

Sequoia National Forest

Change in Recreation Fee Structure at Lake Isabella: Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork

Background

In June 2011, the Forest Service conducted a national review of the 97 standard amenity recreation fee areas on National Forest System lands. As a result of the review, the Forest Service plans to remove the fee area designation for 73 standard amenity recreation fee areas and reduce the boundaries for the remaining 24 standard amenity recreation fee areas across the nation.

Within the Sequoia National Forest, the national review resulted in a pro forma change in the designation of the Lake Isabella recreation area from a standard to an expanded amenity recreation fee area, and a proposal to reduce the size of the area and split it into three fee sites, at Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork. Based on direction regarding implementation of the national review, in June 2012, the Sequoia National Forest started issuing notices of required fees and enforcing recreation fees in the Lake Isabella recreation area consistent with the proposal while preparing to present it to the California Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (R-RAC).

Description of the Recreation Area

The 112-acre Lake Isabella recreation area follows Highway 178 between the Auxiliary Dam and South Fork recreation sites and extends to the shoreline of Lake Isabella. Thousands of visitors fish, sunbathe, camp, or picnic in the recreation area. Campers and day users can choose from designated campsites with tables and fire rings with grills or freestyle camping along the shoreline. The lake level fluctuates and the exposed beach area varies greatly with the season and amount of precipitation each year.

The recreation facilities at Lake Isabella are located within a two-hour drive of Los Angeles and are a popular weekend destination for visitors from Los Angeles County. This recreation destination is also within a one-hour drive of more than 800,000 people living in the surrounding communities of Bakersfield, Fresno, and Kern County. The Kern River Valley communities use the Lake Isabella recreation area as a regional or community park. On an average summer weekend, approximately 300 to 500 people and over 100 vehicles occupy the Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork recreation sites. On an average summer holiday weekend and during special events, use grows to 3,000 to 5,000 visitors with approximately 1,000 vehicles.

Lake Isabella Recreation Fee Proposal

The Sequoia National Forest is proposing to:

- Reduce the boundary of the Lake Isabella expanded amenity recreation fee area (see enclosed map); and
- Split the recreation area into three expanded amenity recreation fee sites, at Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork (see Table 1).

Table 1. Proposed Expanded Amenity Recreation Fee Sites

Site Name	Tent or Trailer Spaces	Picnic Tables	Drinking Water	Access Roads	Fee Collection by FS	Security	Trash Containers	Toilets	Campfire Devices
Auxiliary Dam	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Old Isabella	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
South Fork	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

The Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork recreation sites are accessed by paved roads from Highway 178. All three facilities have paved or graded roads, restrooms trash service, visitor information stations, and campsites above the high-water mark. Drinking water, flush toilets stoves and picnic tables are available within Auxiliary Dam and South Fork, Auxiliary Dam also offers showers. Below the high-water mark, visitors can drive their vehicles to the lakeshore and recreate. Portable toilets and trash receptacles are provided along the lakeshore below the high-water mark during the summer.

Fee Collection and Compliance

Visitors will see no increase in recreation fees as a result of this proposal. No change is being proposed to the amount of recreation fees charged or the method of collection at Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork. The fee payment mechanism will continue to be through recreation passes: the Southern Sierra Pass (\$10 per day, \$50 annually, and \$10 per second vehicle) or the America the Beautiful—the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands passes (Annual – \$80, Senior – \$10, Access, Military, and Volunteer – free).

The Forest Service’s Southern Sierra Pass may be purchased from Forest Service offices, local vendors, or online. The use of recreation passes as a fee payment mechanism will continue to support improved efficiencies in fee collection and compliance while providing the customer convenience visitors have come to expect. The Forest Service enforces recreation fees and issues notices of required fees at Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork. Compliance is verified by observing recreation passes displayed on vehicles parked within the three recreation sites.

Impacts Resulting from the Change

Financial

The financial impacts of the proposed changes are unknown at this time. It is anticipated that fee revenue will remain relatively stable or possibly decrease slightly.

