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Eighth Colorado County Declares Opposition to Fee Demo

On January 14, Montezuma became the eighth county and eleventh elected body in Colorado to go on record urging Congress to fully fund federal lands with regular appropriations, not with recreational user fees. At a public meeting in Cortez, the Montezuma County Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to oppose the federal Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (Fee Demo). The resolution requests that no recreational user fees be imposed on Federal lands within the boundaries of Montezuma County.

Similar resolutions have already been adopted by San Miguel, San Juan, Hinsdale, Saguache, Gunnison, Mineral, and Rio Grande Counties, and by the towns of Silverton, Creede, and Ophir. La Plata County will consider one on January 28.

The resolutions are the result of efforts by the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition urging counties to formally declare themselves on the Fee Demo issue as a way of encouraging repeal of the federal program. Similar resolutions have been adopted in cities and counties nationwide, as well as by the state legislatures of California, Oregon, and New Hampshire. Although symbolic, the resolutions send a powerful message to Congress that Fee Demo is unpopular with the American people.

The urgency of taking a position on Fee Demo increased in November, when the original cap of 100 sites per agency was lifted by Congress, allowing the Forest Service, BLM, Park Service, and Fish & Wildlife Service to charge fees at an unlimited number of recreation sites nationwide. In California and the Pacific Northwest, entire National Forests now require a paid pass for access.

The WSNFC is one of over 200 grassroots groups working to convince Congress to restore adequate funding for public lands through the regular appropriations process and to repeal Fee Demo.

At a WSNFC-sponsored protest on July 7, 2001, 35 protesters were issued tickets for driving into the Yankee Boy Basin fee area near Ouray without displaying a pass on their vehicles. Thirty of them are contesting the tickets on the grounds that a recreational pass is not required in order to exercise their First Amendment right to free speech. The case is set for trial on January 23 before Judge Gudrun Rice in the Federal Magistrate Court in Grand Junction.