Officials to work on lake fees
BLM, city to meet in hopes of setting reasonable rates

By NATHAN BRUTTELL
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The recent announcement of possible fees on Lake Havasu is drawing concern from many city and lake officials.

Bureau of Land Management representatives announced in June the organization is currently administering an environmental assessment on the Lake to determine Special Recreation Permit Regulations and possible fees for "nearly every boating activity on the Lake." The announcement sparked notions in many in the hospitality industry that the fees could hinder tourism greatly.

"If there are a large amount of fees for events such as the (International Jet Sports Boating Association) World Finals, Desert Storm or regattas, then that will do nothing but drive those events away from our town and that's just unacceptable," said Mayor Mark Nexsen Friday. "We've agreed to continue to meet with the BLM to find a way for that not to happen. ... The basic idea of the meetings is let's get out some information to these promoters of these events, assuring them that nothing is going to change from last year for now."

BLM representatives say the fee process is still underdetermined but plans to use the same structure used nationwide. For further details on the possible fees about the Special Recreation Permits, residents are asked to visit BLM California's website at www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/prog/recreation/recpermit.html. BLM Lake Havasu Field Manager Ramone McCoy said she expects the same schedule and details will be available on the local website shortly.

"We're working on the environmental assessment for both the competitive and organized events and we will have public hearings before it is done for residents to comment," McCoy said. "We are cooperatively working with the city to help educate people on what's going on with the events and fees on the lake."

But city officials are saying fees shouldn't be imposed before the completion of the environmental assessment, which is expected as early as October.

"What we've discussed is that until we have the opportunity to meet again, the only thing the BLM is asking from event participants is that they apply for the permits," said City Manager Charlie Cassens. "But BLM folks have told us they'll hold off on establishing or collecting fees until we have time to develop a meaningful program and set fee rates that make sense and that it's not so onerous."

Cassens added that city officials don't want the fees "to affect our events on the Lake."

"If there is a common thread throughout this whole thing, it's that nobody wants to see these fees and bureaucratic processes chase anybody off the Lake because it could certainly have a detrimental effect on our economy," Cassens said. "I don't think (BLM representatives) want that to happen but obviously they're a government agency that has a charge to regulate these kinds of activities on the Lake."

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Cassens said the process took many by surprise.

"Here we are for 40 years where these processes and fees were not in place," Cassens said. "And now we're looking at all of these systems and processes that are going to affect almost everything we do on the Lake. We don't want these processes to affect our special events because they do contribute to our local economy. In the wake of the downturn in our economy, tourism and special events have become a prime focus in our city, and if there's the potential to run off even one event, then we need to work to see that that doesn't happen."

A number of hospitality officials within the city agree the fees will hinder tourism.

"These new fees are definitely going to have some of our events reeling or folding altogether," Convention and Visitors Bureau President/CEO Doug Traub said in June. "Some of these regulations could effectively shut down our ability to market ourselves to film and other events in our city. In the wake of the downturn in our economy, tourism and special events have become a prime focus in our city, and if there's the potential to run off even one event, then we need to work to see that that doesn't happen."

In terms of possible revenue for the city, Traub said he sees potential for an "astronomical increase in fees and detrimental effects to our revenue stream."

"We also estimate (the fees) would comprise about 25 percent of the estimated revenue of all of the events on the Lake," Traub told the Lake Havasu Marine Association members in June. "It certainly infringes on the revenues our city relies upon. ... For all of these reasons, it is definitely not a plus for tourism in our community."

You can contact the reporter at nbruttell@havasunews.com