

# Coconino National Forest

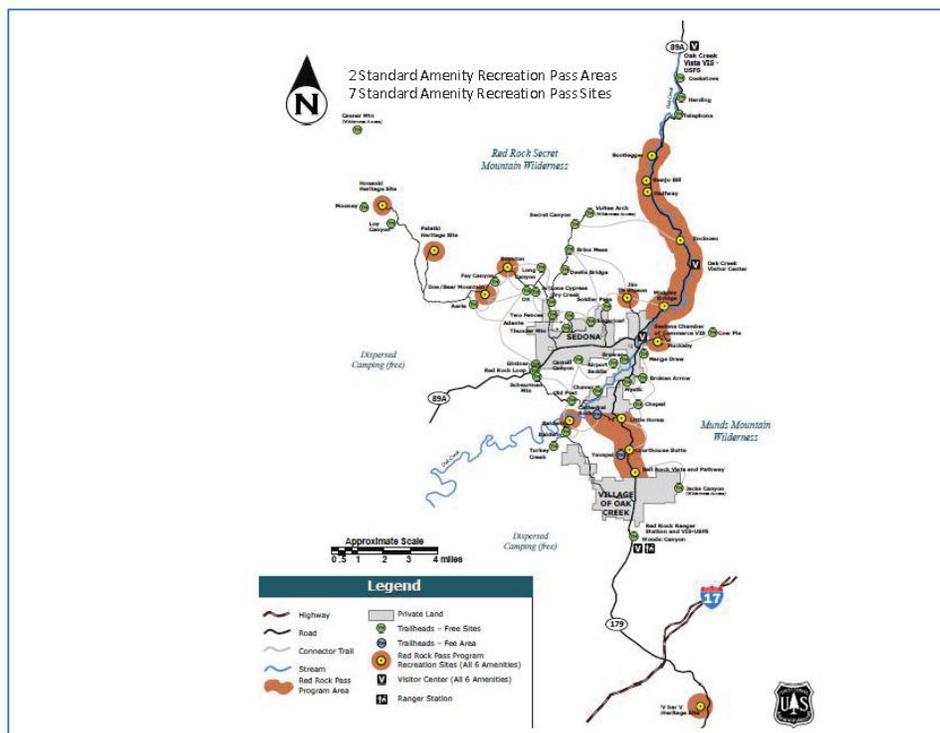
## Red Rock Pass Fee Program - Proposed Changes

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### Background

In 2011, the Coconino National Forest (CNF) conducted a review of the Red Rock Pass Fee Program. As a result, the program was substantially reduced in size. As part of the review, the CNF hosted the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) Work Group and members of the public for a field trip and the CNF received hundreds of public comments. The original Red Rock Pass Fee Program contained 160,000 acres; the BLM RAC recommended to the Regional Forester a 93% size reduction that resulted in approval of a revised Program. The revised Program included two tightly defined areas and seven stand-alone sites as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Current Red Rock Pass Fee Program configuration (2015).



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Implementation of this change resulted in over 40 sites previously in the RRP Program becoming free sites, reinstatement of the Grand Annual Pass which allows users access to all day use fee sites in the area (concessionaire operated and RRP fee sites), regularly scheduled and well-advertised fee free days, an updated Business Plan, and continuing amenity improvements at fee sites.

### Description of the Red Rock Pass Fee Program Areas and Stand-Alone Sites

Currently the RRP Fee Program includes two areas: the first along Oak Creek Canyon (State Route 89A), and the second along the Red Rock Scenic Road (State Route 179, a National Scenic Byway). These two areas receive intense visitor use, have high financial investment and a need for visitor services. There are also seven stand-alone fee sites: Palatki, Honanki and V Bar V Heritage cultural sites, and four picnic sites with trailheads: Jim Thompson, Boynton Canyon, Bear/Doe, and Baldwin.

### New Red Rock Pass Fee Program Proposal

The Coconino National Forest is proposing to operate the Red Rock Pass Fee Program as 20 stand-alone sites (Figure 2).

This proposal includes the following actions:

