Our View: Good riddance, Adventure Pass

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WE'VE known it all along, and have been saying so since 1998. But sometimes it takes literally making a federal case out of an injustice in order to make common sense into law.

Speaking for a unanimous panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in a ruling this month in favor of four hikers who objected to paying a fee to visit an Arizona forest, Judge Robert Gettleman wrote: "Everyone is entitled to enter national forests without paying a cent."

Of course we are. These federal lands are paid for by our tax dollars. (For that matter, we welcome into them foreign hiking and sightseeing buffs who don't pay American taxes at all. Good PR for America's great outdoors.) The absurdly concocted Adventure Passes all but a few protesting conscientious objectors have been forced to pay these past 14 years are nothing more than a case of double taxation that never should have been cooked up in the first place.

Technically, if you even pulled your vehicle over to the side of the road on Highway 2 through our Angeles National Forest and took a stroll to a lookout point, you had to fork over $5 for the privilege - or $30 for an annual "pass."

We already have that right. It's not something you can extort money from us to do. This ruling clearly marks the end of the Adventure Pass once and for all.

Even so, the curmudgeonly local Forest Service isn't ready to, as it were, buy in.

"I don't have anything officially on that at this time," said Sherry Rollman, spokesperson for the U.S. Forest Service in Arcadia.

"It happened in another state and we haven't assessed it yet."

What planet is the USFS living on? This isn't a state matter. It's not the California Forest Service. Its workers are federal employees, and this ruling was made by a federal judge. We're one big country, and a happier one for the ruling that we have a right to walk on our own land without being nickled and dimed in order to do so.

Our ire at the Forest Service has nothing to do with whether or not the government agency is properly funded. For decades now, in fact, it has been severely underfunded. We don't object to creative ways to get it more money to protect our wildlands. In fact, we would wager that many if not most avid hikers, backpackers, car campers, fishers, hunters and other forest users would be more than glad to pitch in with their charitable donations to keep their mountain, desert and other wild lands clean and safe - perhaps to a nonprofit organization specifically set up for that purpose.

http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/fdcp?unique=1330102697979
Put a donation booth at every trail head with a smiling volunteer and watch the money roll in - voluntarily.

The 9th Circuit ruling hedges a bit. Those who go to a place in the forest with "a majority of the nine amenities" offered in developed areas such as picnic tables, permanent toilets, garbage cans and running water, may be charged, the court said.

We're not sure about that logic, and not sure how such uses can be quantified. But we'll take the present ruling and run with it - and perambulate, cycle, swim and more through the lands that are owned by us all together.