Editorial: Farewell to forest fees

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The U.S. Forest Service has finally done the right thing in eliminating the Adventure Pass fee for many national forest areas in Southern California.

Four hikers, including two from Ojai, filed a lawsuit in 2012 challenging the Forest Service's right to charge visitor fees in the Los Padres, Angeles, San Bernardino and Cleveland national forests. The fees, called Adventure Passes, cost $5 for a day or $30 for a year.

A federal judge in April 2014 ruled the fee could not be levied on hikers and other forest visitors who didn't use amenities such as bathrooms and campgrounds. It took the Forest Service another two years to finalize a lawsuit settlement and agree to drop the fees.

Courts in California, Arizona, Colorado and Oregon had ruled against fees for parking at trailheads when no facilities are used, but the Forest Service in Southern California basically ignored all those cases. Now, it will only charge visitors who use recreation sites with six standard amenities: developed parking, picnic tables, permanent toilets, security, interpretive signs and trash cans.

That seems fair, but we still wonder why it took so long.