



- Daily file photo

## Green Mountain Reservoir may see lower rec fees

JANUARY, 26 2012  
BY [JANICE KURBJUN](#)  
SUMMIT DAILY NEWS

If the proposal passes state and local approval, Green Mountain Reservoir users may say good-bye to day-use fees.

After a nationwide inventory and review of recreation fees within the U.S. Forest Service, the agency's Washington Office staff is proposing substantial fee reductions in high-impact recreation areas, or HIRAs.

Green Mountain Reservoir has previously been categorized as a HIRA, a Forest Service designation that allows the agency to charge fees for use of a broad area, even if it doesn't fit the legal definition of a fee-permitted area. Currently, fees are due at the Cataract Lake Trailhead, where rough parking amenities are provided without other site improvements. Among other similar charges, a day-use permit is also required to access the lake shore.

The HIRA review process identified Green Mountain Reservoir, located at the north end of Summit County, as one area that may see reduced fees for stand-alone day-use as well as increased campground fees, with land between those sites restored to free access.

"Those who are less likely to camp overnight can return to visiting that area for free," said Kitty Benzar, President of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition.

She was part of a coalition that worked together between December 2008 and March 2009 to create a fee structure that best represents local and regional interests. The work group included Dillon Ranger District staff, Friends of the Eagles Nest Wilderness representatives, local people who use the area, and others.

"As soon as we finished, the (Forest Service) Recreation Resource Advisory Committee became defunct," Benzar said. "It's been waiting to be blessed."

The proposal needs to be considered by the committee. When it is, it likely won't receive too much pushback, Benzar said, adding that the Green Mountain Reservoir proposal is an example of vested officials and public coming together to create an appropriate and legal fee structure.

"There shouldn't be much controversy about it, because it went through this extensive process," she said. "The locals came together and said, 'We don't like your definition of a high-impact recreation area; we want to do it this other way.' It took months of hard work, but it finally happened."

### More in Colorado

The Green Mountain Reservoir area is just one of several HIRA-designated areas in Colorado that are under consideration for lifted fees. Many still must meet local approval before they're adopted, Benzar said. There are 96 HIRAs around the country.

The areas vary in size from the 40-acre Piper HIRA on the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire to the 191,791-acre Mirror Lake Scenic Byway on the Wasatch-Cache National Forest in Utah. Nationally, HIRAs encompass over 1.4 million acres of National Forest. Within a HIRA, visitors are charged a standard amenity fee for all-day use. Those who camp overnight in developed campgrounds are charged an additional expanded amenity fee.

The future is uncertain for the Mt. Evans HIRA near Idaho Springs, which is the subject of ongoing litigation, as

well as the Arapahoe National Recreation Area HIRA near Granby, where stakeholders have yet to come to a consensus of fee revisions.

Critics of the Forest Service's fee program, such as Benzar, have mixed feelings about the plan.

“Right now these HIRAs contain hundreds of dozens of fee sites that control access to lakes, rivers, and undeveloped backcountry as well as dispersed camping areas where fees are charged despite a lack of developed facilities,” Benzar said. “The Forest Service claims that 95 percent of the land they manage is fee-free, but much of that cannot be reached except from places where parking fees are charged. If under the new plan the remaining fee areas and stand-alone sites still contain access points like trailheads and dispersed campsites, then there will be no real change. If the fee areas are tightened up to include only developed facilities and general access returns to being free, then that will be an improvement. We're watching closely to see how this plays out on the ground.”

Benzar hinges her position on the legal authorization that amenity fees are authorized only in places where there are six improvements: a permanent toilet and permanent trash receptacle, picnic table, interpretive signage, developed parking, and security services. Expanded amenity fees also require devices for containing campfires, tent or trailer spaces, drinking water and access roads.

**Want to know more?**

Download a list of high-impact recreation areas that were considered in the National Forest Service's review online at <http://bit.ly/AnNej5>.

---

<http://www.summitdaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20120127/NEWS/120129829/1001/RSS&parentprofile=&template=printart>