



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Pike and San Isabel
National Forests
Cimarron and Comanche
National Grasslands

San Carlos RD
3170 E Main
Canon City, CO 81212
(719) 269-8500

File Code: 2331

Date: May 12, 2010

Dear Reader,

I am writing to solicit your comments on a proposal to initiate a permit and fee system for recreational access to South Colony Basin and the surrounding 14,000-foot peaks in the Sangre de Cristo Range.

South Colony Basin, located about 12 miles southwest of Westcliffe, CO, is the most popular backcountry destination in the Sangre de Cristo Range. Most visitors to the basin are climbers on a quest to reach the summits of the surrounding 14,000-foot peaks; Crestone Peak, Crestone Needle and Humboldt Peak.

Managing recreational use and protecting the environment in South Colony Basin presents the Forest Service with many challenges not found in other backcountry locations; such as maintaining costly summit trails, restoring degraded alpine ecosystems, supporting search and rescue operations, and dealing with human waste. Forest Service appropriated funds have not been sufficient to sustain the recreational facilities and environmental protections in the basin. Revenue from the proposed recreation use fees will help close the gap.

The Forest Service's preliminary fee proposal would require visitors to obtain a special recreation permit for access to South Colony Basin and the adjoining summit trails. The permit fee would be \$10 per person per trip for day trips, and \$20 per person per trip for overnight trips. The permit and fee requirements would be in effect annually from May 15 through October 15. Children and teenagers under the age of 18 would be exempt. Permits would be available on-line, at local Forest Service offices, and at the trailhead for those with exact change.

The 2004 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) allows the Forest Service to collect fees through special recreation permits to offer recreational opportunities, protect natural resources and provide for the health and safety of visitors. FLREA clarified and expanded recreation fee authorities that were first legislated by Congress in 1996.

In the 2004 legislation re-authorizing recreation use fees, Congress required the creation of independent Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (RRAC) for the specific purpose of reviewing federal agency recreational fee proposals within a region or state. The Colorado RRAC is made-up of individuals, outside of the Forest Service, who represent the various recreational uses of public lands in the state. A definite date has yet to be scheduled for the Colorado RRAC's review of this South Colony Basin fee proposal, but it will likely be considered between January and April of 2011.

Since 1996, the Forest Service has worked in partnership with several non-profit educational and environmental service organizations to reconstruct trails and climbing routes within the basin, and to restore alpine slopes that have eroded under cross-country travel. To date, over 40,000 volunteer hours and nearly \$1,000,000, of mostly non-federal funds, have been spent restoring long-term recreational impacts, rebuilding the lower road, constructing trailhead facilities and creating sustainable summit trails in South Colony Basin.

The recently constructed summit trails and stabilized alpine slopes will require regular maintenance to protect the public and private investment in these restoration treatments. Funding opportunities through private foundations for continued trail maintenance and slope restoration are very limited. Forest Service funding for trail maintenance has been “flat” for the past several years and is not expected to see major increases for the foreseeable future. The funding available for education and enforcement of backcountry etiquette and regulations has similarly been strained. Please refer to the attached map, proposal summary, and anticipated questions for details about South Colony Basin and the proposed fee and permit system.

Relying on recreation use fees appears to be the best option for providing future high quality backcountry experiences and protecting the natural environment in South Colony Basin. However, if you have alternative proposals for managing this special basin, I am still open to suggestions. I am particularly interested in any comments or concerns that you may have about the proposed fee levels, the methods for obtaining a permit, or how the revenues generated through the fees will be used in South Colony Basin.

Sincerely,

Paul M. Crespín

PAUL M. CRESPIN
District Ranger

Attachments – Map of proposed South Colony Basin Fee Area
South Colony Basin Fee Proposal
Anticipated Questions and Responses to the Fee Proposal