

# The BUGLE

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## Red Rock Pass gets interim changes *Opponents say new policy still ignores law*

By [Steve Avers](#)  
Staff Reporter

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VERDE VALLEY - The Coconino National Forest announced Wednesday that it was implementing interim changes to the Red Rock Pass program, including curtailment of the program at some remote locations.

The changes come following a judge's decision on a citation issued to a Sedona resident parked at an unimproved trailhead, limiting the U.S. Forest Services' ability to collect fees where amenities are not present or are not used.

"To address the court ruling in the long run, the Forest Service will work with the public and the Arizona BLM Recreational Advisory Council (RAC) to determine appropriate changes to the Red Rock Pass Program," the press release stated.

However, the list of interim sites where the program will continue to be enforced includes a number of trailheads and access points, which opponents of the program have argued violate the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act, the statute under which the Forest Service instituted the Red Rock Pass program.

Kitty Benzar of the Western States No Fee Coalition, reacting to the press release, said the interim program outlined by the Forest Service is not in compliance with the judge's ruling.

"The judge stated in his decision that the Forest Service cannot charge the public to 'pay for parking or simple access to trails and underdeveloped camping sites.'

"Many of the sites they are still going to enforce are trailheads. The law is as simple as it is specific. You can't enforce the program at a trailhead just to go hiking," Benzar said.

Coconino National Forest spokesperson Connie Birkland said on Wednesday that the interim guidelines were written under direction of the Forest Service's Office of General Counsel, the agency's legal department.

"Legally we cannot not charge a fee without going through the BLM's RAC first. But in order to



change the program, we were advised by our attorneys that this is what we were to do in the interim," Birkland said.

"The RAC has already advised us not to enforce the pass program in areas similar to the one in which the court dismissed the citation."

Birkland said the full program, not just the interim changes, would go through a public process that begins sometime around the first of the year.

"It will probably have a proposal ready for consideration by the RAC by March of next year. In the meantime we will have multiple public meetings and gather public comment. That's how we will come up with the changes that will come about," Birkland said.

Contact the reporter at [sayers@verdevalleynews.com](mailto:sayers@verdevalleynews.com)

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Red Rock Pass Program will be enforced at:

- Palatki, Honanki and V Bar V cultural sites
- Oak Creek Canyon
- Sites along SR179 between VOC and Sedona
- Long Canyon, Boyton Canyon, Doe, Bear and Aerie trailheads, along the paved Boyton Canyon Road
- Huckaby, Soldier Pass, Jordon, Thunder Mountain, Broken Arrow. Cathedral, and Airport Mesa trailheads near the Town of Sedona

Red Rock Pass enforcement will temporarily cease at:

- Verde Valley School Road
- Jacks Canyon Road
- Forest Road 152, also known as Dry Creek Road, including Vaultee Arch Trailhead
- Upper and Lower Red Rock Loop Road
- The unpaved portion of Boyton Pass Road, west of Doe Trailhead
- The unpaved portion of Schnebly Hill road, north of Huckaby Trailhead

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