

**SOUTHERN REGION RECREATION
RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
February 20, 2008**



The third meeting of the Southern Region Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) convened at 8:30 am on Wednesday, February 20, 2008 at the Staybridge Suites in Atlanta, Georgia. Ten of the eleven members of the RRAC participated.

RRAC members in attendance: Billy Smith, Bill Alexander, Larry Mashburn, Morgan Sommerville, Hilda Morales, Brett Paben, Gail Wright, Taylor Stein, Betty Huskins, and Jack Terrell.

USFS attendees included: Mary Morris, Ann Christensen, Bob Burger, Cheryl Chatham, and Caroline Mitchell.

Brett Paben, Chairman, welcomed the committee and explained that Ron Fox was unable to attend. He then reviewed the agenda for the remainder of the meeting.

Chatham discussed housekeeping issues (restroom locations, safety awareness, etc) and introduced the Forest Service employees present. Ann Christensen, Director of Recreation, Wilderness, & Heritage programs in the FS Southern Region announced staff changes – particularly, Rick Lowe's retirement since the last meeting. Mary Morris, Deputy Regional Forester discussed Regional office staff changes and issues that the Forest Service is currently facing. Regional Forester Charles L. Myers has accepted a job in the Washington DC office. Deputy Regional Forester Tom Peterson will serve as Acting Regional Forester until the job is officially filled.

The committee was informed about legislation introduced into Congress last session that would impact the Recreation Enhancement Act (REA). S.2438 i.e. The Baucus Bill, co-sponsored by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) with support from Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO) would repeal certain provisions of the REA. The committee asked to be kept informed on progress of this legislation over the next few months.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Committee had been contacted by the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Potomac Field Station with a request to review a fee proposal at the next RRAC meeting. A revision of the by-laws was needed to expand the RRACs authority to make recommendations on a proposal submitted by the BLM. Appropriate by-law changes were proposed, made and voted on by the Committee with unanimous approval. Copies of the new by-laws will be sent via email to the Committee, and hard copies will be available at the next committee meeting.

PUBLIC INPUT

The committee had reviewed correspondence from two members of the public regarding a previous proposal (Kisatchie NF Multi-Use Trail System) that had been discussed at length and recommended by the Committee at the September 2007 meeting. The Committee requested that Chairman Paben, working with the Designated Federal

Official Chatham prepare a letter of response back to these two individuals. These letters will be sent within the next week.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Chairperson Paben noted that the public participation opportunity was on the agenda. No one from the public had provided additional information to the committee nor had anyone requested the opportunity to address the committee at this meeting.

SUMMARY OF PAST RECOMMENDATIONS BY RRAC

In some cases, Forests have provided some feedback to the RRAC regarding former recommendations/approvals as a result of the fee program. That information was shared with the committee during discussion of this meeting's project proposals. A brief summary from fall 2007 follows:

Daniel Boone NF – The Forest reports no significant public reaction to the fees that have recently changed, but will monitor this aspect of their recreation program over the upcoming recreation season and report back in the fall.

Kisatchie NF – The sale of annual passes for the multi-use trail system is up from last year. They have received no additional input from the public but will continue to monitor public acceptability during the next several months.

NF In Mississippi – The Forest has no feedback to provide at this time, since it has been winter, recreation use has been low. Fees were implemented in January 2008 and will report back at the end of this upcoming recreation season.

NF in North Carolina – The season really is just beginning but so far, the public is supportive of the fees that were recommended by the RRAC for the new picnic shelter rental fees. People are particularly pleased they can now “reserve” the sites and plan on having a place for their event. There has been no negative reaction to the fee increase for the special event fees at the Cradle of Forestry.

NF in Florida – There have been no complaints from users during the past few months at the Apalachicola NF since the fees were implemented. Use at Camel Lake has picked up as users are enjoying the improvements that have been made in recent months i.e. hot showers, flush toilets, new picnic shelters, renovation of the beach, etc. Use at Wright Lake is up slightly, with no complaints.

Staff, Student Conservation Association participants and volunteers on the Ocala NF have been heavily involved in an information campaign designed to familiarize users with the increase in fees, both at campgrounds, day use areas, and the OHV Trail system. For several weekends during past months, staff has been at trailheads to provide informational brochures, answer questions, facilitate payment including purchase of annual passes, etc. The Forest reports no formal complaints about any fee increases. There have been some verbal complaints (seasonal and local users) that users do not like the increases, but do seem to understand why the fees are needed. Routine OHV patrols are conducted to assess compliance and seldom find users that have not paid. This effort has paid off in regard to the public understanding what the fees are being used for,

and people are actually seeing the benefits as they visit. An increased presence in campground hosts appears to be valuable for the overall outdoor experience.

