

## **WESTERN SLOPE NO-FEE COALITION**

April 23, 2010  
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### **IDAHO SENATOR SIGNS ON TO FEE REPEAL BILL**

Senator Jim Risch (R-ID) has joined his colleagues Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Jon Tester (D-MT) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) in co-sponsoring Senate bill S.868 The Fee Repeal and Expanded Access Act.



Idaho Senator  
James E. Risch

The bill would repeal most provisions of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) but allow the recreation fees that were authorized under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 to continue. Fees could continue to be charged for entrance to National Parks and for camping in developed campgrounds and the use of other specialized developed facilities.

Fees for general access to public lands began under the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program, or Fee Demo, in 1996. They proved to be quite unpopular. Several states and dozens of counties, as well as hundreds of local organizations and individuals, called for the demonstration program's demise. In 2004 Fee Demo was repealed, but it was replaced by the FLREA, which was attached as a rider to a must-pass appropriations bill. FLREA was never debated or voted on as a standalone bill by the House, and was never introduced in the Senate.

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management charge recreation fees for access to undeveloped backcountry at hundreds of trailheads, river put-ins, and other access points. Despite specific prohibitions in the FLREA, fees are charged for parking, for picnicking along roads and trailsides, at scenic overlooks, and for general access to vast tracts of federal recreational lands.

"Assurances that the FLREA's restrictions would rein in the abuses that occurred under Fee Demo have turned out to be hollow promises," said Western Slope No-Fee Coalition President Kitty Benzar. "General access fees have continued, and over 1,000 new or increased fees have been put in place since FLREA became law."

The Fee Repeal bill was introduced in April, 2009. Risch's addition as a co-sponsor means that both of Montana's Senators, who are Democrats, and both of Idaho's Senators, who are Republicans, are calling for legislative reform of federal recreational fee policy.

"This is a show of bipartisanship that highlights how strongly Americans feel about our public lands," said Benzar. "Access to them without financial barriers is our heritage and tradition. I applaud Senator Risch for joining the bill, and anticipate that his support will be what it takes to get it done."

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Risch is a member of the Committee.