

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Recreation Fee Site Proposal

April 1, 2008

Forest Profile

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, located in the Blue Mountains of northeast Oregon and western Idaho, covers 2.4 million acres of rugged landscapes and ecosystems. National and regionally known areas which draw visitors to the forest include Hells Canyon – *the deepest gorge in North America*, the Eagle Cap Wilderness – *the largest wilderness in Oregon*, and the Wallowa Mountains – *home of the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway and the towns of Enterprise and Joseph*. The Forest is managed under five Ranger Districts (RD) with five district/satellite offices: Whitman and La Grande RDs (located in the Blue Mountains of Oregon); Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA – located in 3 offices: Enterprise, OR, Clarkston, WA and Riggins, ID); Eagle Cap RD (including all of the Eagle Cap Wilderness); Wallowa Valley RD (non-wilderness and other lands surrounding the HCNRA).

Recreation Facility Analysis

The Forest completed the Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA) in the summer of 2006 and began implementation later that year. As part of the RFA process, the forest developed a niche, program of work and preliminary budget plan which would assist in guiding future management decisions for recreation sites. A summary of the Forest RFA process and niche are found on the forest website at; <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/w-w/recreation/rsfmp/index.shtml>

Due to other regional and national recreation priorities many of the RFA action items associated with fee changes have not been implemented, however 2 sites have been selected this year for implementation.

Summary of Fees Changes

BOUNDARY GUARD STATION

Recommended Action: Fee Elimination

Background: This 1960s cabin was built as a FS guard station for field crews working near the Sumpter and Granite, Oregon area. It was sporadically used as a guard station through the late 1990s. In 2002 it was converted to a fee site with the purchase of new furniture, removal of several bunk beds, and repair of the wood stove and kitchen appliances. The cabin was marketed as a year-round site with emphasis on fall hunting and winter snowmobile seasons.

Key rationale that support elimination as a recreation rental:

- a. Income vs. operational costs – Occupancy of this cabin has been very low with less than 5% from 2002-2007 (ie. \$1200-1500 as a high year). With low occupancy, annual cleaning and test such as those for propane and smoke detectors still need to be accomplished.

- b. Inadequate Water supply - The existing toilet, potable water and shower are all serviced by a spring fed system which has been unreliable or not tested good in the last few years. Lack of showers, potable water and a temporary outdoor toilet all receive negative comments by the few users at the site.
- c. Universally Accessible - The site cannot reasonably be made universally accessible since all of the bedrooms are upstairs and the bathroom is not ADA compliant. Conversion of these structures would be cost prohibitive due to insufficient income.

CHRISTMAS CREEK CABIN

Recommended Action: Fee Elimination

Background: This 1940s cabin was part of a working cattle ranch on the Snake River in Hells Canyon. It was part of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area land purchase in the 1980s and was left unoccupied until the early 2000s. In 2003 the Forest was approached by a local group of jetboat users who wanted to repair the old ranch cabin and have it available for club and public use. The forest worked out an agreement in 2004 with the club to include their use as well as make it part of the recreation rental program. Key operational strategies included having periodic club use in exchange for volunteer cleaning and repair following public rental. Work to convert it to a rental included: purchase of new furniture and kitchen stove, re-piping of the propane system, general cleanup and minor repairs. The cabin was marketed as a year-round site with emphasis on fall hunting and spring/summer float and jetboat river use.

Key rationale that support elimination as a recreation rental:

- a. Income vs. operational costs – Occupancy of this cabin has been very low with less than 1% from 2004-2007 (ie. a high of only \$600 one year). With low occupancy, annual cleaning and test such as those for propane and smoke detectors still need to be accomplished.
- b. No water supply - The historic water system for the ranch was inoperable and the sites was marketed as having no water. With temperatures over 100 in the summer this was not attractive to many users.
- c. Access only by jetboat or float – the remote cabin can be accessed by hikers but it is located 3.5 miles from the trailhead. This trailhead is located 3 hours away from Enterprise Oregon at Dug Bar. Main access was private jetboat.
- d. Universally Accessible - The site cannot reasonably be made universally accessible since access from the river is uphill on sandy banks which fluctuate during river ramping flows. Conversion of this facility would be cost prohibitive due to insufficient income.
- e. Other Factors – Other complaints heard from users included; the old style non-accessible toilet, no water, no air conditioning (no electricity)

Future use of cabin: The forest is discussing the future use and operation of the cabin with the jetboat club. They indicated that they may to “adopt” the structure for their club and continue conducting maintenance in exchange for periodic use of the facility.