Reader Input: State charging fees for federal access

A year ago signs were erected halfway down Iowa Hill Road notifying patrons on the North Fork of the American River in Colfax that a fee was being charged for day use. I began parking outside the signed fee area, as I was hiking along the Bureau of Land Management’s Stevens Trail and I would not be using the state park area; therefore, I should not have to pay a fee. I have continued to park in that same area for the past year. Last weekend, Independence Day weekend, I parked in my usual spot only to find a ticket on my windshield for "Illegal Parking on Public Grounds." I am fighting the ticket, and through my research I have unearthed some interesting facts.

While I maintain that I parked outside the state park area on a county road easement butting up against BLM land, the real problem here is with the state park fees. In reality, the "state park" area is Bureau of Reclamation land — it is simply managed by California State Parks. Because of this, state parks should not be able to charge a fee to anyone who is using the land just to hike or park without using state park campground or bathroom facilities.

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act prohibits agencies from charging these patrons a fee on federal land. In April, U.S. District Court Senior Judge Terry J. Hatter Jr. ruled that a fee cannot be levied if people use federal lands, but do not use the provided amenities, such as campgrounds and bathrooms. This same problem is prevalent along the confluence of the American River. Patrons of the outdoors, who are simply using trails or undeveloped parking areas, are being ticketed and charged day use fees, which should be illegal considering it is actually federal land.

Not only am I a journalist, but I also write for a prominent gold prospecting newspaper and magazine, so I have done extensive research on land rights and deal with the aforementioned agencies frequently.

Most importantly, I am a concerned citizen. I am tired of looking over my shoulder and being made to feel like a criminal. I love the outdoors and I am constantly picking up trash, hiking out with a pack that is heavier than it was when I hiked in. We shouldn’t have to ask ourselves every time we head into the woods, “What am I doing wrong this time?”

This land is my land. This land is your land. And we have a right to use it without being nickel-and-dimed or harassed.

Sarah Reijonen, Cameron Park

Keywords:
Sarah Reijonen Cameron Park Fee Iowa Hill Road California state parks U.S. District Court Senior Judge Terry J. Hatter Jr. Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act BLM bureau of reclamation ticket "Illegal Parking on Public Grounds" bureau of land management stevens trail North Fork American River colfax
Mark Davis • Top Commenter • Auburn, California
On either of these locations I don't see much need for State Parks involvement. It is simply a money grab to justify their existence. The confluence, Mammoth Bar, Clementine and Iona Hill have been used for decades without the present of the Parks Dept. The stories of harassment by SOME of these “Rangers”?? I've been to Clementine on Sat mornings and seen 4 pickups there with multiple agent sitting under a shade structure collecting money, emptying trash, cleaning toilets and motoring up and down the lake. In my opinion, a HUGE waste of money. And when their budget gets in trouble they start talking about closing these facilities as if they couldn't possibly function without the Parks Dept. being there. Way too much nonsense for me. Oh, and who owns these lands??
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Scott Holbrook • Top Commenter • CEO/Janitor at Scott's Econo Labe N Tune & Brakes
What we have is a case of bad management and spending on the Federal and State level - Unfortunately, parks are not on the priority list & way down the list of where tax dollars should be allocated. To keep the parks open, the concept of user fees has come into play. I am mixed on this concept - but given the choice of closing down parking areas & parks or paying a fee - for now I will pay the fee. The fee is to replace those in charge and shift the trend.
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Frederic Bastiat • Top Commenter
Or you could go in front of congress and demand a 300% increase in taxes to support our Federal park system...just like the 300% increase in taxes you requested our council impose for the benefit of APR.
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Pablo Sust • Top Commenter • Newcastle, California
How many people walk and bike into Folsom SRA without paying a penny but they enjoy all the amenities offered by the park. I don't have the answer other than to either get a yearly permit if I'm going to frequent a State managed area or pay the fee. If I only use it every now and then. I guess what I'm trying to say is that if we use whatever areas on a regular basis it pays to get the Golden Poppy Pass. Besides, if the State is managing Federal property they have the right to charge entry/parking fees.
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Bill Hembrell • Auburn, California
Sorry Pablo, Auburn SRA does not except the California Vehicle Day Use Annual Pass... Only the $150 150 year commemorative pass.Fits our public lands and roads. We have already paid for them with our tax dollars.
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Frederic Bastiat • Top Commenter
Bill - the Golden Poppy pass is absolutely accepted by Auburn SRA...I have bought one every year for the past 10 years. I visit Mammoth Bar once a week in winter and three to four times per week in summer.
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David Harvey • Top Commenter • Santa Teresa High
Fees are an attempt to circumvent tax increases and a favorite among this states democrats. They cost the poor a lot more than the wealthy.
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