No visitor fees on tap for Braley Pond

WEST AUGUSTA — It's a tiny little sign about a vague idea floated several years back — so, no, you don't need to worry about the U.S. Forest Service charging fees for visits to Braley Pond.

"We just forgot to take it down," from the information stand at the entrance to Braley Pond, said U.S. Forest Service spokesman Michael Williams.

There are no plans to charge fees for visitors to Braley Pond, in other words — despite the four-by-six-inch notice asking for public comments.

The Forest Service is allowed to charge fees for some recreation facilities, such as ATV trails, though the law is pretty specific about when and for how much, said Ted Coffman, recreation, wilderness, heritage and volunteer programs staff officer for the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

But the aim is basically to help cover out-of-the-ordinary costs. That doesn't apply at Braley Pond.

"That small an area, it probably doesn't make sense," he said.

Any decision to charge fees, meanwhile, has to go all the way up the ladder to the service's regional office in Atlanta and from there to headquarters in Washington, a two-year process. No one from the George Washington and Jefferson forests ever forwarded the idea farther up the chain.

The Virginia Department of Game and Fisheries does collect National Forest Stamps from hunters and fishermen, using the proceeds for wildlife and fisheries habitat improvement.

The sign, by the way, is coming down, Williams said. Soon.
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