



File Code: 2460-1

Date: January 27, 2009

Ms. Laurie K. Vierheller  
Administrator  
Hinsdale County  
P.O. Box 277  
Lake City, CO 81235

Dear Ms. Vierheller:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests' (GMUG) proposal to increase the fee charged for Christmas tree permits from \$8 to \$10, per permit.

The GMUG has charged \$8 per permit for Christmas trees over the past several years. The receipts collected from each of these permits are distributed in the following manner: \$2 is returned to the Treasury of the United States and the remaining \$6 stays in the National Forest System. Of this \$6 that remains with the Forest Service, 5% (\$.30) goes to the Rocky Mountain Regional Office for administrative purposes, 80% (\$4.80) is used to manage the Christmas tree permit system on the Forest (e.g. setting up areas, law enforcement and information) and 15% (\$.90) is used to fund the visitor information staff who sell the permits.

In 2007, a total of 1176 Christmas tree permits were sold on the Forest. Of these, 38 permits were sold in Hinsdale County (13 to individuals and 25 to the Chamber of Commerce) for total revenue of \$182 to the Forest and \$76 to the Treasury. In truth, this program barely pays the expenses of administration; however, it is an important, low cost, form of recreation and tradition for families and individuals and one that the Forest desires to continue to support.

What is being proposed is the fee increase by \$2 for each permit, not whether the receipts are returned to the Treasury or a portion held on the Forest. This change was made in the past.

Recently Hinsdale and other counties were asked to make a choice whether to receive payments maintaining the traditional 25% of gross receipts funding or under the Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS) formula changes. The whole purpose of this effort was designed by Congress to de-link the ties between forest receipts and funding to the states (and through the State to the counties). On the GMUG, each of our counties elected to take the Secure Rural Schools Act funding, as it was significantly more money than the 25% of receipts calculations. Therefore, there is no direct link between the monies collected for these permits and county funding. Likewise, there is no direct link between what funds are returned to the Treasury and what is allocated to the GMUG for the vegetation management program. Funding for the Forest Service is decided by Congress annually in the national budget process and provided to the Agency to distribute by Region and Forest along with annual accomplishment targets.

What the Forest is proposing to do, and asking for public input on, is to: 1) charge fees that are more in line with some of our surrounding forest and BLM neighbors, and 2) to retain more money on the forest from the receipts to help pay for the cost of the permit program.



I hope that this information provides some clarification of the proposal and the status of receipts from Christmas tree permit sales on the Forests. Please feel free to contact District Ranger Connie Clementson at 970-242-8211 with any questions you may.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Charles S. Richmond*  
CHARLES S. RICHMOND  
Forest Supervisor

cc: Connie Clementson  
James R Dawson  
Lee Ann Loupe  
Robert Vermillion  
Carmine Lockwood