Resources

The impacts of the proposed changes to natural resources are unknown at this time and will be carefully monitored.

Visitor Use

Visitor use pattern shifts have been observed during the past few months. Some visitors are driving down to the lakeshore, through the expanded amenity fee sites, and setting up just outside of the expanded amenity sites. Impacts to recreation facilities, sanitation, public health & safety, and resources are unknown at this time and will be monitored.

Planned Accomplishments

Fee revenue is used for operation and maintenance and facility improvements at Auxiliary Dam, Old Isabella, and South Fork. There are exceptionally high incidents of vandalism and graffiti at these sites, especially in the flush restroom facilities. The hot temperatures, excessive sun exposure, and high winds of the high desert environment decrease the life of facilities and are especially noticeable on signage and portable toilets. Law enforcement and visitor support services are important to ensure visitor safety, enforcement of rules and regulations, fee compliance, resource protection, and crowd control on weekends and holidays.

Public Involvement

Outreach

The Forest Service sought public comment on the proposed changes to the Lake Isabella recreation area prior to the planned August 29, 2013 California R-RAC meeting.

Public Involvement efforts completed:

- July 11, 2013 & August 8, 2013 - Distributed a press release regarding the proposal to the official publication of record, the Porterville Recorder, as well as many additional press outlets.
- July 16, 2013 - Provided information to Kern County Supervisor and Congressman McCarthy's offices.
- August 8, 2013 - Posted information on the proposal on the Sequoia National Forest website.

Public Comments Received (updated 8/19/13)

- July 16, 2013 e-mail question – Will folks need to purchase additional passes to visit the three fee areas? E-mail response sent 7/16/2013 clarifying that this proposal will not change current recreation fees or pass acceptance.
- July 24, 2013 article “Lake Isabella Recreation Access Fee Program Proposal” published in Kern Valley Sun – Chris Horgan reports on the scheduled RRAC meeting in Sacramento, California and suggests that the meeting should be held in Lake Isabella. The reporter also suggests that interagency passes should not be accepted at campgrounds.
- July 25, 2013 visitor comment – “Services at Lake Isabella have been unacceptable for 15 years”.
- E-mail comment – “oppose any day use fee around Lake Isabella”.
- July 30, 2013 web posting on Stewards of the Sequoia – Web posting comments on proposal, location of meeting in Sacramento rather than Lake Isabella, contention over fees, new fee program further reducing tourism, and acceptance of national interagency passes at campgrounds.
- August 2, 2013 letter to the editor voicing concern over higher campground fees while access to lake is closed.
- August 14, 2013 article “Locals scratching heads over location of R-RAC’s public hearing on Lake Isabella Recreation Fee Area proposal” published in Kern Valley Sun – Chris Horgan reports on R-RAC meeting location being Sacramento rather than Lake Isabella.
- August 15, 2013 e-mail – Does not feel there should be any day use fees around Isabella reservoir, or anywhere for that matter. The reservoir was built with taxpayer money. It is a bad time to do any type of reorganizing around Lake Isabella due to dam reconstruction.

The proposal will be presented to the California Recreation Resource Advisory Committee at the scheduled August 29, 2013 meeting.

R.33 E.

Lake Isabella

PROPOSED CHANGES LAKE ISABELLA RECREATION FEE AREA



USDA - Forest Service
Sequoia National Forest
Kern River Ranger District

T. 26 S.

South Fork
X, T, D, A, F, S, G, R, C

Old Isabella
X, A, F, S, G, R

Auxiliary Dam
X, T, D, A, F, S, G, R, C

To Bakersfield

Proposed Expanded Amenity Fee Sites

Proposed Fee Elimination

National Forest

Other Ownership



Amenity Legend

- X = Tent or Trailer Space
- T = Picnic Table
- D = Drinking Water
- A = Access Road
- F = Fee Collection
- S = Security Services
- G = Trash Receptacle
- R = Toilet Facility
- C = Campfire Device

06/11/13

0 0.25 0.5 Miles