



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Malheur
National
Forest

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Route To:

Subject: Recreation Fee Proposals for PNW Recreation RAC

To: Regional Forester

It is with great pleasure that we submit our proposals for new fees and for fee increases as authorized by the Forest Lands and Recreation Enhancement Act for consideration by the Pacific Northwest Recreation Resource Advisory Committee. The required proposal template for fee increases has previously been provided to Jocelyn Biro as requested by the Regional Fee Board. Transmitted with this letter are the campground fee analysis forms for the new fee proposals and a combined Executive Summary for both new and increased fees. Please contact Jennifer Harris, Recreation Staff Officer, if there are any questions about these submissions. She is prepared to present these proposals to the Recreation RAC.

Thank you for the opportunity to address our critical need for additional fee revenues for this program.

/s/Gary L. Benes
GARY L. "STAN" BENES
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure
cc: Jocelyn Biro



Executive Summary

Malheur National Forest Recreation Fee Site Proposal

The Malheur National Forest comprises three Ranger Districts: Emigrant Creek (part of which is Ochoco National Forest administered by us), Prairie City and Blue Mountain located primarily in Grant and Harney counties in eastern Oregon. Two state highways access the Forest—Highway 395 bisects the Forest north to south and Highway 26 bisects the Forest east to west.

The Forest began collecting fees at 15 campgrounds under the previous “fee demo” program. The Recreation Enhancement Act continues the opportunity to collect fees in campgrounds on the Malheur National Forest that meet the requirements of the Act and retain these fees to cover operation and maintenance costs of these campgrounds as well as implement improvements. These fees are a critical contribution to financial stability of the Forest’s developed recreation program. The Forest now proposes to raise fees by \$2-3 at each fee campground and begin collecting fees at 8 additional campgrounds. The Forest will still operate 9 free rustic campgrounds, spread out among the 3 Ranger Districts. Nightly camping fees would range from \$6 at our rustic, forest campgrounds to \$13 at our most highly developed lakeside site.

Nearly all of the recreation facilities on the Forest were built prior to or in the early ‘60’s. These facilities are in need of heavy maintenance and some degree of reconstruction, resource protection, or restoration. Historically, maintenance and operation funds have only covered minimal maintenance while the facilities have continued to deteriorate.

All of these sites had signage indicating this proposal posted on-site for two years, and in particular through hunting seasons which is the heaviest use period on the Forest. Very few comments were received and those focused on the amount of increase over current rates. Local businesses and governments recognize the fiscal challenges we face and support the philosophy of recovering costs when the fees can be retained for use at these sites. Fees retained would be used for the following kinds of items:

- Bring operation and maintenance closer to the full service standard of the Forest Service.
- Reduce backlog of deferred maintenance.
- Make improvements to come closer to full universal accessibility.
- Resolve health and safety issues, particularly with water systems.
- Provide interpretive signing where warranted.
- Provide increased visitor information, security, and customer service.
- Rehabilitate or reconstruct as needed to meet current visitor needs.

Estimated retention of fees (80%) under this proposal would be roughly \$100,000/year for about a 150 day season. Fee collection costs are under \$5,500. Estimated annual operating costs are \$170,000 for these sites (not incl. backlog maintenance).

The Malheur National Forest is known primarily as a dispersed recreation destination, that is people come here to disperse out far and wide enjoying their favorite pastimes such as hunting, driving for pleasure, off-road vehicle touring, hiking, relaxing, gathering products like mushrooms and in the winter snowmobiling. The Forest is also bordered by the high, dry desert on the west, south, and east, making it an attractive, cool, green oasis in the hot summertime. As a result, our campground facilities fall into three general categories.

Rustic, forested setting

These are fairly primitive, small campgrounds with rustic facilities typically scattered “around the woods.” They are usually off the main road system and are well suited to our dispersed recreation visitors offering only the most basic of support (e.g. toilet, picnic table, fire ring). They allow visitors to still have a campfire when fire season closes off the rest of the Forest. These sites are primarily the new fee sites and are proposed for the lowest fee of \$6.

The sites are: Tamarack, Tip Top, Buck Springs, Rock Springs, Lower Camp Creek, Wickiup, and Starr (current fee is \$5).

Moderately developed, attraction oriented

These sites are typically located along one of the three main scenic drives through the Forest or one of the main highways and/or are associated with the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness. Some provide water and some don't. Some provide garbage service and some don't. Many are adjacent to attractive creeks. A few have a Host presence. The level of improvements varies among these sites, but they are all essentially similar as a group and the proposed fee is \$8.

These sites are Emigrant, Falls, Joaquin Miller, Parish Cabin, Murray, Big Creek, Trout Farm, Dixie, Strawberry, Slide Horse, Middle Fork, and Deerhorn.

Highly developed and/or lake oriented

In the dry, high-desert setting, lakes are rare, attracting considerable use. Typically these sites also have lake-oriented facilities, group sites, picnic shelters, associated trails and other highly developed amenities. They all have water. The fee proposed for these sites is \$10, except for Magone Lake Campground which is proposed for \$13. These sites also have separate fee scales for group sites and picnic shelter reservations.

These sites are Delintment Lake, Yellowjacket Lake, Idlewild and Magone Lake.