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## **PUBLIC LANDS: House subpanel to spotlight federal recreation fees (Monday, June 17, 2013)**

**Jessica Estepa, E&E reporter**

The 2004 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act -- which allows agencies to charge fees for use of federal property -- is coming due for reauthorization in 2014 and maybe a major overhaul.

At a hearing tomorrow, a House Natural Resources subcommittee will take up the question of what comes next for the law when it hears from agency officials and citizens about what works well and what doesn't work at all.

The law allows the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and Forest Service to charge recreation fees for areas with facilities such as restroom and picnic tables. According to the most recent [report](#) on the law, released in May 2012, the total revenue made by all five agencies was \$260.6 million in fiscal 2011. Two-thirds of that revenue was pulled in by the Park Service.

Opponents of the act say the Park Service isn't the problem. Rather, it is the way BLM and the Forest Service -- which made \$17.4 million and \$64.9 million, respectively, in fee revenues during fiscal 2011 -- have handled fees.

Kitty Benzar, president of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, said the law has spurred a building spree by the Forest Service. She described a photo she took of a trail head on which the agency had placed a picnic table. The table was overgrown with weeds because it had gone unused, but its presence allowed the agency to continue charging fees for anyone who wanted to hike through the area.

Benzar, who will testify before the Public Lands and Environmental Regulation Subcommittee, said the law should expire so Congress can put forth a better proposal.

"We need more specific language," she said. "No one opposes entrance fees or fees for developed campgrounds. But the way some agencies are charging fees for taking a walk through the woods or riding a horse or [off-highway vehicle] isn't right. We already pay taxes and should have access to our lands."

**Schedule:** The hearing is Tuesday, June 18, at 10 a.m. in 1324 Longworth.

**Witnesses:** Kitty Benzar, president of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition. Other witnesses TBA.