

News Release

CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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December 19, 2012

Decision Notice Signed for the Cedar Creek Falls Visitor Use Permit System

San Diego, Ca., December 19, 2012. Cleveland National Forest Supervisor Will Metz has signed the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Cedar Creek Falls Visitor Use Permit System. The decision stems from an Environmental Assessment conducted to study alternatives for managing visitor use and addressing natural resource damage concerns.

“Based on my evaluation of the alternatives and supporting documentation, I have selected Alternative 2, the proposed action, for implementation as this is the best, most balanced method available to us to restore public access to Cedar Creek Falls while addressing natural resource concerns,” said Metz. This selected alternative will establish a visitor use permit area in the immediate vicinity of Cedar Creek Falls. It will also permanently prohibit the possession and consumption of alcohol in the visitor use permit area, at the San Diego River Gorge and Saddleback Trailheads, and along the San Diego River Gorge Trail and Eagle Peak Road that lead to the falls. Additionally, the decision implements a permanent closure of cliffs immediately surrounding the falls to public entry, in effect prohibiting jumping and diving from the cliffs. The permit system and closures are scheduled to be implemented in early April of this year. Until the implementation, the existing closures of the San River Gorge Trailhead and the San Diego River Gorge Trail will remain in effect.

Cedar Creek Falls has long been a popular recreation destination in the Cleveland National Forest. Although members of the public have been visiting the falls for many decades, dramatic growth in visitation in recent years has resulted in a variety of issues, including medical emergencies and natural resource degradation. In addition to impacts on natural resources, high levels of public use have resulted in social issues related to parking and traffic congestion on County public roadways in the San Diego Country Estates (SDCE) neighborhood adjacent to the San Diego River Gorge Trailhead.

Under the visitor use permit system, a permit will only be required while recreating within the Cedar Creek Falls visitor use permit area, which is located in the immediate area around the falls. Other trail users including hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, and hunters who are not recreating within the visitor use permit area or visiting the falls will not be required to obtain a visitor use permit, but they are still allowed to use and park in the San Diego River Gorge Trailhead parking lot free-of-charge. It is important to note that the visitor use permit is a not a parking permit – limited parking space is available at the San Diego River Gorge Trailhead and is offered on a first-come, first served basis.

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Predicting the appropriate level of public visitation in the Cedar Creek Falls visitor use permit area requires the Forest Service to monitor the performance of the visitor use permit system. “I recognize the importance of providing a level of certainty and transparency as to how the Forest Service will operate this visitor use permit system,” said Metz. “Therefore, I’ve decided that the system will be governed by an adaptive management system that uses a series of three metrics to address natural and social resource issues.”

The metrics to be used under this adaptive management system are specifically related impacts to the public lands of the Cleveland National Forest. The metrics are: 1) litter left behind by area visitors, 2) wetland and riparian health, and 3) erosion resulting from the proliferation of user-created trails in the visitor use permit area. The Forest Service is not able to establish or use a metric that is not directly under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service, such as impacts to the surrounding privately owned lands.

“The designation and implementation of a visitor permit area is intended to reduce the number of daily visitors to a manageable quantity,” added Metz. “It is our intent to continue to provide for an outstanding outdoor recreational opportunity, while being proactive about caring for the natural resources on these public lands, and to assist the public in providing for their own health and safety.”

Initially seventy-five (75) visitor use permits for individuals and/or groups of up to five (5) people will be available each day by reservation. Permits to visit the falls will be reserved through the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS) website. Reserving a visitor use permit will require visitors to pay a \$6 administrative fee per permit for up to 5 people to NRRS. This administrative fee allows NRRS to operate and maintain the reservation system – these fees are not retained by the Forest Service. The on-line system provides flexibility to the public in that visitor use permits can be reserved 24-hours per day, 7-days a week. The rules and regulation of the permit system will be enforced by Forest Service law enforcement officers.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date that notice of this decision was published in *The San Diego Union-Tribune* which is Dec 18, 2012. An appeal to this decision must be received in the office of the Forest Service by February 2, 2013. For more information on this project, please visit this link: http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=37332

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