

## News Release

### DELEGATION FIGHTS FOREST FEE INCREASE FOR SENIORS

*Retirees, disabled could lose discounts*

**Contact:** Susan Wheeler, office of Senator Mike Crapo 202-224-6142  
Friday, February 12, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Idaho's Congressional Delegation is asking the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service not to cut discounts for senior citizens and disabled Americans under the Interagency Pass Program. The program provides discounted use rates for activities on Forest Service lands, but a plan is under discussion to reduce the discounts from 50% down to about 10% for programs and services operated by Forest Service concessionaires.

Senators Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, and Congressmen Mike Simpson and Walt Minnick sent the following letter today to Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell:

The Honorable Tom Tidwell  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Tidwell:

We are writing to express concern with a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) proposal to allow a decrease in discounts for senior citizens and the physically disabled on USFS lands, as proposed in the Federal Register on December 1, 2009.

As you know, the USFS is a participant in the Interagency Pass Program, authorized by Congress in December 2004. Congressional intent in establishing this pass program was to continue the multiple benefits of an earlier fee program (Fee Demo Program) by simplifying and standardizing the fee types and providing for public input in establishing fee locations and amounts, among other things. However, that authorization also provided the Forest Service with authorities – unused up to this point – to reduce discounts for senior citizens and the disabled in some circumstances.

Under the aforementioned proposed regulations, some pass holders will find the cost of recreation on their public lands prohibitive. Of equal concern to the actual economic impact is the demographic groups that it will effect; the recession has been especially hard on senior citizens and the disabled, who already must shoulder the burden of high healthcare costs and depleted retirement savings.

As the recession has gone on, more American families have turned to our public lands for vacationing and recreation purposes than they had in the past. In part to address this rising demand, Congress has provided funding increases for the National Forest System activity in recent appropriations bills. Furthermore, the Forest Service received \$650 million for capital improvement and maintenance in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. As such, we are confused as to why the Forest Service would find it necessary or appropriate to levy increased fees on seniors and the disabled.

We urge you to maintain these discounts at their current levels. In this economic climate, we cannot eliminate the opportunity for our senior and permanently disabled citizens to enjoy our public lands.