WESTERN SLOPE NO-FEE COALITION

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April 14, 2009

To: The Colorado Recreation Resource Advisory Committee
Re: Comments on the BLM North Fruita Desert Campground Proposal

Please include these comments in the public record for your April 21, 2009 meeting.

The North Fruita Desert campground has sufficient amenities to meet the requirements for an Expanded Amenity fee. In general the WSNFC does not oppose charging Expanded Amenity fees where those requirements are met.

WSNFC member Dave Scherer made a site visit to this campground in early April 2009 and spoke to several of the visitors camped there at the time. His informal survey showed mixed opinions about a fee, with those who did not oppose one suggesting that the operating costs are probably not being met with appropriated funding. However, a review of the Non-Fee Revenue/Expenditure Worksheet submitted with this proposal shows that not to be the case.

Dave also found that even among those who did not oppose a fee, they almost all thought that $10 was too high. This is a primitive campground, and the users are not asking for that to change. If a fee were to be imposed, $5 would be more readily accepted than the current proposal of $10.

A review of the proposal documents also raised the following questions, which I hope the RecRAC will get answered before approving the plan.

1. In 2008 BLM operated the campground on a $21,000 appropriation (with a little change left over), and they project that to go to $22,000 in 2009 and $23,000 in 2010. (See Non-Fee Revenue/Expenditure Worksheet) So it appears that they can continue to operate the campground at the current level of services for the foreseeable future on appropriated funding alone, and users seem to be satisfied with that level. Why is a fee considered necessary?

2. There was $210,000 in appropriated funding spent for capital improvements in 2006-7, and there is no current deferred maintenance need. But the Fee Revenue/Expenditure Worksheet shows $2,800 per year in Deferred Maintenance expenditure, in the categories of Personnel and Vehicles. Deferred Maintenance normally applies to constructed facilities, not people or vehicles. It is also usually a one-time need, not an annual one. What does this $2,800 expenditure represent?

Also, why is toilet pumping shown as an annual maintenance expense only on the Fee Revenue worksheet? Don't the toilets get pumped now using the current appropriated funding?

3. BLM is projecting a one-time "flexible fund" allotment of $30,000 in 2009, which will be used to establish a host site. What will this host site include, considering that there is no drinking water or electrical service available on site? And won't it be difficult to recruit volunteer hosts unless hook-up services can be provided? This has proved to be the case in other places.

4. Has BLM considered asking the Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association to help organize a volunteer host presence during busy periods, as an alternative to trying to find hosts willing to stay all season under primitive conditions?

5. No trash service is provided, and none is proposed. Both the Mesa County and Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association letters of support cite trash service is one of the reasons for that support. Do they still support the proposal if no trash service is in place?

6. I can find no record in the Mesa County BOCC minutes from May or June 2008 of the briefings with BLM staff that the proposal says were done regarding both the North Fruita and Mud Springs campgrounds. When and where was that done?

7. The Fruita City Council passed their resolution of support (which is identical to the one passed by the Colorado Northwest RAC) for both BLM proposals on June 3, 2008. The minutes of that meeting show that the resolution was on the Consent Agenda. The minutes say: *"Mr. Robert Jones asked for clarification on item I regarding the Campgrounds. City Manager Clint Kinney stated that the Bureau of Land Management is asking for an increase of $5 in overnight camping fees to aid in the upkeep of the Campgrounds."* The councilors were not told that in the case of North Fruita, this is a new fee, nor that it is $10, not $5. The resolution states that the North Fruita campground costs about $21,000 per year to manage, but does not say that that expense has been adequately covered by appropriated funding in the past and is projected to continue to be covered at least through 2010. The Fruita City Council resolution appears to have been based on incomplete, inaccurate, and/or misleading information given to them by their City Manager and/or BLM.

8. Currently, BLM allows dispersed camping inside the campground during high-use periods like the Fat Tire Festival. Since nobody is paying, there's no reason for those whose campsites lack a picnic table or a fire ring to complain. But when there is a fee, BLM will either have to discontinue the dispersed camping (where will they go?) or deal with complaints that some people are getting more for their

camping fee than others. Have they considered how they will handle that situation?

9. Has BLM considered how they will handle the campers who are displaced from the North Fruita campground because they are unable/unwilling to pay the fee? Will free undeveloped camping be available to them in an appropriate location, or will this inevitable displacement result in resource damage, sanitation problems, and increased enforcement needs?

10. Since costs are currently being adequately covered by appropriations, and are projected to continue to be covered through 2010, why not install a deposit tube for voluntary donations and ask the users to contribute? This would bring in supplemental revenue without the controversy of imposing a new fee, and would allow time for the new administration in Washington to review and revise the policy of Full Cost Recovery that was implemented under the previous administration.

Thank you,
Kitty Benzar