

# Standard Journal

[Print Page](#)

**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 17, 2010** :: Last modified: Monday, February 15, 2010 10:59 PM MST

---

## **ID delegation urges agency to keep senior discount**

Idaho's congressional delegation has weighed in on a proposal to reduce discounts for fees at Forest Service campgrounds and other services.

Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch and Rep. Mike Simpson, all Republicans, and Rep. Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, have asked Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell not to allow discount rates charged by concessionaires to be cut from 50 percent to as low as 10 percent.

The delegation says legislation already is in place to allow reduction in discounts in certain cases, though it has gone unused, so far.

Under the proposed regulations, some pass holders will find the cost of recreation on their public lands prohibitive, the delegation says.

"Of equal concern to the actual economic impact is the demographic groups that it will effect; the recession has been especially hard on senior citizens and the disabled, who already must shoulder the burden of high health-care costs and depleted retirement savings," the delegation says in a letter to Tidwell. "As the recession has gone on, more American families have turned to our public lands for vacationing and recreation purposes than they had in the past."

The Idaho delegations says Congress has provided funding increases for the National Forest System activity in recent appropriations bills and the Forest Service has received \$650 million for capital improvement and maintenance under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"As such, we are confused as to why the Forest Service would find it necessary or appropriate to levy increased fees on seniors and the disabled," the delegation says.

The proposal would change the rules for issuing concessionaires' special permits to require only a 10-percent discount, rather than 50 percent now required.

Concessionaires could offer 50 percent discounts, but they would not be required to do so.

Private campground operators have raised concerns about the mandatory discounts and their effect on their bottom line.

According to a notice in the Federal Register, the concerns prompting the proposal:

- A 50-percent discount is very steep and is not comparable to other discounts in the private sector.
- The 50-percent discount is nonnegotiable and cannot be used as a marketing tool to encourage off-peak use.
- Application of the 50-percent discount to holders of the Senior and Access Passes is unreasonable in view of the growing number of senior citizens in the U.S.
- The 50-percent discount requires concessionaires to raise camping fees to compensate for the loss in revenue, thus increasing prices for nonseniors and discouraging a future generation of campers.

The Forest Service estimates that changing the discount rate from 50 to 10 percent would increase

revenue by about \$3.4 million, or about 9.6 percent annually.

The concessionaires would be charged an increase in their special permit land use fees according to increases in gross revenue.

JOYCE EDLEFSEN

jedlefsen@uvsj.com