



Hoosier National Forest Happenings



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Trail User Fees (Show Me The Money)

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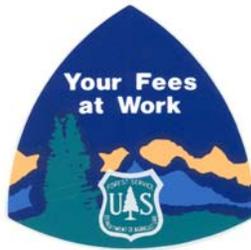
Why is there a fee for the use of trails on the Hoosier National Forest? For years, national forests, parks, and other public lands charged a fee for the use of some facilities. Generally, these were areas that required more upkeep, such as campgrounds with a high level of development. However, the money went to a general fund and did not necessarily benefit the area where it was collected. In 1998, Congress expanded the fee authority with the idea that public agencies should try and become more self sufficient and less reliant on tax dollars. Agencies such as the Forest Service were given authority to charge for the use of more types of facilities, with an emphasis on those that were expensive to maintain because they required more development. A significant improvement to the fee program was that most of the money collected was to remain on the forest and used to maintain the facilities where the fee was collected. The Hoosier National Forest decided to charge a fee for trail use.

How did the Forest come to decide to charge this fee? On the Hoosier National Forest most of the trails are open to use by horses, mountain bicycles, and hikers. It turned out that these "multiple use" trails were very expensive to maintain, and were used by only a small percentage of the people that came to the forest. Therefore, it made sense to charge a little extra to those users for the additional upkeep required to keep the trails in good shape. Today, horse and bike riders over 16 years of age are required to buy an annual trail permit for \$35 or a daily permit for \$5. Hikers are still free because hikers cause very little impact and additional income is not needed to maintain trails just for hiking.

Where is the money going? Since 1998 the Forest has used \$340,000 of trail fee revenue for trail and trailhead improvements. Examples are rerouting bad sections of trail, new parking lots at the Nebo Ridge Trail, permanent trail maps mounted on kiosks at each trailhead, new toilets at trailheads, loading ramps for persons with a disability, and purchase of new picnic tables and hitch rails. Some of the money is also used to partially fund a trail ranger to provide visitor assistance in the backcountry and perform trail maintenance.

In 2008, there were 1,796 annual and 7,221 daily permits sold, and \$91,034 was collected. The 2008 financial statement may be found at:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hoosier/recreation/2008_financialrep.pdf

The trail permits are available at Hoosier National Forest offices and 32 vendors scattered throughout the Forest. A list of vendors and their location may be found on the forest website at:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hoosier/recreation/vendor_list.htm.



Logo indicates fee revenue contributed to the maintenance of the site



Riders enjoy a refurbished trail paid for by the fee program