

The Press-Enterprise (Riverside, CA)

<http://www.pe.com/articles/facilities-751120-forest-pass.html>

News

## **BOB PRATTE: Adventure Pass is more like a forest donation now**

October 1st, 2014, 6:37 pm ·

Public backlash and court challenges have reduced the need for the passes at U.S. Forest Service sites, but people continue to buy them



*The level of enforcement for Forest Service Adventure Passes is light because of a court order on the west side of Lake Hemet in Garner Valley. (FRANK BELLINO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)*

I stepped onto steep and rocky Devil's Slide Trail in the bone-dry forest above Idyllwild without paying attention to the Adventure Pass-required signs at Humber Park.

The program, created following a 1996 act of Congress to collect fees from visitors to maintain Forest Service facilities, was greatly reduced over the years in the face of public displeasure and legal challenges. The pass often kept me away from areas in the forest I used to frequent because I didn't want to go to the bother of buying one before driving to the woods.

Though the popular Humber Park trailhead is designated as one of the only three remaining official U.S. Forest Service Adventure Pass-required facilities in the San Jacinto Mountains, parking and stepping into the woods did not warrant a ticket or even a warning.

Thanks to an April federal court ruling on a case filed by four protesting hikers, I legally parked without a pass because I was careful not to use Humber Park facilities. If I had, it would have been highly unlikely that I would have been ticketed.

"Now that the officers have to prove that visitors use facilities like trash cans, bathrooms and picnic tables, it has become increasingly difficult to issue notices of noncompliance," said John Miller, a

Forest Service spokesman for the San Bernardino National Forest.

I suppose Forest Service enforcement personnel would have to go undercover, perhaps disguised as scruffy rock climbers, to catch a hiker tossing a Granola Bar wrapper into a trash. Then they would have to check to make sure an Adventure Pass wasn't hanging from the hiker's rear mirror.

Miller said issuing citations was not a priority of the Adventure Pass program anyway. The Forest Service worked harder on persuading visitors to buy passes because 80 percent of the fees go directly to maintaining and improving facilities. Miller said he does not have information on the frequency that citations being issued this year following the highly restrictive court ruling, but he's sure it's minimal.

Despite great reduction in scope of the program and the difficulty of enforcement, eight of the 19 cars parked at Humber Park the morning of my stroll up Devil's Slide Trail had passes.

I queried readers on Facebook. Though many did not like Adventure Passes, several buy them every year because they help maintain facilities.

"Yes, we still buy them," said avid hiker and outdoor photographer Cindy Rojas of San Jacinto. "Hopefully, the money is being used for the management and maintenance of the park. It's a win-win situation."

Beginning in 1997, the controversial Adventure Pass was required all over national forests in Southern California when visitors parked to enter public land. It was reduced to specific facilities in 2005. In face of legal challenges and opposition from the public, the list of facilities was further reduced early this year. The big whammy was when a federal court ruled in April that Southern California federal forests could not require the pass for visitors who simply parked without using facilities.

The only facilities that require Adventure Passes in the San Jacinto Mountains are Humber Park, the day-use section of Lake Hemet and Lake Fulmor. There are about three dozen facilities requiring Adventure Passes in the San Bernardino Mountains and areas close by.

Over at the Lake Hemet Market in Garner Valley, Michelle Lofton continues to steadily sell the passes despite the court ruling. Many customers are confused by the rules. She explains as best she can and considers the purchase a way to support forest facilities.

"I pay my taxes, but I still buy passes," said Lofton, who lives above Idyllwild in Pine Cove. "I see what people do to the facilities on weekends. "

Because of the difficulty in writing citations, the program now is little more than making a donation to the Forest Service.

I respect the people who buy the passes because they want to, not because they are required.

**Contact the writer:** 951-368-9078 or [bpratte@pe.com](mailto:bpratte@pe.com)