

Press Release of Senator Wyden

Wyden Urges Forest Service to Honor Deal With Seniors and Disabled Campers

Proposed Reduction in Camping Fee Discount Will Go Back on Deal

Friday, February 19, 2010

Washington, D.C. – In order to protect seniors and persons with disabilities from seeing a reduction in discounts for fees at most Forest Service campgrounds, U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) is asking Tom Tidwell, Chief of the Forest Service, to retain its current discount level.

“When these discount passes were sold, they were with the understanding that they entitled the holder to lifetime benefits” Wyden said in the letter. **“This Forest Service proposal would go back on that promise, effectively changing the rules after these passes had been sold.”**

The Forest Service currently gives a discount of 50 percent for seniors and persons with disabilities who purchase special passes to campgrounds operated on Forest Service land by private concessionaires. Approximately 80 percent of the Forest Service campgrounds are operated by private concessionaires, including those in Oregon’s Willamette and Deschutes national forests. The concessionaires have complained that the discounts are hurting profits. The Forest Service is considering reducing the discount to 10 percent on all pass holders, regardless of the terms under which the passes were purchased. Wyden urged the Chief of the Forest Service not to implement this directive or to at least consider honoring the terms of passes purchased before the rule change.

“I can see no reason for increasing the bottom lines of private companies with proceeds derived exclusively from persons with disabilities and elderly users of the National Forests,” Wyden continued in the letter. **“I urge you not to implement this proposal and instead to keep the promise the USFS has made to seniors and the disabled.”**

Text of the entire letter is available below.

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-1111

Dear Chief Tidwell:

In the December 1, 2009 Federal Register, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) issued a proposed directive (RIN 0596-AC91) that would reduce the discount currently given to seniors and the disabled who hold special passes on

campgrounds operated by private concessionaires. I write to you today to urge you not to implement this proposal, and to honor the promise that the Forest Service and other government agencies made to seniors and persons with disabilities when issuing these passes.

As you know, the proposed directive would reduce the current discount of 50% for seniors and the disabled on privately operated camping fees on public land to 10%. When these passes were sold, they were with the understanding that they entitled their holder to lifetime benefits. This proposal would go back on that promise, effectively changing the rules after these passes had been sold. In the proposed regulations, USFS argues that the current discount is untenable because, among other reasons, there are a growing number of senior citizens in our country, thus reducing the revenue that concessionaires receive as more people take advantage of the discounts available. While I appreciate the potential need to change the types of passes and discounts offered in the future, USFS should not change the provisions of passes already issued.

I can see no reason for increasing the bottom lines of private companies with proceeds derived exclusively from persons with disabilities and elderly users of the National Forests. I urge you not to implement this proposal and instead keep the promise the USFS has made to seniors and persons with disabilities.

I appreciate your consideration of my request and look forward to working with you in the future in my role as the Chairman of the Senate Public Lands and Forests Subcommittee.

Sincerely,
s/s Senator Ron Wyden