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## Hikers win: Forest Service forced to scale back fee program on public lands across America

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The easy trail to Deadfall Lakes is an example of a trail on public national forest that has always been free. Tom Stienstra/The Chronicle

**The idea of having to pay \$30 a year to walk on a trail in national forest was met with outrage from the first moment it was proposed 17 years ago.**

The ongoing fear that the U.S. Forest Service would charge a parking fee to fund recreation operations at its 16 national forests across northern and central California, just as has been done in Southern California, has been vanquished in a court decision.

The opposite will occur: The Forest Service said it would propose eliminating Adventure Pass recreation fees, typically a pass for \$5 per day or \$30 per year, at 75 percent of the locations across the country where the fee is now charged.

That would leave only 12 areas left among of thousands of trailheads in California, with most in Los Padres, San Bernardino, Angeles and Cleveland national forests.

**A decision by the U.S 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit of Appeals said the Forest Service had overreached in its implementation of the fee program.** At regional headquarters in Vallejo, Forest Service officials said it was reviewing the order and will submit changes for future operations.

The Forest Service operates 19 national forests in California that cover 20 million acres of public land. The Adventure Pass was supposed to be a "temporary experiment" when it was launched in 1996. At several public hearings I attended in 1995, the public opposed it unanimously with the kind of vehemence usually reserved for political demagogues, not your typical hikers, campers and boaters.

It was enacted anyway, though the Forest Service shredded the program at Lake Tahoe and Mount Shasta, where locals were the most indignant in their opposition.

At Mount Shasta, the Forest Service substituted a \$30 annual Summit Permit for climbers, which has been met with acceptance. Visitors are required to purchase the permit if they climb over 10,000 feet in elevation. Parking is free. The permit pays, in part, for the Mount Shasta wilderness rangers, and rangers said Tuesday they hope to keep the program in place.

In Southern California, the Adventure Pass was one of the most despised user fees ever implemented, where you had to pay just for parking, regardless if you used services.

**That ended a 100-year legacy of free access to public land on national forests.**

Forest Service districts used the money to pay for restrooms, signs, and trash pick-up, rather than use traditional funding sources from their budgets allocated by Congress.



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