

Volume XXVIII, Number 9, Wednesday, September 26, 2012



- HOME
 - VALLEY NEWS
 - OPINION
 - SPORTS
 - CALENDAR
 - CLASSIFIEDS
 - LEGAL NOTICES
 - ABOUT US
 - CONTACT US
 - MONTANA LIFE
- LOCAL INFO

Forest Service offers compromise on fees for cabin use

Posted on September 25, 2012 in [Page One](#)

By Michael Howell

Dave Meyers, Supervisor of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, has taken one step back on his proposal to enter the Gordon Reese cabin/warming hut at Chief Joseph Pass Ski Area into the National Recreation Reservation System and charge rent for its use. The plan to enter the cabin into the NRRS initially involved charging a \$9 fee paid to the company that administers the internet based registration system and a \$20 nightly rental charge. Following strong objections from the Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club, however, Meyers recently revised the plan by agreeing not to charge the rental fee for at least the first year.

But that concession was not enough to sway the ski club's board from drawing a line in the sand over the charges. If the fee is instated the group will no longer volunteer to maintain the cabin as it has in the past.

The ski club has been maintaining and grooming ski trails, which it developed and built, at Chief Joseph Pass for free public use since 1991. The ski club also initiated and spearheaded the building of the Gordon Reese Cabin which is located on the trails and opened for use during 2001. For more than a decade the public has been able to stay overnight for free at the cabin during the winter. Club members donate more than 1,500 hours of volunteer time per year and raise over \$14,000 annually to cover expenses associated with the ski area and facilities. The ski club has purchased the equipment, costing over \$35,000, necessary to support its responsibilities. Members consider the cabin an integral part of the Chief Joseph Ski Area and remain adamant that the public should not be charged for use of the cabin and trails. They told the Forest Service that they are willing to continue trail maintenance and grooming but would seriously consider no longer helping with upkeep of the cabin if a fee is charged.

Not every member of the club is ready to draw that line, however, and on September 4, a few club members, acting on their own, met with Forest Service officials in Missoula to discuss some alternatives. Sonny LaSalle, retired Forest Service Supervisor and founding member and past president of the Bitterroot Cross Country Ski Club, was one of those people. According to LaSalle, other members, including the founding board member for whom the cabin was named, Gordon Reese, and others including Mel Morris and Ed and Pat Hastings are not ready to draw a line in the sand.

"I'm no fan of the national reservation system," said LaSalle. "We all share some displeasure at the idea of charging fees for the use of the cabin. But my concern for the condition and upkeep of the cabin overrides my concerns about the registration system and the fee."

LaSalle said that they urged the Forest Service to consider using experienced volunteers like themselves in the program outlined by Meyers with a \$9 fee going to the registration company and no rent being charged for the first year. He said a lot of people who worked on building the cabin and maintaining it all these years don't want to see it deteriorate due to lack of proper maintenance over this squabble.

A new group called Friends of the Gordon Reese Cabin is being formed by people willing to work with the Forest Service on maintaining the cabin.

"That's fine," said current President of the BCSC, Michael Hoyt. "If they want to do that as individuals that's fine. But our club remains opposed to any fees."

According to Hoyt, club members are against the rental charge in principle. They believe that the Forest Service is acting systematically to transform the free use of public land into a pay-to-play scenario that will provide the agency with funds that are not controlled by congressional appropriation. They believe the ethics officer's opinion about the agency's relationship with the club, which ostensibly initiated reconsideration of the longstanding arrangement, was a reason to pursue the pay-to-play agenda.

Longtime club member and former county attorney George Corn wrote a lengthy legal critique of the ethics officer's opinion.

He claims the ethical opinion was off base in applying restrictions designed to protect the public from unscrupulous officials abusing the process to enrich themselves, not as a way to control volunteers.

"They have no legal justification to change the status quo and upset an arrangement that has served the public well for over a decade," said Corn. He also said that the agency has no excuse for not responding to the club's request for agency legal review of the ethics officer's opinion and certainly no excuse for not responding to the club's request, sent to Chief Tidwell, asking him to intervene.

"They have not even responded to our request for verification of the decision," said Corn. "It's disappointing to receive no answer." Corn called it "pernicious" to have unelected bureaucrats that are unanswerable to anyone.

Search the Site

Back issues

September 2012

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

[« Aug](#)

Archives

[Click here to see back issues prior to May 2011.](#)

There are other reasons to object to the \$9 fee going to the registration company, according Hoyt. That company, according to Hoyt, is located in Canada and operates internationally. He claims 60% of the fee goes directly out of the country while 30% may be returned to the Forest Service through a grant program for selected projects.

"This arrangement meant that of the \$8.0 million charged for placing 890,989 reservations during 2011, ReserveAmerica kept \$4.8 million (60%) and returned the remaining \$3.2 million (40%) to U.S. government agencies. By condoning the use of a vendor based outside the United States to handle the reservation system for its agencies, our government is supporting the removal of \$4.8 million from our nation's economy. If the majority of our nation's citizens were aware of this state of affairs, it would be considered 'not particularly intelligent', especially during a less than robust national economy," he said.

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Supervisor Dave Meyers was on detail in Washington D.C, but Deputy Supervisor Chuck Mark confirmed on Monday that the public will have to register for use of the cabin through the national registration system for a \$9 fee. The \$20 rental charge is not being implemented due to the need to get a financial plan in order. He said the agency would use some volunteers to maintain the cabin. He said the ski club appeared to be opposed to the change but that some of the ski club's members have expressed an interest in volunteering. The Forest Service sent out a press release on Monday advertising the cabin for rent.

0 Comments - [Leave a comment!](#)

[« Previous Post](#)

[Next Post »](#)

There are no comments yet. Be the first and leave a response!

Leave a Reply

Name **(required)**

E-Mail Address **(required)**

Website

Comment

Wanting to leave an *phasis* on your comment?



Please type the characters of this captcha image in the input box

[Administration Login](#) [Go To Top](#)

Copyright © 2011 Bitterroot Star, Site Design by [Candied Pixels](#) using the [Headway Framework](#)