

Debate Steams Over Future of Bagby Hot Springs

4:01 PM December 6th, 2010 by [Stacy Brownhill](#)



If you've ever made the pilgrimage to [Bagby Hot Springs](#), a 90-minute drive southeast of Portland followed by a 1.5-mile hike in, you might be intrigued by the passionate debate over the beloved springs' future.

Bagby Hot Springs, rumored to have served as a sacred healing spot for Native Americans, comprises two natural springs that feed 136-degree, mineral-rich water into several cedar log tubs. Surrounded by old-growth forest and pristine waterfalls, Bagby is a popular retreat year-round. And except for a \$5 parking fee, it's free.

All that might be about to change.

The [U.S. Forest Service](#) is restoring the bathhouses in an effort to attract a private company to help manage Bagby. Forest Service spokesman Rick Acosta says officials think that enlisting an outside partner will keep Bagby safe, clean and well-maintained.

"We don't anticipate any policy changes," Acosta said today. "We just want to maintain the site." He says the potential change in management may result in a higher vehicle fee, but suggests people can "come by bicycle." (The nearest town of Estacada is 25 miles away).

[Mike Rysavy](#) of the [Northwest Forest Conservancy](#) is outraged. He accuses the Forest Service of turning Bagby into a "for-profit engine" and worries that a unique piece of history is being destroyed.

Raising the fees at Bagby would present a form of "financial discrimination," Rysavy said today. He calls Bagby a unique site distinct from other campgrounds for its history and popularity.

"Three hollowed out log tubs dating from the 1920s were recently hacked up with a chainsaw and destroyed in a burn pile," says Rysavy, who wishes the tubs could have been preserved on display. "The new tubs that have come in from Japan are like horse troughs, straight up and down with no room to lay down ... It's changing the whole nature of the soaking experience."

Kathleen Walker of the Forest Service says they are "just repairing rotten-out boards."

Rysavy claims there has been complete disregard for the collective knowledge of volunteers at Bagby, and adds that he has not head back on his request for a public meeting. Acosta says the Forest Service will host a public forum in January and argues it is still "early in the game."

Both Acosta and Rysavy agree there needs to be better management of Bagby, due to litter and occasional crime and vandalism.

"But there are all kinds of options, and it doesn't need to be a private company making money off the public," says Rysavy. He thinks one option could be a small non-profit with a few paid staff, including historical interpreters, who would keep the costs down and the money local.

Trash and small crime aren't the Forest Service's only motivations. The Forest Service [prospectus](#) (PDF) hopes that developing and privatizing Bagby will bring in money to "offset the receipts from the Timothy Lake campgrounds."

To find out more, check out [Bark](#), an environmental nonprofit that works to preserve Mt. Hood National Forest.

