

**Wet Mountain Tribune (Custer County CO)**  
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**Forest Service accepting comments on proposal for S. Colony use fee**

Visitors using South Colony Basin in the Sangre de Cristo range may soon have to pay to use the wilderness trail.

The U.S. Forest Service is currently seeking public comments on a proposal to initiate a fee system for recreational access to South Colony Basin.

It's expected to take several months to review the proposal.

Located some 12 miles southwest of Westcliffe, South Colony Basin is used by climbers to reach the summits of Crestone Peak, Crestone Needle and Humboldt Peak.

If the USFS decides to implement a fee, then visitors would have to secure a special recreation permit to gain entry to South Colony Basin and the adjoining summit trails.

On the table is \$10 per person each day and \$20 per person for each overnight trip with fees in effect from May 15 through Oct. 15. The fee would apply to those at least 18 years old.

According to USFS records, some 3,500 to 4,500 persons currently use the South Colony trail during the summer months with most trail users primarily from the Denver, Boulder and Colorado Springs areas.

In addition, weekend use is significantly higher than on weekdays.

Furthermore, during peak weekends such as holidays, it is not unusual for over 200 persons to be using South Colony. On average, typical weekend use is 80-150 persons and usual weekday use is 30-50 persons.

Officials also report that since the early 1990s, visitation in South Colony has increased three to five percent a year. Moreover, as the population in front range cities increases, USFS officials expect South Colony use to rise.

USFS officials said since 1996, they have been working to restore long-term recreational impacts, rebuild the lower road, construct trailhead facilities and create summit trails in South Colony Basin.

Also said the USFS, funding opportunities to continue trail maintenance is limited and as a result fees appear to be the best option to continue to offer recreational opportunities while still protecting the natural environment and providing for the health and safety of visitors.

Those wishing to provide comments on the fee proposal can go online to <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/sanc/>.

*– Nora Drenner*