BLM Plans Public Meetings on San Joaquin River Gorge Fee Proposal

In order to accommodate growing public interest in the San Joaquin River Gorge, the Bureau of Land Management is considering charging fees for certain uses of the area.

The BLM will hold public meetings to discuss the fee proposals on May 18 and 19. Meetings will be held in the Clovis Police Department conference room, 1233 Fifth St., Clovis, on May 18 and at the Sierra Unified School District office board room, 29143 Auberry Road, Prather, on May 19. Both meetings will run from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

"We are considering fees at the San Joaquin River Gorge consistent with Congressional direction to 'provide fair value and fair return' for recreation through amenity fees and commercial services," said Tracy Rowland, park manager.

Fees are proposed for the use of specific facilities such as the group campground, as well as for any activity that requires the special attention of BLM staff. Suggested fees for use of a walk-in campsite at the campground are $10 single and $15 for double and triple sites. Fees for the use of the group campground would be $175 and $25 for non-exclusive use of the horse camp. Interpretive and educational programs would cost $15 per person for up to a half day (4 hours) and $20 per person for a full day (6+ hours). The proposal would also charge a $5 per vehicle fee for parking. An annual pass would be available for between $25 and $50.

The fees would generate an estimated $50,000 to $80,000 annually, depending upon visitation, Rowland said. An estimated 54,000 to 84,000 people visit the gorge annually.

Fees provide a means of ensuring that services meet the public's expectations. As use has increased, the cost of providing an appropriate level of services has also gone up. Fee revenues would be used for operations and maintenance, and to help expand the level of visitor services. Expanded services could include additional guided walks, talks and interpretive programs, new self-guided interpretive displays and experiences, and wayside exhibits that highlight natural features and the cultural history of the area.

Proposed improvements to facilities and trails include adding a shade structure for the group picnic area at the group camp, adding permanent restrooms in the horse camp and fishing access areas, creating new interpretive exhibits and adding a self-guided interpretive trail.

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