OHV users seem particularly pleased with better trails, well designed and maintained trailheads, better groomed trails, etc—all a result of fee dollars at work.

Chattahoochee/Oconee NF – Majority of OHV users are pleased to have the opportunity to purchase an annual pass, and not have to be “nickel and dime” each time they go out. Pass has been popular, with no negative comments received from either FS field staff or leadership on the Forest.

Ozark NF – Blanchard Springs Caverns wild cave tour fee increase. Based on reports from the Forest, there has not been one complaint about the price to participate in the wild cave tour. Numbers were down this past year, but it was due to the Forests’ lack of ability to provide adequate staff to accommodate visitor demand. The Forest continues to assess ways to provide adequate staff to meet public expectations.

PROJECT PROPOSALS

Daniel Boone National Forest

Proposal 1: Natural Arch Scenic Area & Alpine Picnic Area

New fee

1. Initiate a group day use rental fee at Natural Arch Scenic Area. The recommended fee per day for group use of the two shelters or one amphitheater is \$25 per day/per shelter/amphitheater. Rental of all three facilities would be \$75 per day.
2. Initiate a group day use rental fee at Alpine Picnic Area. The recommended fee per day for group use of the one shelter is \$25 per day.
3. If the shelter/amphitheater is not reserved, there is no fee charged and it is available for use as first-come, first-served.

Discussion Points

- The Committee asked for clarification regarding the location of the shelters and the fee requested.
- Estimated revenue seems low.

Sommerville made a motion to recommend. Terrell seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

National Forests in Florida

Proposal 2: Apalachicola National Forest OHV Trails

New fee

Initiate a new user fee at the Apalachicola National Forest OHV trails. The recommended fees are \$75 per operator per year, or \$25 for seven consecutive days, or \$10 for three consecutive days (\$5 for 15 years and under accompanied by parent or legal guardian).

Discussion Points

- The Committee discussed the validity of youth discounts.

Alexander made a motion to recommend. Wright seconded. Motion recommended.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 3 in favor, 1 opposed (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

LUNCH

George Washington & Jefferson National Forests

Proposal 3: Campgrounds (Development level #3) - Blowing Springs and Hidden Valley

Current Fee: \$6 per site

Increase camping fee at Hidden Valley and Blowing Springs Campgrounds on the Warm Springs Ranger District to \$10 per night.

Discussion Points

- The group discussed the qualities of Level 3 campgrounds.

Huskins made a motion to recommend. Alexander seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

Proposal 4: Campgrounds (Development level #4) - Brandywine, Hurricane, Todd Lake

Current Fee: Brandywine - \$13; Hurricane - \$14; Todd Lake - \$13

Increase family camping fees at these three development level 4 campgrounds to \$16 per site per night.

Discussion Points

- The group discussed the qualities of Level 4 campgrounds.

Masburn made a motion to recommend. Alexander seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

Proposal 5: Morris Hill Family Campground

Current Fee: \$10 per site

Increase the fee at this family campground in two stages for development scale 4 campgrounds. The proposal is to increase the fee to \$14 in 2008 and to \$16 in 2011.

Discussion Points

- 10 years since last fee increase
- The 2011 increase would be made after site improvements are made

Sommerville made a motion to recommend. Terrell seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

Proposal 6: Raccoon Branch Campground

Current Fee: \$12 per site with an additional \$4 fee for utility hookups

Increase the camping fee at Raccoon Branch Campground beginning April 1, 2008, to \$14 in 2008 and then to \$16 after a shower building is installed (estimated to be in 3-5 years).

Stein made a motion to recommend. Smith seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

Proposal 7: Sherando Lake Family Campground

Current Fee: \$15 for sites without hookups and \$20 with hookups

Increase the camping fee to \$20 per campsite and \$5 for utility hookups. This will change the fee structure so that the utility hookup fee is no longer imbedded with the camping fee, but is a separate fee.

Discussion Points

- Most popular family campground for the Forest: amenities include an entry station, campground host at each loop, ice delivery etc.
- Operations and Maintenance costs are shown for the campground; revenue is shown for the entire complex. It is extremely difficult to separate the camping revenue out.

