



FEE REPEAL AND EXPANDED ACCESS ACT

Risch Joins Effort to Repeal the RAT

Idaho, Montana Senators of both parties get together to repeal public lands law.

By Bill Schneider, 4-24-10

Now, it's four out of four in Idaho and Montana.

On Friday, Senator Jim Risch (R-ID) joined Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Montana's Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester, both Democrats, in co-sponsoring S. 868, the Fee Repeal and Expanded Access Act, which would repeal most provisions of the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act (FLREA), the law federal agencies use to charge fees for accessing public lands.

Repealing FLREA--or RAT (Recreation Access Tax) to its detractors--is also, it seems, a truly bipartisan issue with two Democrat and two Republican Senators carrying the bill.

If passed, S. 868 would allow the fees authorized under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, such as those charged for entering national parks and camping in developed campgrounds, to continue, but federal agencies could no longer charge for general access to public lands, as they now do in many states.

Since FLREA became law in 2004, notes Kitty Benzar, president of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, over 1,000 new or increased fees have been put in place by federal agencies.

"This is a show of bipartisanship that highlights how strongly Americans feel about our public lands," Benzar told *NewWest.Net*. "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."

S. 868 has been referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and Senator Risch is a member of that Committee. The co-sponsors are pushing for a hearing in the near future, possibly as early as May 2010.

Footnote: for extensive NewWest.Net coverage of the recreation fee issue, [click here](#).

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Comment By Tim M., 4-24-10

Calling REA "the RAT" in the subject is silly. Using a pejorative term is not very good journalism (in my opinion).

Comment By Binky Griptight, 4-24-10

Only bureaucrats call it FLREA. Most folks know it either as the Recreation Tax, or Rec. Fee Demo.

Comment By Tom von Alten, 4-24-10

Feels great to be on the same side of an issue as Idaho's two Senators.

As for "silly" naming, there's nothing silly about it. Framing an issue to your advantage is half the battle. We all have to call it the "Recreational Enhancement Act" because that's the Orwellian name the bill sponsors gave it? I don't think so.

"Recreational access tax" happens to be more accurately expressive, and it's a matter of FACT that the law's detractors call it that.

Confusing objective reporting (of advocacy) with advocacy is not very good commenting, Tim.

Comment By marti bridges, 4-27-10

Wow! This bill is a long time coming. This has been the BLM and the USFS excuse for not asking for the money they need from Congress for land management. But worse, this fee is ludicrous. Want to go hiking? Pay a fee. Want to go rafting on the Middle Fork or Main Salmon? Pay a fee per day for the privilege. I don't have a problem paying a small fee for the river lottery, but even that is now being handled by an outside firm instead of the USFS itself. And I resent that as much as the Rec Fee Demo that went well beyond a demo. It's one thing to charge a fee to commercial outfitters and grazers who are profiting off the public lands. It's another to charge Americans to access their lands. And they are our lands.

Comment By TomK, 4-29-10

*Bill,
You've been chasing after this thing for a long time. Maybe you're finally starting to rattle the right cages.*

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