

Green Mountain Fee Proposal Strikes Out

By Kitty Benzar

The latest denial of the fee increase for Green Mountain Reservoir and Cataract Lake trailhead by the Colorado Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) is the third strike for this misguided plan. It's time to call it "out."

The White River National Forest first tried to increase the fees in 2006, but was stopped when a congressional committee "reminded" forest managers that the law does not allow them to do that without the approval of the RRAC. Colorado had no RRAC at that time.

The second strike was in February 2008, when they dusted off the 2006 plan and brought it to the first meeting of the newly chartered Colorado RRAC. Again they were stopped, because the law contains a provision that the RRAC can't recommend a proposal unless it shows documentation of general public support. The Green Mountain/Cataract scheme, far from being able to show such support, actually has a great deal of documented public opposition, which even the District Ranger acknowledged.

Third strike was on June 24, when they were on the agenda again with a slightly modified format. Two business owners from Heeney, Colorado, on Green Mountain Reservoir, were there to oppose the plan. The RRAC chairman had heard vocal opposition from residents of Kremmling, Colorado to the north. Again, no public support. Again, no fee increase.

But the WRNF won't give up. They are planning a field trip for the RRAC, to show off the area. Let's hope some folks from Heeney and Kremmling tag along, to remind them of the negative economic impacts and reduced visitation that the existing fee has already caused.

Beyond the issue of public opposition or support, there lies a more fundamental reason why this proposal is a non-starter: They don't need the money.

You read that right.

They. Don't. Need. The. Money.

Despite constant pleas of poverty, the current fee at Green Mountain/Cataract already brings in more than the management plan for the area says they need to operate the facilities. And it includes a comfortable cushion for improvements.

According to the management plan, it takes \$98,000 a year for operations and capital improvements.

In 2007, *without a fee increase*, they brought in \$149,711, 53% more than their stated need. Yet they persist in trying to increase the fee.

What's the basis for such arrogance? It's really very simple: When you allow local managers to keep all the money they can raise, they will raise all the money they can.

The only way to get our National Forests back is to repeal the law that authorizes the Forest Service to keep the money. The way to do that is to pass Senate bill S.2438, the Fee Repeal and Expanded Access Act. Ken Salazar is a sponsor, along with three other western Senators. It's a good bill and it needs to pass, soon.

Because three strikes is enough, already.

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More information at www.westernsloopenofee.org*