Huskins made a motion to recommend. Mashburn seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

Proposal 8: Stony Fork Campground

Current Fee: \$12 per site with additional utility fees (\$6 for electric and \$10 for water and electric)

Increase family camping fee to \$16 and decrease the utility fee to \$4 for electric only and \$8 for water and electric.

Discussion Points

- Hookup fee seems disproportionate
- Only 12 of the 49 sites offer hookups
- Large senior citizen use

The Forest Service withdrew this proposal and will resubmit after additional review.

Proposals 9, 10, and 11:

Hussy Mountain Horse Camp

Current Fee: \$5 per vehicle per night

Increase overnight camping fee on April 1, 2008, to \$7 per vehicle per night.

Collins Cove Horse Camp

Current Fee: \$5 per vehicle per night

Increase overnight camping fee beginning April 1, 2008, to \$5 per vehicle per night.

Old Virginia Group Horse Camp

Current Fee: \$40 per night

Increase group camping fee to \$50 per night beginning April 1, 2008.

Discussion Points

- Sommerville read an email he had received from the Chair of the Virginia Horse Council supporting the fees.

- Alexander asked that the Forest Service look into providing another water source for the horses besides watering them in the creek (possibly partnering with the aforementioned horse organization).

Huskins made a motion to recommend all three proposals. Terrell seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

Proposal 12: South Pedlar ATV Trail System

Current Fee: \$5 per vehicle per day or an annual permit for \$30 per vehicle

The proposed fee is a 1-day permit for \$5 per operator, a 3-day permit for \$12 per operator, and an annual permit for \$30 per operator.

Discussion Points

- Will the fee apply to mountain bikes? Yes, it would.
- What is prohibited on the trail? Street legal off-highway vehicles, saddle, pack, and stock animals are not permitted.

The Forest Service withdrew this proposal and will resubmit after additional public involvement.

Proposal 13: Sunrise Cabin

Current Fee: \$70 per night or \$390 per week

Original proposal: Increase fee at the Sunrise Cabin to \$85 per night and to \$475 for a week-long rental. In 2011, increase the fee to \$100 per night or \$560 per week.

The Committee recommended the following proposal: Increase fee at the Sunrise Cabin to \$85 per night and to \$475 for a week-long rental. In 2009, after sharing information with the public, increase the fee to \$100 per night or \$560 per week.

Discussion Points

- Fee is too low for what the site has to offer; might be better to tear down.
- Is there a better use for the cabin i.e. volunteers, conservation education, etc

Stein made a motion to recommend. Huskins seconded. Motion recommended unanimously.

Voting Outcome:

Category 1: 4 in favor (1 member absent)

Category 2: All approved

Category 3: All approved

NEXT MEETING DATES Fall meeting will include a field trip: September 24-26. The Committee discussed the value of visiting Forest facilities in Florida, Arkansas, or Virginia. It was decided that Chatham will pursue holding the fall meeting at the George Washington/Jefferson NFs in Roanoke, Virginia. This will provide the Committee an opportunity to see some of the facilities where fee recommendations from them have been implemented and gain a better understanding of the various development levels at Forest Service recreational areas across the Southern Region.

COMMITTEE TERMS The term of service for members is either 2 years or 3 years. Current terms of service expire in February of 2009, requiring soliciting applications from both interested citizens and interested committee members whose two year terms expire. This process will be discussed in more detail at the September 2008 meeting. Current terms of service (number of years), which were determined at the first committee meeting in April 2007 are as follows

Alexander – 3 Paben – 3 Huskins - 3
Sommerville – 3 Morales - 2 Smith - 2
Stein – 2 Mashburn – 2 Wright -2
Terrell – 2
Fox – 2

COST RECOVERY Ann Christensen provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled: “Perspectives on Cost Recovery” which was followed by Committee discussion regarding how prices at recreation areas in the Southern Region are established and challenges associated with costs of doing business.

WRAP-UP

Notes will be sent to Paben, who will forward on for group to review.
Recommendations will go to Regional Forester for approval.

Stein made a motion to adjourn. Alexander seconded. Meeting adjourned at 5:45 pm.



I certify that each member of the Southern Region Recreation Resource Advisory Committee has been given an opportunity to review and comment on the February 2008 meeting notes; and I officially approve the above notes.

Brett Paben
Southern Region RRAC Chairperson

March 21, 2008
DATE