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Are you willing to pay a fee to use trails in Big and Little Cottonwood canyons?

By Jasen Lee , Deseret News

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Parked cars line up near the base of Snowbird in Little Cottonwood Canyon on Friday, Feb. 5, 2016. (Kristin Murphy, Deseret News)

SALT LAKE CITY — The National Forest Service is proposing a new fee structure for using popular trails in two local canyons that could be in place by 2017.

The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest is seeking comment on a proposal to charge a user fee for access to heavily used trails in Big and Little Cottonwood canyons. Forest Service representatives said the money collected would help pay for maintenance and improvements of the trails.

“We hope that outdoor enthusiasts

will see that what we want to do is enhance the recreation experience that we’re able to provide in these two great canyons,” said Trails, Wilderness and Dispersed Recreation manager Matthew Lane. Over the years, the number of people visiting the canyons and using the trails has increased, which has resulted in the need for increased maintenance.

“We’re not able to really keep up with it,” he said. “These are the ‘shining stars’ of our great (recreation areas), and these forests get more visitors than some of our national parks.”

Lane said that the Forest Service is proposing a site fee of \$6 for a three-day pass and \$45 for a Cottonwood Canyons annual pass. The “America the Beautiful” Interagency Passes would also be honored at each site. Cottonwood Canyon passes would be valid at the American Fork Canyon and Mirror Lake Scenic Byway standard-amenity fee sites, he added.

Reciprocally, the American Fork Canyon and Mirror Lake Scenic Byway day and annual passes would be honored at the proposed sites in the Cottonwood canyons.

Fees collected at the proposed sites would be used to improve recreation site facilities, maintenance and operations in the canyons, Lane said. The proposed fees would be assessed based on the level of amenities and services provided, cost of operations and maintenance, and market assessment, he said.

The proposal would include Mill B South trailhead, Cardiff/Mill D South trailhead, Donut Falls trailhead, Silver Lake recreation complex, Spruces winter trailhead, Guardsman Pass trailhead, Temple Quarry trailhead and interpretive site, White Pine trailhead, Catherine’s Pass trailhead and Secret Lake trailhead. Passes sold would be valid for all sites.

Comments will be accepted through Sept. 9 and, if approved, the new fees would begin June 2017. Comments should be directed to Lane via e-mail at malane@fs.fed.us or by phone at 801-733-2662.

He said the proposed fee structure is similar to the American Fork Canyon and Mirror Lake Highway fees, with 95 percent of the funding collected going to improving the recreation areas. The passes would allow all occupants of a vehicle to enter the trail areas, he noted.

Initially, the fees would be collected in “tubes” at the sites based on the ‘honor system,’ he said.

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