Ask Mr. Outdoors: 8.17.10

Staff Reports

Monday, August 16, 2010

Q: I saw your article in (Aug 10.) Sun about the National Forest Recreation Pass, etc. I’m not clear on how the NF Rec Pass coordinates with the America the Beautiful Pass. Is the AmB Pass an “umbrella” for the access and/or parking fees described for the NF Rec Pass?

For example. I have a Golden Access Passport (a precursor to AmB Pass). It is a lifetime (free) admission permit. It is “Valid at Federal entrance fee areas ... Agencies administering Federal recreation areas where the Golden Access Passport is honored: Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers, Tennessee Valley Authority, National Park Service, Forest Service. Pass...entitles permittee ONLY to 50% discount on use fees, e.g., camping and cave tours. Pass is not valid for any special recreation permit fee.”

Specifically, is a holder of the AmB Pass or its precursors required to have a NF Rec Pass to park at, e.g., the Lena Lake Trailhead? Is the NF Rec Pass for a parking “fee” or is it an “access” permit? I would guess it’s a parking fee, since access seems to be covered under the AmB.

If it is for parking, then is it subject to the 50% discount afforded AmB pass-holders? If it is an access permit, then is it not required for holders of AmB Pass?

If AmB pass-holders are exempt from the NF permit, and park, e.g., at the Lena Lake Trailhead, what if anything should they leave on the dashboards of their cars?

I hope you can address this in a follow-up column, since many people hold the lifetime and annual access passes.

Donald

via e-mail

A: As you note, there’s a large number of passes and permits for recreating on federal lands. It’s a confusing mess, but at least there is enough interagency cooperation to reduce the number of passes and permits necessary. To answer your question, and for the record:

America the Beautiful Passes, Golden Access Passports and Golden Age Passports are acceptable at all locations where a National Forest Recreational Pass is required.
The America the Beautiful, Golden Access and Golden Age passes trump any other passes or permits. You need only leave it on the dashboard of your vehicle or in a hang tag (available at many Ranger Stations) from the mirror wherever a Northwest Forest Pass or National Forest Recreation Pass is required. Signs are posted at the trailhead, generally stating “Fee Area.”

As you note, the National Forest passes are for parking at the trailhead, but as your Passport and the others mentioned above are accepted pretty much everywhere, the parking is free. I should note, here, that National Forest trail users can park off the road a quarter of a mile from the trailhead to legally avoid paying for a daily or annual National Forest Recreation Pass.

Do you have a question for Mr. Outdoors? E-mail him at Skiberry@pwimail.net.