

## Adventure Pass may not be required for most national forest areas

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If a Forest Service proposal is approved, the Adventure Pass will not vanish but will be required in fewer national forest areas.

Those who visit Los Padres National Forest, for example, would need the pass in only two of its seven recreation areas: Santa Ynez and Figueroa Mountain.

The two are among 26 national forest areas that would still require visitors to pay fees, down from the current 90 areas. Thirty-one areas in Southern California require a fee. The proposal would reduce that to 12.

"We've been doing an ongoing review of all our areas where we charge fees," said Jim Bedwell, national recreation and heritage director for the Forest Service. "In January, from the Washington office, we approved a set of changes to the areas where fees can be charged."

The changes will not be official until they go before a public board, the California Recreation Resource Advisory Committee. The federal advisory panel consists of business owners, environmentalists, frequent forest users and others.

The committee isn't expected to meet until the fall, so Adventure Pass fees likely will continue through the summer, despite a recent court ruling calling their legality into question, officials said.

The Washington office started studying use fees in national forests about two years ago in response to heated resistance, Bedwell said. In California, the fee is called the Adventure Pass and is \$5 per day or \$30 per year.

The agency devised a list of areas where the use fee could be eliminated. Mount Pinos, Rose Valley, Goldhill, Pozo-LaPanza and Ballinger in Los Padres National Forest would no longer require an Adventure Pass under the proposal.

The proposal was completed in January, almost a month before the Feb. 9 decision by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that essentially said the Forest Service was wrong to charge many of its fees.

Bedwell said the proposal and the court decision were not linked.

"It's kind of a coincidence," Bedwell said. "We initiated this study almost two years ago. In January we sent our letter. It was a culmination of our national study. It was not triggered by the 9th Court decision."

The ruling was in response to a 2008 lawsuit filed by four visitors to the Coronado National Forest near Tucson. The court found the Forest Service at fault for charging fees to people who hike or picnic without using facilities like bathrooms, picnic tables or trash cans. The judges said the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act bans such fees.

Attorney Mary Ellen Barilotti, who began filing suits against forest fees 10 years ago, said the ruling is binding in all the Western states but not yet final. The Forest Service has 90 days to appeal.

Until directed to do otherwise, Los Padres National Forest will require the Adventure Pass in all seven areas, spokesman Andrew Madsen said.

Including Adventure Pass, standard use and extended-use fees, California's forests pulled in about \$3.5 million in fiscal year 2011.

Even if the proposal is approved, areas not requiring the Adventure Pass might still require standard or extended-access fees, officials said.

Extended-access fees are charged for amenities such as kiosks, visitor centers and boat ramps. A standard access fee might be required for areas less developed but with amenities such as restrooms and picnic tables.

"Those are the kind of facilities we've been charging fees for since 1965," Bedwell said.

The Adventure Pass has been a hassle for many members of the Ventura branch of the Los Padres Chapter Sierra Club, according to member Kurt Preissler of Ventura.

"It has always been a problem with us — who's got a pass and who doesn't have a pass," Preissler said.

But there's another side to the controversy, he said. The national forests need financial support beyond taxes.

"Not everything is free. Not everything is owed to us. I believe in paying," he said. "We have to support them somehow."



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