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## Editorial

### National forest fees work

**The U.S. Forest Service should work to change the law regarding fees in national forests to reflect the realities of modern recreational use.**

March 1, 2012

Does a hiker go to the bathroom in the woods? It might matter, under a recent federal court ruling.

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled correctly last month that parking fees were being wrongly levied in many areas of America's national forests. A 2004 [law](#) is quite specific that it is impermissible to charge fees for parking or for "general use" of the forests. But while the court's ruling was perfectly in line with the law, the real problem is with the law itself. Under its provisions, if you use the bathroom while hiking in the forest, you can be charged, but not if you use nature itself as the bathroom. Picnicking on the ground has to be free under the law, but eating at a picnic table could, at least theoretically, cost you, as could using a trash can.

The way the law was drafted, it's all about whether forest visitors are using "developed" facilities. But as the examples above show, that's a ludicrous distinction that is impossible to enforce, out of line with the procedures at most wilderness parks and ultimately harmful to the forests and their visitors.

Most national and state [parks](#) and many regional parks charge an entry fee for vehicles whether they're headed to the trail or the interpretive center, understanding full well that hikers' and bikers' activities come with costs even if they don't use the "developed" facilities. Most hikers require trail markers to guide them on their way. The heavily used trails themselves must be maintained. Anyone might need emergency rescue or medical help from rangers. And for that matter, why shouldn't a parking lot be considered a developed facility?

One argument against fees is that they keep poor people from enjoying the forests. But at \$30 a year, a forest Adventure Pass is one of the best bargains in Southern California. It's less than a fourth the price of an annual pass to state parks and is good for unlimited day use of four forests — the Angeles, Cleveland, San Bernardino and Los Padres. A single-day pass to the forests costs \$5 for a carload of visitors, less than half the price of most movie tickets for a single person. The gasoline to drive to the forest would generally cost more.

Most of the money is used in the local forests where it is collected. In 2006 alone, the fees [paid for](#), among many items, adding 74 new portable bathrooms, refurbishing 123 picnic areas and removing 8,752 cubic yards of trash in the Southern California forests. But as a result of the law and the recent court ruling, the U.S. Forest Service is now planning to drop [fees](#) in many areas of the forests. Instead, the law should be changed to reflect the realities of modern recreational use.

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