

# Verde Independent

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

## Editorial: Red Rock Pass debate can re-form public attachments

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If you are a hiker, or if you like to snoop around in local cultural sites, or if you simply like to stop in popular viewing areas to take photos of red rock country, you know about the Red Rock Pass.

Inconvenient to users but useful to the U.S. Forest Service, the fee for the pass was meant to help offset visitor impact in the treasured area. It has done that, to the tune of about \$1 million a year, but it has also caused detachment from many residents in the Verde Valley down the road.

Some support the purpose of the pass. Others have been angry about it since the beginning. Last year, a magistrate ruled the USFS could not impose the pass in the manner it was used to. Since then, the Red Rock Ranger District has been busily seeking ways to please everyone.

An important part of this decision-making process is the involvement of the public. On Thursday, the public gets to look at some of the resulting options for maintaining this public land. The ideas are interesting and worth scrutiny.

Knowing what the Red Rock Pass is and how it impacts Verde Valley residents in their recreation habits is important. The fee keeps some residents from even enjoying the trails and recreation areas in the Red Rock District as they opt instead for areas with free access. Any idea is a good one that would bring them back and make them feel personally involved in one of Arizona's natural gifts.

The Red Rock Pass has allowed the USFS to treat red rock country like a national park, which it is not. However, red rock country should be claimed and embraced by Verde Valley residents as the national treasure it is and not just "a Sedona thing."

The Thursday open house (4 to 7 p.m., at Sedona Red Rock High School) is one way for the public to have a say in the future vitality of the region - and maybe re-form those attachments.



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