

Forest Service offers fee cut Proposal would drop them in 75% of areas that charge.

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Americans don't seem to mind paying to recreate in national parks.

But national forests? Not so much.

The ongoing battle between user groups and the U.S. Forest Service over recreation-related fees took a curious turn last week when the agency proposed eliminating fees in 75% of the areas where they are currently imposed. In Southern California, those fees usually take the form of the controversial Adventure Pass, which costs \$5 a day and \$30 annually.

But even that reduction may not be enough to satisfy the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled in February that the Forest Service "overreached" when it charged parking fees at the Coronado National Forest in Arizona.

Recreation fees in national forests have not been an issue in Central California. Neither the Sierra National Forest nor the Sequoia National Forest nor Giant Sequoia National Monument have implemented the Adventure Pass. But there was always a concern among hikers, bikers and boaters that it would spread throughout the rest of the state.

The Sierra National Forest does not charge recreation-related fees. (Sno-Parks are operated by the state's Off-Highway Vehicle program.) Visitors to the Sequoia National Forest or Giant Sequoia National Monument who enter via Highway 180 pay entry fees to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The Forest Service then gets a slice of those revenues.

The Forest Service operates 19 national forests in California, encompassing 20 million acres of public land.

The Adventure Pass was vehemently opposed by user groups when it was launched in 1996 as a "temporary experiment" even though most of the money stays in the forest where it was collected to pay for things such as restrooms, signage, picnic tables and trash removal.

In a March 1 news release, the Forest Service said it plans to retain the Adventure Pass and continue to charge fees at 12 so-called High Impact Recreation Areas, mainly in the Los Padres, San Bernardino, Angeles and Cleveland national forests.