News Release

For Immediate Release: April 29, 2010
Contact: David Christy (916) 941-3146

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.

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 day use which includes access to the area and its trail system, restrooms, water, visitor center and interpretive exhibits. 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.

For more information, contact Tracy Rowland at (559) 855-3492, or by email at trowland@ca.blm.gov.

-BLM-
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El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
Gorge may start charging visitors

Fee proposal will be heard at upcoming meetings.

By Marek Warszawski
The Fresno Bee

Hikers, mountain bikers, anglers, hunters and horseback riders who enjoy the San Joaquin River Management Area likely will have to cough up a few bucks starting next spring.

A proposal to start charging user fees for parking, camping and interpretive programs at the 6,700-acre recreation area outside Auberry will be heard by the Pacific Southwest Recreation Resource Advisory Committee during its June 23-24 meeting in Mammoth Lakes.

Until now, the estimated 54,000-84,000 people who visit the gorge annually did so for free. But park manager Tracy Rowland said fees are necessary to offset the Bureau of Land Management’s shrinking budget and internal grants that are no longer available.

The park’s annual operating costs are $330,000, Rowland said. “Our funding is getting cut every year,” Rowland said. “We need new sources of income so we can maintain what we have now as well as expand visitor services in the future.”

Under the proposal, all fees collected will be spent on park maintenance and operations, Rowland said.

Visitors would be charged $5 per vehicle to enter the park, $10 per night for camping ($15 for double and triple sites), $25 per night for using the horse camp and up to $20 for interpretive programs.

Fees would also be used to expand the park’s trail system, adding permanent restrooms in certain areas and creating new interpretive exhibits, Rowland said.

► The reporter can be reached at marekw@fresnobee.com or (559) 441-6218.

TRAIL MIX

Events

Fresno County Sportsmen’s Club 94th Annual Family Picnic
When: Saturday
Where: 10645 N. Lanes Road, Fresno
Join one of California’s oldest conservation organizations for its yearly get-together on the bank of the San Joaquin River. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
BBL proposes fees for gorge use

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

According to Rowland, the fees would 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, self-guided interpretive displays and experiences, and wayside exhibits that highlight natural features and the cultural history of the area.

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SUSD board makes public statement

The Sierra Unified School District Board of Trustees has issued the following statement:

"The Board would like to make the community that needed to ensure that the incident is not repeated and that it has been handled appropriately.

"We respect the right of anyone to bring these issues
to the Editor MUST have a handwritten signature and include a name, address and telephone number. Anonymous letters will not be published, and must be limited to approximately 500 words. Letters exceeding that count may be refused or returned for editing. The Mountain Press reserves the right to edit, publish or not publish any letter submitted. Opinions expressed in the Letters to the Editor are not necessarily those held by the owners of the Mountain Press.

Dear Editor,

If you cross the border illegally in the following countries: North Korea, you get 12 years hard labor. If you cross the border illegally in the following countries: North Korea, you get 12 years hard labor. Afghanistan, you are a spy and your fate will be sealed. Cuba, you will be thrown into political prison to rot. Mexico, you will be imprisoned.

If you cross the US border illegally in the following countries: North Korea, you get 12 years hard labor. If you cross the border illegally in the following countries: North Korea, you get 12 years hard labor. Afghanistan, you are a spy and your fate will be sealed. Cuba, you will be thrown into political prison to rot. Mexico, you will be imprisoned.

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NOTICE: BLM is seeking public input on proposal to charge USE FEES at this site. Please read the summary and send comments to address listed.

May 20, 2010 - Posted on 3 bulletin boards @ SSRG by T. Rowland. Requested comments back by May 31, 2010. Provided comment form
Briefing Paper
Fee Proposal for San Joaquin River Gorge Special Recreation Management Area

DATE: March 24, 2010  
Prepared by: Tracy Rowland, Park Manager

BLM is proposing to institute fees at the San Joaquin River Gorge. This conforms with Congressional direction to “provide fair value and fair return” for recreation through user fees and commercial services. Fee revenues will be used for operations and maintenance. Fee revenues will create the potential to expand the level of visitor services beyond those currently offered. Expanded services could include additional guided walks, talks and interpretive programs, new self-guided interpretive displays and experiences, including wayside exhibits that highlight natural features and the cultural history of the area. In the past few years estimated visitation has ranged from 54,000 to 84,000 persons per year.

FEE PROPOSAL: Under the Federal Lands and Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) two types of fees will be charged: 1) Standard Amenity and 2) Expanded Amenity. Standard Amenity fees are charged when there has been substantial Federal investment in an area and these items are present: 1) developed parking areas, 2) permanent toilet facility, 3) permanent trash receptacles, 4) interpretive signs, exhibits or kiosks, 5) picnic tables and 6) security services. All of these items are present at the Gorge, and BLM proposes to charge a $5.00 per vehicle standard amenity fee; an annual pass costing $25 to $50 would also be offered.

Expanded Amenity Fees: These fees will be charged for use of a specific facility such as the Group Campground or for any activity that requires special attention of BLM staff, such as guided interpretive or educational programs. Fees for camping are proposed as well. (see table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Fee Item/Service</th>
<th>Proposed Fee Amount</th>
<th>Est. Revenue*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campsite (walk-in)</td>
<td>$10 single/ $15 double &amp; triple sites</td>
<td>$810-$1620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Camp</td>
<td>$175</td>
<td>$3,160-$6,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Camp</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$825-$1,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interp/Educational programs</td>
<td>$15 per person/half-day (4hrs)</td>
<td>$22,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$20 per person/full-day (6hrs+)</td>
<td>$600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Amenity Fee</td>
<td>$5.00 per person/day</td>
<td>$24,375-$48,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total estimated fee revenue:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$52,270-$81,420</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*fee revenue depends upon visitation and level of compliance. For planning purposes we used conservative visitation numbers.

Use of Fee Revenue: Fees will be reinvested in operations & maintenance of these facilities, including the trail system, and facility improvements as funds allow. Proposed improvements would include adding a shade structure for group picnic area at group camp, adding permanent restrooms in horse camp and fishing access areas, creating new interpretive exhibits, and a self-guided interpretive trail.

Timeline: BLM plans to hold two public meetings this Spring to solicit feedback from public on proposed fees, concurrently publish Federal Register notice and get on RRAC schedule so that fees could be implemented in the spring of 2011. Contact: Tracy Rowland, Park Manager for more information 559-855-3492 trowland@ca.blm.gov
I would support an Annual Pass to the Gorge in the amount of:

$25 $30 $35 $40 $45 $50

I would like to see the following projects be implemented with Fee revenues: