



Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions about the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests' Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System for the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wildernesses.

Permit Requirements

When are permits required?

Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required from June 15 through October 15 every year. No permits are required before or after those dates.

Where are permits required?

Overnight Use

- Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required for all overnight stays in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.
- No Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required for overnight stays in the Waldo Lake and Diamond Peak Wilderness areas. Free self-issue permits are still required in these wilderness areas.

Day Use

- Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required for day use at 19 of 79 trailheads in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas (see maps). Free self-issue day use permits are required at the other 60 trailheads.

How to Get Permits

How do I get a permit?

All reservations for Central Cascades Wilderness Permits need to be made through Recreation.gov either online, via the Recreation.gov app, or by calling their call center at 1-877-444-6777 or TDD 877-833-6777. Search for "Central Cascades Wilderness." Permits are not available at Forest Service offices.

What is the cost?

There is a \$1.00 processing charge for day-use permits per individual and a \$6.00 processing charge for overnight-use permits per group. An overnight group can be from 1 to 12 people. Processing fees are non-refundable unless the area is closed by the Forest Service.

Permit Reservations and Permit Availability

When are overnight permits available?

About 40% of overnight permits are available for advance reservation on the first Tuesday in April every year at 7:00 am PDT. Once the permit season begins, the remaining 60% of overnight permits will be released on a 7-day rolling window throughout the permit season.

When are day-use permits available?

Day-use permits are only available on a rolling basis, on 10-day and 2-day rolling windows. About 40% of the permit quota at each trailhead becomes available 10 days prior to the day of the trip, and the remaining 60% is released 2 days prior.

Example: For the first day of the season, June 15, the first batch of permits (approximately 40% of the total at each trailhead) will be released on June 5 at 7:00 am PDT; the remaining permits will be released June 13 at 7:00 am PDT.

Is there a limit to the number of permits an individual can have?

People only can have three overnight permits reserved at any one time. People should only reserve permits they know they will use. Once the ending date of a permit has passed, an individual can make another overnight reservation.

The reason for a limit on the number of permits anyone can have at one time is to avoid individuals hoarding permits and permits going unused.

What is the cancellation policy for the Central Cascades Wilderness Permits?

If someone decides not to use their Central Cascades Wilderness Permit, we highly encourage them to cancel their permit to allow others the opportunity to reserve it and go on a trip. The processing charges for permits through Recreation.gov cannot be refunded unless the Forest Service has closed an area due to a wildfire or other public safety reason.

Day Use Permit Availability Alerts:

Recreation.gov recently added a new option to set “Availability Alerts” for day use permits. If the trailhead and day you were hoping to go hiking is already fully reserved, you can set an “Availability Alert” to notify you if permits come available through cancellations.

Changes to the overnight permit system in 2026:

Two rarely used access points were removed from the system, Dry Creek and Hortense in Mount Washington Wilderness, as a result of the 2025 Sisters Trails Additions and Realignment NEPA Project. Anyone still wanting to use these access points must get a permit from the nearest trailhead (PCT Trailhead at McKenzie Pass and PCT Trailhead at Big Lake).

How to Use Your Permit

Do I have to stay near the trailhead listed on my permit?

No, once you have entered the wilderness using the entry trailhead and on the starting date listed on your permit, you are free to travel anywhere within the wilderness. You may exit the wilderness from any trailhead.

When I make an overnight permit reservation, do I need to select where I’m camping each night?

No, this permit system is designed to allow freedom of travel once you’ve entered the wilderness. When making your reservation, you select your entry date and your entry trailhead. You are free to travel and camp beyond that area once in the wilderness and you are free to exit from a different trailhead.

Can I start a day use trip at a trailhead that doesn’t require permits and then hike into an area accessed by a trailhead that requires day use permits?

Yes, once you enter the wilderness, you are free to travel anywhere within the wilderness. If entering

from a trailhead that doesn't require the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit for day use, make sure you fill out the free, self-issue permit, available at the trailhead and carry it with you.

What if I do not use a trailhead to access Wilderness?

Visitors that don't use a trailhead to enter one of the wilderness areas still need to have a permit associated with the trailhead closest to their point of entry into the wilderness. For day-use this could be a permit from either a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit trailhead or a self-issued permit trailhead. For overnight use it must be a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit.

Avoiding entry from a trailhead does not eliminate the requirement of a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit if one is required.

Can I get an overnight permit for three days and just go in and out of the wilderness for day trips for three days?

No. An overnight permit is only valid to enter the wilderness on the entry day and entry trailhead that is on the permit.

Do I still need to pay a fee or show a Northwest Forest Pass or other recreation pass at some trailheads?

Yes, if a trailhead has a day use fee, the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit DOES NOT cover that requirement. Visitors will still need to pay the day use fee or display a Northwest Forest Pass or other recreation pass in their vehicle.

Permit Exceptions and Where Permits Are Not Required

What about wilderness areas that don't require a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit?

Where Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are not required, free, self-issue permits are required, as they have been for decades:

- Waldo Lake and Diamond Peak trailheads (overnight and day use).
- 60 of 79 trailheads for day use in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters wildernesses without trail quotas.

Are there exceptions to the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit requirement?

Yes, the following situations are exempted from getting a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit:

- Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) Long Distance permit, issued by the Pacific Crest Trail Association for long distance hikers and riders traveling more than 500 miles along the PCT.
 - Camping is restricted to the PCT Corridor and prohibited in certain high use areas.
 - More information for PCT long-distance travelers is available here: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/media/229213>
- Hunters with elk, deer, or mountain goat hunting tags from ODFW:
 - Elk, deer and mountain goat tags can be used in lieu of Wilderness permits (overnight and/or day) during the hunting season established by ODFW;
 - Entry is allowed one day prior to the start of the hunting tag and one day after;
 - Three additional support persons can accompany the licensed hunter, group size max of four per hunting tag;
 - Hunters must have their hunting implement with them, along with proof of their hunting

tag. The hunting tag is only valid in lieu of a CCWP permit within the hunting unit boundaries.

- Volunteers, while volunteering in coordination with the Forest Service

What about volunteers who contribute so much to improving these wilderness areas?

Volunteers working under an approved Forest Service volunteer agreement who contribute 40 hours of labor in support of wildernesses on the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests will get a volunteer pass, which will exempt them from needing to get a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit. All volunteer hours must be accounted for through the two forests' official volunteer programs. Program participation may be capped.

What if I don't get a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit? What is the fine?

We expect people to follow the rules of getting a permit to help maintain these special areas for everyone's enjoyment and use for the long-term. Just like you are expected to stop at a red light to protect everyone's safety without a police officer watching you, we expect you to get a permit whether anyone catches you or not without a permit. Your decision to not get a permit may lead to continuing impacts to these wildernesses and additional requirements to protect them for the future, which will affect all of us. Wilderness rangers can write violation notices to anyone in these wilderness areas without the appropriate permit. Fines for violations start at \$200 plus processing costs, but can go higher and require a court appearance, depending on the individual's behavior and history of past incidences.

For More Information

What if I have more questions? There are a few ways to reach out with additional questions:

- You can contact any Willamette or Deschutes National Forest office
- Visit the [permit information website](#)

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