



Recreation Fee Program

Issue

In recent years, revenue from the recreation fee program has provided many benefits for visitors to Alaska’s national forests, including increased hours in visitor centers; new interpretive programs, more maintenance at recreation sites, and other improvements and services.

In 1998, the Alaska Region placed three recreation sites in the national recreation fee demonstration program, and today the recreation fee program has eleven projects, with others being considered depending on current economic conditions and public support., Fees collected at recreation fee project sites are returned to the unit administering the recreation site for improvements, maintenance, and additional visitor services.

Background

In 1996, Congress passed temporary authority for the Forest Service, as part of a national fee demonstration program, to establish and collect fees at national forest recreation sites. The Forest Service was given broad discretion with its authority to charge fees through 2001 and was extended the authority through 2005. In late 2004, Congress passed the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (now called the Recreation Fee Program) that gives federal agencies authorities to continue charging for enhanced recreation services for an additional ten years, and drops the demonstration aspect of the program. It also added recreation special use permits as a fee category, allowing those special use fees to be kept at the national forest to enhance the recreation special use programs.

The total recreation site fee receipts for the Alaska Region in FY09 were approximately \$2,600,000. The Alaska Region’s fee sites are: Begich, Boggs Visitor Center (BBVC) near Anchorage, the Juneau Ranger District Recreation Complex (visitor center, campgrounds, shelters, and the Juneau Icefield helicopter tours), the Southeast Alaska Discovery Center in Ketchikan, Pack Creek Bear Observation Site on Admiralty Island, Anan Wildlife Observatory near Wrangell, Fish Creek Wildlife Observation Site near Hyder, Childs Glacier Campground near Cordova, the Public Recreation Cabin rentals, Tongass National Forest campgrounds, the Interagency Pass program (Annual, Senior and Access), and special recreation permits; which account for nearly 36% of the fees collected in 2009. There is no mention of the vast majority of campgrounds on the Chugach National Forest because the program is delivered through the Granger-Thye Concessions, where the holder of the special use permit is Alaska Recreational Management, Inc.

Alaska Region Fee Revenue (in thousands)

All Fee Projects	2007	2008	2009
Total Revenue	\$2,500	\$2,800	\$2,600

Current Situation

Fees are being used to maintain facilities, trailheads and trails, campgrounds, picnic areas, recreation use cabins, and visitor centers. There has been an improvement in visitor services, public safety, and new opportunities for heritage expeditions, tours, and interpretive programs. The new legislation also provides for fees generated from commercial recreation outfitting and guiding to be returned to the Forest Service for use to manage that program. While there has been some controversy about the recreation fee program nationally, analysis of survey results in the Alaska Region show that the acceptance of fees is generally positive, especially when the public can see direct benefits and improvements at the sites where the fees are paid. At present the only fee change happening in the Alaska Region is a phased-in fee schedule at BBVC that will end at \$5 in 2011. Business planning changes at BBVC were initiated in FY2007/2008.

More Information

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