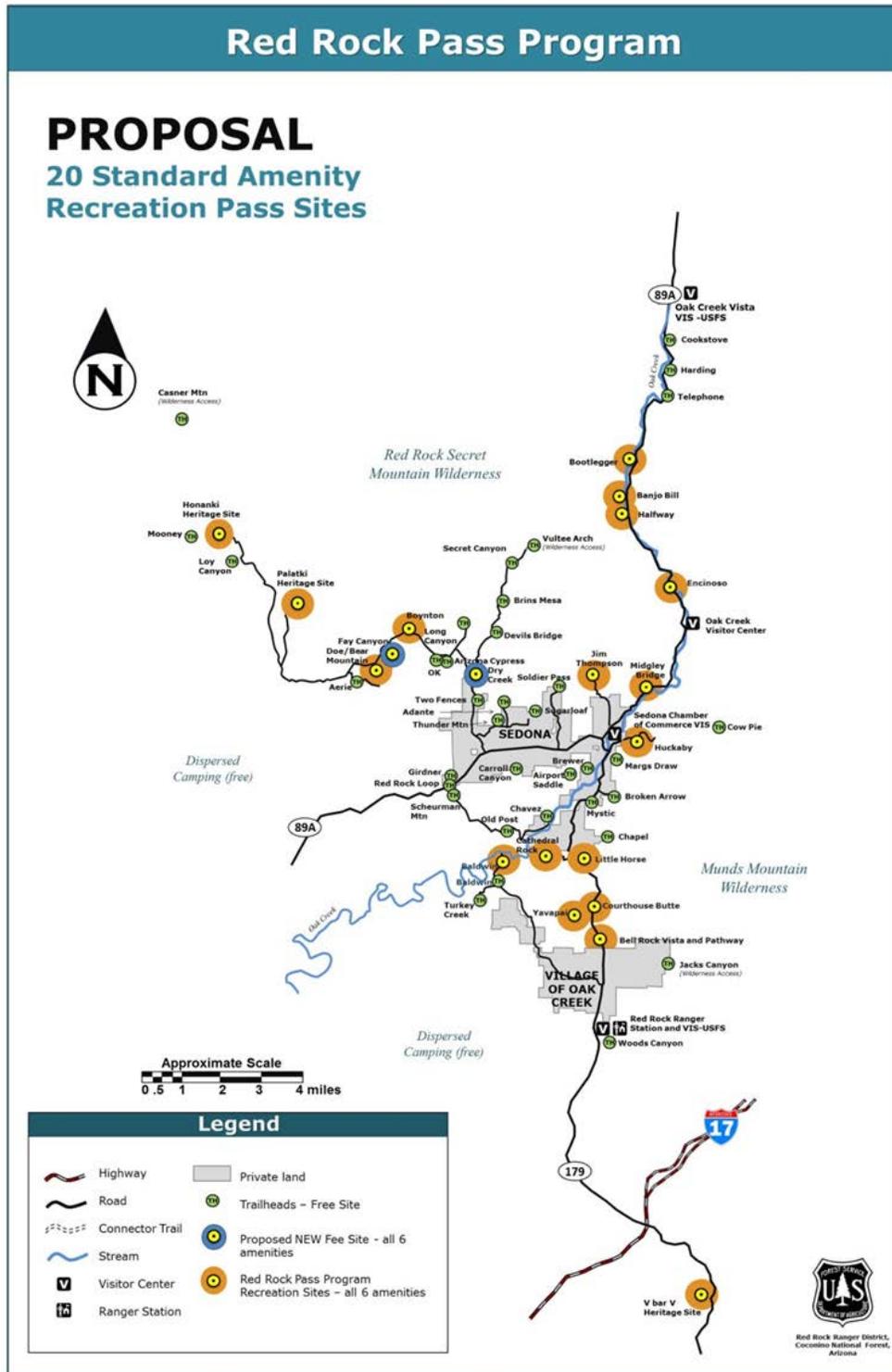
- 1) Retain the seven current stand-alone fee sites – these sites would remain unchanged, and include Palatki, Honanki and V Bar V Heritage cultural sites, and four picnic sites with trailheads: Jim Thompson, Boynton Canyon, Bear/Doe, and Baldwin. These seven fee sites contain amenities required by FLREA.
- 2) Eliminate the two fee areas. Visitor use and public comments indicate the distinction between fee areas and stand-alone fee sites is confusing to visitors. As a result of removing the fee areas, the following would occur:
  - a. Recreation sites within the fee areas will become stand-alone fee sites. The standard amenity fee would continue to be charged at these 11 stand-alone recreation fee sites. All sites would contain the required six amenities: designated developed parking, permanent toilet facility, permanent trash receptacle, interpretive signs, exhibit, or kiosk, picnic tables, and security services.

Six fee sites would be retained from the Oak Creek Canyon SR89A “area” including:

- Bootlegger Picnic Site
- Banjo Bill Picnic Site

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Figure 2. Display of proposed stand-alone sites.



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- Halfway Picnic Site
- Encinoso Picnic Site
- Midgley Bridge Vista and Picnic Site
- Huckaby Trailhead and Picnic Site

Five recreation fee sites would be retained as stand-alone sites from the SR179 “area” including:

- Little Horse Trailhead and Picnic site
- Courthouse Vista and Picnic site
- Yavapai Vista and Picnic site
- Bell Rock Vista and Picnic site
- Cathedral Rock Vista and Trailhead<sup>1</sup>

### 3) Add two new stand-alone recreation fee sites.

- a. Dry Creek Vista Picnic Site (Figure 3): During the 2011 review with the RRAC, Dry Creek Vista Picnic Site had just been contracted to be built. The RRAC deferred a decision on the addition of it as a fee site, pending completion of construction. As shown in the pictures below, the site contains all six amenities and is open to the public.
- b. Fay Canyon Vista and Trailhead site (Figure 4): Fay Canyon site has a parking area, interpretive kiosk, and security patrols are provided. A permanent toilet facility, tables and trash receptacles will be added in the summer of 2015 to give Fay Canyon site the required amenities.

