

NEWS RELEASE



USDA Forest Service

Rocky Mountain Region

Pike & San Isabel National Forests, Cimarron & Comanche National Grasslands

San Carlos Ranger District

3028 East Main St.

Canon City, CO 81212

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/sanc>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S FOREST SERVICE PROPOSES FEES FOR SOUTH COLONY BASIN RECREATION AREA IN CUSTER COUNTY

CANON CITY, Colo., May 11, 2010...The U. S. Forest Service – San Isabel National Forests, San Carlos District is seeking public comments on a proposal to initiate a permit and fee system for recreational access to South Colony Basin and the surrounding 14,000-foot peaks in the Sangre de Cristo Range of Custer County. If approved, implementation of a permit and fee system in South Colony Basin would likely begin in 2011 or 2012.

South Colony Basin, located about 12 miles southwest of Westcliffe, CO, is the most popular backcountry destination in the Sangre de Cristo Range. Most visitors to the basin are climbers on a quest to reach the summits of the surrounding 14,000 foot peaks: Crestone Peak, Crestone Needle and Humboldt Peak.

Managing recreational use and protecting the environment in South Colony Basin presents the USFS with many challenges not found in other backcountry locations; such as maintaining costly summit trails, restoring degraded alpine ecosystems, supporting search and rescue operations, and dealing with human waste. Revenue from the proposed recreation use fees will help to sustain the recreational facilities and environmental protections in the basin.

The Forest Service's preliminary fee proposal would require visitors to obtain a special recreation permit for access to South Colony Basin and the adjoining summit trails. The permit fee would be \$10 per person per trip for day trips, and \$20 per person per trip for overnight trips. The permit and fee requirements would be in effect annually from May 15 through October 15. Users under the age of 18 would be exempt. Permits would be available on-line, at local USFS offices, and at the trailhead for those with exact change.

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Comments or concerns about the proposed fee levels, the methods for obtaining a permit, or how the revenues will be used in South Colony Basin should be mailed to: San Carlos Ranger District, Attn: Mike Smith, 3028 E. Main Street, Canon City, CO 81212 or call, 719-269-8704.

Additional information, a map of the proposed fee area, and a comment form can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/sanc/>

Trailhead register data indicate 3,500 to 4,500 persons visit the small basin at the head of the South Colony drainage during each summer season. The majority of visitors come from the Denver, Boulder and Colorado Springs metro areas. Visitation has been increasing by 3 to 5% per year since the early 1990s.

As Colorado's Front Range cities are projected to add another one million citizens by the year 2020, so also use of South Colony Basin is expected to rise. Weekend use is significantly higher than on weekdays. On average, 30-50 persons are in the basin on a typical summer weekday, with 80-150 persons on typical weekends. On occasional peak weekends, well over 200 persons may be in the basin. Most climbers set up a base camp in the basin for one or two nights while ascending the surrounding peaks.

Since 1996, the USFS has worked in partnership with several non-profit educational and environmental service organizations to reconstruct trails and climbing routes within the basin, and to restore alpine slopes that have eroded under cross-country travel. To date, over 40,000 volunteer hours and nearly \$1,000,000, of mostly non-federal funds, have been spent restoring long-term recreational impacts, rebuilding the lower road, constructing trailhead facilities and creating sustainable summit trails in South Colony Basin.

The recently constructed summit trails and stabilized alpine slopes will require regular maintenance to protect the public and private investment in these restoration treatments. Funding opportunities through private foundations for continued trail maintenance and slope restoration are very limited. Relying on recreation use fees appears to be the best option for providing future high quality backcountry experiences and protecting the natural environment.

The Recreation Fee Demonstration Program allows the USFS to collect recreation use fees to offer recreational opportunities, protect natural resources and provide for the health and safety of visitors.

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