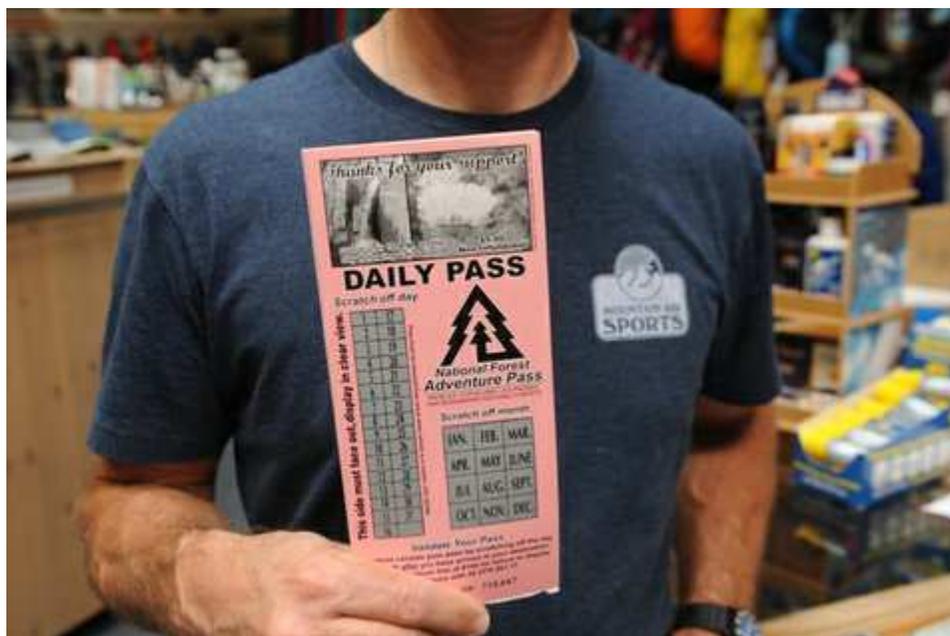


Adventure Pass Foes Claim Victory

By Matt Kettmann (Contact)



Paul Wellman

Adventure Passes sold at Mountain Air Sports

Federal Decision Stops Fines for Simply Exploring Forest; Fees Still Allowed at Developed Sites

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National forests can no longer charge people who simply park and explore undeveloped areas, according to a federal court ruling reached on Monday. The decision comes after years of legal wrangling by activists who believe programs like the Adventure Pass amount to double taxation. It does not do away with the fees charged to use developed areas of the forest, such as picnic tables, campgrounds, and bathrooms. Los Padres National Forest officials are awaiting direction from Washington, D.C. on how to interpret and abide by the decision, and whether that will require some policing on whether people are, for instance, using picnic tables or not.

The news was a major victory for people like Alasdair Coyne, of Keep the Sespe Wild, who has been fighting the program since it was first tested in 1996. "These national forests are maintained by our tax dollars," he explained, "so why should we be paying double to use them?" He doesn't have "high hopes" that Los Padres officials will adhere to the order, and so will maintain a public awareness campaign to ensure people aren't paying unnecessary fees.

What remains unclear is whether fees can be charged on areas controlled by concessionaires, even for people who do not use the amenities. For instance, Rocky Mountain Recreation, which runs the popular Paradise Road area just over the Santa Ynez Mountains from Santa Barbara, has no plans to change their policies, according to an

unidentified woman who answered the phone there on Tuesday. Anti-fee attorney Matt Kenna believes those areas may be exempt, explaining, "This ruling probably won't affect concessionaires charging for their areas."

That's okay for Coyne, so long people are using the developed areas. "The fee foes have always been focused on opposing a fee to access the undeveloped backcountry," he said. "Nobody disagrees that there shouldn't be reasonable fees at developed sites, where people have to clean up the trash and toilets and firepits."