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Forest Service to Repeal Fees at Many Sites

By Dave Rice | Posted March 1, 2012, 7:34 a.m.

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After over a decade of complaints and controversy, the U.S. Forest Service is on the verge of repealing most fees for access to public national parks and forests, which were represented locally by the wildly unpopular Adventure Pass.

Originally introduced in 1996, the pass has been required to park at many trailheads, day-use sites, and general forest areas, including throughout most of the Cleveland National Forest in San Diego's eastern mountains.

Cost on the passes has ranged \$5-8 for day use and \$30 for an annual permit through the life of the program. The fees have drawn fire from conservatives as a form of double taxation, as well as from liberals who argued the additional fees served to restrict access to lower-income populations.

The Forest Service now says it will end fees at three-quarters of the sites where they're currently in place, including at 19 sites in Southern California, but it may be compelled to go even further.

The U.S. Ninth District Circuit Court of Appeals ruled earlier this month concluded charges at the Coronado National Forest in Arizona were improper and sent the case back to a lower court for reconsideration.

A total of 25 areas requiring fees would remain under the Forest Service's current proposal, including a dozen in Southern California. These areas provide extra amenities which could include toilets, trash cans and picnic benches, or even interpretive signs.

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1. Free at last, free at last! Oh, Lordy. Those fees have been a huge nuisance ever since they were first imposed. The worst part was that when you needed the darned day-use pass, you were often miles from any place that sold them. That meant that you just got out of the habit of going to areas that required one, or bought extra passes and carried them in your car or truck. (At first, one of the sporting goods stores in the area insisted that you validate the pass before they would sell it to you, and that contradicted the USFS instructions that were printed right on the pass.) I'd also be curious to know just how much revenue the Cleveland National Forest actually took in vs. the cost of the signs, enforcement, handling citations, and on occasion court appearances.



By **Visduh** 7:48 a.m., Mar 1, 2012 > Reply > Report it

2. I heard they collected lots of money but did nothing to improve the forest. This was one of the arguments to eliminate the fee.



By **skylinemike** 8:43 a.m., Mar 3, 2012 > Reply > Report it

3. Good riddance! It was a bad setup, for all the reasons mentioned. Far better would have been a voluntary contribution scheme/honor system. People of good conscience should recognize that Forest access is one thing

--on foot--but it costs money to maintain trails and roads and other public facilities for horses and vehicles. Bicyclists do volunteer work to maintain trails. The disabled and those with physical limitations should be included in planning and decision-making should be a mix of professional analysis and public participation with an emphasis on agency responsiveness and discussing issues to clear, honest, and feasible conclusions.

Pressure groups, however, should not rule just because they can muster a lot of people. Somebody has to stand up for the minority; the noblesse oblige concept needs to be resurrected and applied fairly. The whole picture should be given a hard look with public input and required responsiveness.

When I was in the Forest Service we were trained to avoid being "officious" when dealing with the public. There's something about a badge and/or a Smokey hat that brings out the control-freak in people. Exit surveys would help weed out the employees who arbitrarily enforce the letter of the law and policy with no regard to circumstances, and should be complimented, not criticized for doing so. The Forest Service needs to ease up on hassling people, and should stop giving away timber to logging corporations so cheap that even the costs directly attributed to the logging can't be covered.

On the contrary, there should be enough surplus income from logging to pay for the other non-exploitative uses like recreation. Campground fees should be scaled to the impact on the forest and cost of facilities management and operation. Tent campers should be charged less than RV's, which should be assessed according to size and number of vehicles.

I wonder if the USFS is listening?

Wanna put some money on it?



By **Twister** 5:37 p.m., Mar 3, 2012 > Reply > Report it

Visitors to the National Forests who do not use any developed facilities (like hikers and horseback riders) may return to their vehicle to find on their windshield a piece of paper entitled Notice of Required Fee. A NRF resembles a ticket but it is nothing more than a request for a voluntary donation to the Forest Service. It carries no fine or other penalty. Only a Violation Notice is a ticket, and the Forest Service rarely issues those for non-payment of recreation fees. Read carefully before you pay. More info at WesternSlopeNoFee.org



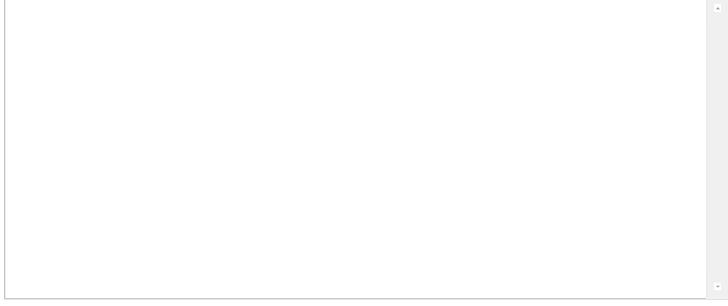
By **KBenzar** 10:06 a.m., Mar 4, 2012 > Edit > Reply > Report it

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