

Executive Summary for the Pacific Northwest Recreation Resource Advisory Committee

Site: Elk Lake Campground
Site Type: Expanded Amenity
Proposed Action: New Fee Site
Recommended Fees: Campsite Fees: \$8 for single unit/night; \$16 for a double unit/night.
Extra vehicle fee: \$5/vehicle/night.

Site Description

Elk Lake Campground is located adjacent the Bull of the Woods Wilderness on the Willamette National Forest, Detroit Ranger District, about 57 miles east of Salem, Oregon. It is within a 1 to 2½ hour drive of the Willamette Valley and Portland Metropolitan areas. This rustic campground is situated on the west end of Elk Lake, a popular 64 acre lake that ‘feels’ remote yet is not too far away for most. The campground was established in the 1930’s then reverted to an undeveloped site because funding wasn’t sufficient to maintain the site. Elk Lake has since become a hotpot and is being “loved to death” with the continual loss and damage to vegetation. Restoration efforts are underway to re-establish campsites, traffic controls and rehab recreation impacts and OHV damage at the lakeshore and meadow. Improvements include: designating 16 campsites and parking areas, installing fire rings, traffic barriers and picnic tables, and adding garbage service, and will be completed prior to implementing a fee. Fee collection will be through a self-service pay station. Three new toilets were installed in 2006 through Secure Rural Schools Act (Payco) funding. The road has been improved with surface rock but it is still rough requiring slow speeds. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Activities associated with the campground are boating, hiking, fishing and swimming. Visitors can enjoy day hikes from the campground into the Bull of the Woods or Opal Creek Wildernesses. The campground is open June through October when free of snow. Several undeveloped sites on the north shore of the lake will continue to remain free of charge. Occupancy is expected to increase because of improvements.

Fee Assessment

Adding this campground and charging a fee is an outcome of the Recreation Site Facility Master Planning (RSFMP) process. The recommended fees were based on 1) a Market Value analysis, 2) the Regional Campground Pricing rating, 3) cost of operation and maintenance (O&M) and 4) the RSFMP process. The recommended fees would help cover the cost of annual O&M, and provide for a sustainable campground program. The fee is consistent with other campgrounds within the area that offer similar amenities and services, and would line up with average market price of \$8. Local sites providing similar services and amenities range from an \$8 to \$10 camping fee and all have a \$5 extra vehicle fee.

Limited appropriated funding covers only a portion of operation and maintenance costs of recreation sites. If fees are not charged, the campground would operate and be maintained below actual cost. This results in increasing deferred maintenance at this site and within the overall campground program. Reducing or eliminating services, or decommissioning or closing this site would result in adverse resource impacts and is not a viable alternative that was determined in the RSFMP. Furthermore, there is a need to improve this site to help protect resources by alleviating uncontrolled recreation impacts while providing for a high public demand.

Public Involvement

Public involvement to add Elk Lake Campground to the fee program has been conducted over the last year and included: notices posted onsite, at the Detroit Ranger District visitor information office and on the Willamette NF Website, a notice published in the Federal Register and a news release that resulted in two newspaper articles. Federal legislators were also briefed.

No written public comments have been received. During a routine patrol, a visitor stated he was delighted to see new toilets and hear about future improvements and felt there was a need for a fee to manage the use.