Figure 3. Dry Creek Vista Picnic site



<sup>1</sup> All required amenities will be added prior to a fee being collected for a Cathedral Rock Trailhead as a stand-alone fee site.

Figure 4. Fay Canyon Vista and Trailhead parking area



## Public Involvement

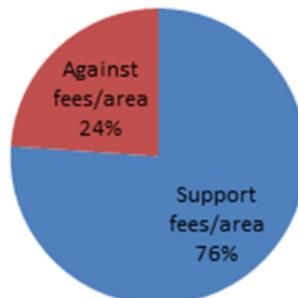
### Previous Public Involvement

In 2011, the Red Rock Ranger District conducted public outreach about changes to the larger RRP fee program (originally 160,000 acres). This led to the current RRP fee program, recommended for approval by the BLM RAC that includes two smaller areas and 7 stand-alone sites. The public input in 2011 showed (Figure 5):

- General acceptance for a fee program in Red Rock Country.
- General acceptance for management of a fee “area”.
- General distaste for placing recreation sites under concessionaire management.

Figure 5: Public comment summary, 2011.

**2011 RRP Public Outreach:  
General Support and Opposition  
for Fees in Sedona area**



## **Current Proposal Public Involvement**

The Red Rock Ranger District is seeking public comment on the 2015 proposal and will submit the proposal to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Arizona Recreation Resource Advisory Council (R-RAC) in the spring of 2016. A communication plan has been developed to ensure effective public notice and opportunities to comment. Public outreach will include:

- On-site notices at the affected recreation fee sites;
- Press releases to local media contacts;
- Proposal and supporting documents posted on the Coconino National Forest website;
- Public open house;
- Local and federal elected officials will be briefed;
- Local Chambers of Commerce and recreation interest groups will be informed;
- Arizona Game and Fish Department and other state and federal recreation providers will be informed; and
- The proposal will be presented to the BLM Arizona Recreation Resource Advisory Council.

## **Anticipated Impacts of the Change**

The proposed changes are not anticipated to make a noticeable difference to most visitors and residents. Since 2011, all stand-alone fee sites have been clearly signed so that visitors know when they are required to pay a fee at a site. During the 2011 review, the forest carefully considered the locations of stand-alone fee sites and free use sites so that there is a distribution of both across the popular red rock area. Visitors and residents continue to use the mix of free and fee sites throughout the popular Red Rock landscape.

## **Program Accomplishments**

### Visitor Enjoyment

The Red Rock Fee Program fee sites host thousands of visitors each year. Most of these sites are open to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (cultural sites are closed at night). Visitors enjoy picnicking, hiking, photography, art, star gazing, meditation, and other recreational activities. These activities are supported by the amenities provided by the fee sites, and maintained by the revenue from the fee program. The provision of developed recreation sites is a key component of the resource protection strategy for the sensitive Red Rock landscape. In addition, these sites and the forest access they facilitate are critical to the local economy and lifestyle. The ability to recover costs at two popular sites (Dry Creek and Fay) will ensure that these two sites are properly cared for. Visitor services such as clean bathrooms, trash-free recreation sites, and information and interpretive signs will enhance visitors' enjoyment.

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### Communication and Interpretation

Since the last review in 2011, Red Rock Fee Program information signs have been installed at all fee sites and Program information and accomplishments shared through the Recreation Guide, a Forest Service publication available for free throughout the community. Comment cards and the web comment venue are also available. USFS staff answers questions about the Pass Program at the FS Visitor Center and at the Sedona Chamber Visitor Center. Very few public comments have been received about the Red Rock Pass Fee Program in the past 4 years. High quality interpretive signs have been installed at fee sites to better inform visitors about the areas unique cultural and natural values.

### Personnel

The RRP Fee Program staffing for site maintenance, security, and visitor information has held steady. Funds are used to pay for toilet janitorial and trash service, for law enforcement/security patrols, and for visitor information and site maintenance provided by on-site recreation technicians. A robust visitor services program also supports docent “interpretive” rangers who provide tours and resource protection at the three archaeological sites. Recreation technicians spend considerable time ensuring that the sensitive environment surrounding these recreation sites is protected from impacts such as off road driving, user created trails, removal of cultural artifacts, plant damage, and human waste.

### Visitor Amenity Improvements

Pathway, toilet, and interpretive sign improvements have been made at 6 fee sites: Courthouse Vista and Yavapai Vista, Midgely, Palatki, Honanki and V bar V sites. Some examples are shown below.

Figure 6: Newly installed toilet and table at Yavapai Vista and Trailhead.



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Figure 7: New interpretive signs at the V bar V Cultural Site.



Figure 8: New interpretive kiosk at Bootlegger Picnic Area.

