

## Red Rock Pass fees will end for wide area

by **Ron Dungan** - Jan. 6, 2012 02:07 PM  
The Republic | [azcentral.com](http://azcentral.com)

Hikers in remote parts of Sedona's red-rock country soon will be spared a \$5-per-day user fee. Coconino National Forest officials have vastly reduced the size of the area where a Red Rock Pass will be required.

The change, which will take effect in February, means that hikers will not have to pay to use 149,000 acres that previously fell under the plan. Most of that land is outside Oak Creek Canyon.

Visitors will still have to pay the fee along Arizona 89A from Midgely Bridge north to the Bootlegger day-use area in Oak Creek Canyon and along Arizona 179 from Bell Rock Vista and Bell Rock Pathway to just past Back O' Beyond Road.

The fee also will be charged at the Honanki, Palatki and V-Bar-V heritage sites, as well as the Doe/Bear Mountain, Boynton Canyon, Baldwin and Jim Thompson trailheads.

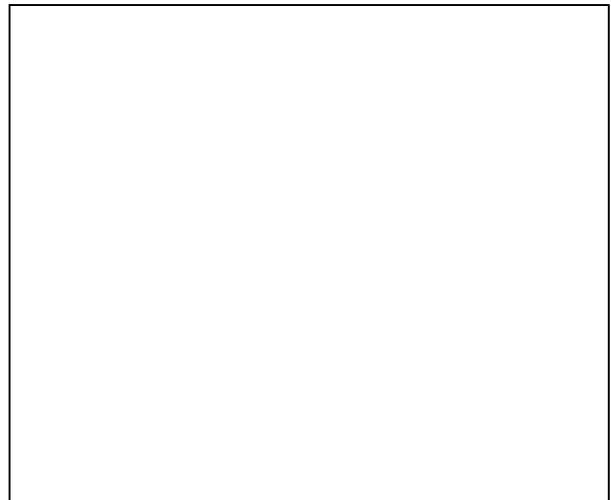
An exact date for the change has not been determined. Forest officials are printing maps and brochures that show the new boundaries.

Connie Birkland, a spokeswoman for Coconino National Forest, said about 100,000 people a year hike in red-rock country.

"It was what we called a high-use impact area," Birkland said.

The fees, implemented in 2000, required people to purchase a \$5 pass for recreational use anywhere in an area covering 160,000 acres of national forest. That area will be reduced by 93 percent, to 11,000 acres. The Forest Service says the fees are necessary for amenities and maintenance at heavily used

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areas.

In 2004, Congress passed the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Under the act, the Forest Service could charge fees only in recreation areas providing specific amenities, including a toilet, trash bins, interpretive signs and security services.

In 2009, a hiker drove down a rough road to the Vultee Arch trailhead, which had no amenities. After his hike, James Smith found a ticket for not having a Red Rock Pass. Smith challenged the ticket in federal court and won. Consequently, the Forest Service consulted with the Arizona Recreation Resource Advisory Council to solicit public comment and amend the fee program.

"This is an improvement," said Kitty Benzar, head of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition. She agreed fees at the heritage sites, which provide services, were reasonable: "Nobody ever said they couldn't get any fees."

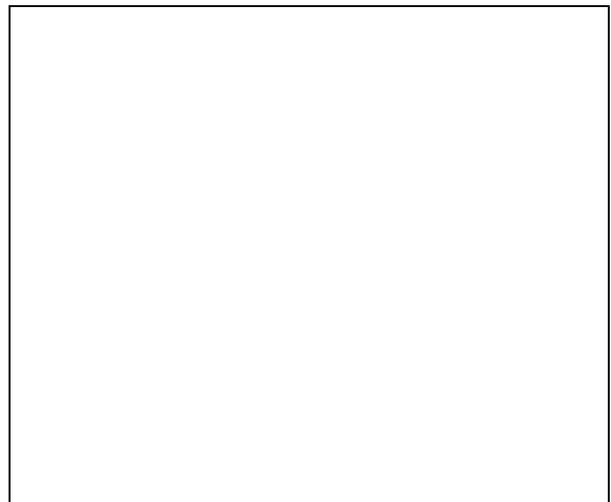
Details: 928-203-2900, [www.redrockcountry.org](http://www.redrockcountry.org).

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