

Residents
shouldn't
have to
pay to
play in
national
forest

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I have been fortunate to have always lived in beautiful areas where outdoor recreation was the norm. From Lander and Jackson Hole, Wyo., to Missoula, Mont., beautiful scenery to enjoy was never scarce. During all of my outdoor adventures I never paid to play outside a national park until I moved to Sedona, which was when I was introduced to the Red Rock Pass.

I understand the trails see more than local traffic with visitors from around the world flocking to the red rocks to recreate. More feet means more upkeep and maintenance for the cash-strapped U.S. Forest Service.

However, I don't think it's right to charge locals to enjoy their beautiful backyard.

When I lived within a few blocks of the Bell Rock trail system in the Village of Oak Creek I easily got around paying the fee by simply walking or biking to the trailhead.

Now that I live much further away I'm not a regular in the Red Rock Ranger District any longer.

The Red Rock Pass appears to be USFS's attempts to also cash in on the tourist traffic in Sedona, which is legitimate, but don't discourage residents' use of the forest too.

People who can show proof of residency in Sedona or the Verde Valley with a valid driver's license should either not have to pay the fee or get a pass at a discounted rate.

Locals would still be required to get a pass to hang in their car, but they shouldn't have to pay much for it if at all.

Other requirements of the Red Rock Pass were recently challenged with the outcome not favoring the pass policy.

A U.S. judge ruled the pass cannot be required for parking anywhere in the Red Rock Ranger District, as USFS currently requires.

The ruling says in order for USFS to cite a motorist for not displaying a Red Rock Pass the motorist's vehicle must be parked at a developed trailhead where he or she has access to amenities provided by USFS, such as trash cans and restrooms.

The Red Rock Ranger District needs to rethink its Red Rock Pass policy and ask residents to provide input.

Jackson Hole sees just as many, if not more, visitors than Sedona each year; yet, the Jackson Ranger District in the Bridger-Teton National Forest hasn't deemed it necessary to charge people to enjoy the outdoors.