

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



June 9, 2005

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Investing in America's Recreation Future

Missoula, MT - The Forest Service Northern Region has completed analysis for all of its recreation sites that have been operating under Fee Demo authority to determine whether they meet provisions of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) which became law last December.

“The Recreation Enhancement Act addresses both agency and public concerns that arose during the eight years we operated under the Fee Demonstration program,” Regional Forester Abigail Kimbell said. “I am pleased at how quickly recreation managers were able to review the legislation and analyze every fee site to determine if they meet the requirements of the Act. These changes will benefit our recreation visitors by offering a more consistent fee structure for sites and services offered by all federal agencies that manage public lands recreation activities across the nation.”

REA permits federal land management agencies to continue charging modest fees at campgrounds, rental cabins and other high-impact recreating areas on federal lands. Since the ACT was signed last December, Forest Service officials have developed agency guidelines to ensure consistent implementation of the Act for all national forests and grasslands. In April, all Forest Service units that charge recreation fees under the old Fee Demo program received the guidelines and were tasked with reviewing all current fee sites to determine whether they meet requirements as outlined under REA.

Nearly all Recreation Fee projects will continue in the Northern Region under REA. For example, camping fees and cabin rental fees will continue to be charged in order to provide services at those sites. The popular winter fee programs at Yellowstone Rendezvous and Lolo Pass will continue in order to provide quality groomed trails and plowed parking. Recreation garnet digging programs at Crystal and Emerald Creek will continue through the REA program. The only new fees approved in the Northern Region are for new cabins or lookouts added to the rental program (such as the newly restored historic Judith Station cabin), or adjustments to make fees consistent. Only fee structure changes have been made to meet the requirements of REA. For there will be no Standard Amenity Fee charged to youths under 16 at major destination interpretive centers and high impact recreation areas (such as Lake Como). The REA legislation also authorized the Forest Service to keep the Outfitting and Guiding Fees paid to the government on the Units where they are collected to be used for administration and recreation projects that benefit the public

The majority of revenues from fees will continue to be used for on-the-ground recreation benefits. However, fees are one part of a comprehensive recreation funding strategy that helps managers maintain all these sites and facilities for visitor enjoyment. Other funds come from congressionally designated funds, interagency cooperation, partnership, commercial operation, funds leveraged from other sources, and of critical importance, the 78,000 people who volunteer on National Forests each year.

A Forest Service survey shows that, nationally, 80 percent of people believe they received a good value for the amount they paid to use Forest Service day-use sites. The Recreation Enhancement Act ensures that the Forest Service will continue to improve visitor satisfaction. For example the Act requires public involvement whenever changes occur in the fee program. The Act also requires that the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management establish Recreation Resource Advisory Councils, which will provide recommendations for establishing new fees.

The Act also merges current nationwide interagency passes into one, which will be called the "America the Beautiful" pass. This pass is still under development so current interagency passes including the Golden Eagle, Age and Access Passports as well as the National Parks Pass will continue to be sold and honored.

To find out about fee changes in your area, contact your local forest. For more information about the program, visit www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/
A national news release on the program is available at:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/news/2005/releases.shtml>

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