District Ranger Rick Larson, above right, stands on a chair to address the crowd at the Forest Service workshop June 5.

It was very clear that the huge crowd that mobbed the Forest Service’s office in Kernville for a workshop June 5 was there to protest. They angrily railed against the Kern River Ranger District’s proposed action to establish fee pass areas all around the lake, along the upper river and along Lloyds Meadow Road north of Johnsondale.

“It is not my intent to gouge you,” said Kern River District Ranger Rick Larson as he and other Forest Service officials stolidly faced a blizzard of hostile questions and comments from the crowd of about 200.

Many local businesspeople were concerned that with the high gas prices and now this new pass too, visitors may not come.

Local residents were concerned that they would have to buy a pass just to go fishing along the river or launch their boat in the lake.

The short answer is that if you want to park a vehicle in a Forest Service HIRA (High Impact Fee Area) to recreate, under the latest proposed action you would have to have a pass.

To recap, in March the Forest Service proposed changing the way they collect fees at the Auxiliary Dam area and designating a HIRA there. At the same time, they proposed changing the daily fee from $5 to $10 and making it year-round instead of summer only.

The workshop June 5 was to discuss a new proposal to establish HIRAs on all Forest Service
lands around the lakeshore, along the Upper Kern River from Riverkern to Johnsondale (clarified at the workshop to including parking along Mt. 99) and along the Lloyds Meadow Road north of Johnsondale.

A vehicle-based daily fee of $10 (or an annual pass for $50) would be charged for the HIRAs in those areas. Signs would be posted announcing fee areas.

Many questions were asked about what some of the details were. Here they are. In part, the Forest Service says:

• “You will not need a pass when simply traveling through the Forest or when stopping for activities incidental to through travel (stretch break, photo opportunity, restroom use, stopping for information at ranger stations, visitor centers, Forest Service offices, etc.).”

• “As written in the legislation, there are no fees paid for horseback riding, walking through, driving through, or boating through areas where no facilities or services are used. No fees are charged for access to overlooks, scenic pullouts, or undesignated parking areas where no facilities are provided.”

• “All vehicles parked at fee sites require a Daily Pass, if applicable. Multiple vehicles in the same party must each display a Pass.”

• “Each pass is good until 10 a.m. the following morning.”

• “Any vehicle not properly displaying a Pass is subject to a notice of non-compliance, a warning notice or a citation.” (This was further clarified at the workshop. When asked about fines, Larson said, “We would hope not to do that.” He explained that a certificate of non-compliance just asks for the original fee.)

• “Exceptions (to having a pass) are campgrounds operated under a concession permit.”

• “The Golden Passport allows free access to a HIRA. It has been replaced with the America the Beautiful Interagency Pass. This is a lifetime senior pass available for any citizen or permanent resident of the U.S. over 62 years of age for $10.”

• “The Forest Service is in the process now of determining how best to administer the Special Use Permit for the Fishing Derby. There is no expectation at this time to change the administration of the recreation event permit for the July Fireworks show from what it has been in the past.”

Due to the large crowd, Larson said another public meeting would be scheduled at the Veterans/Senior Center, where there is more room.