

Proposed Recreation Fee Program Changes

USDA Forest Service -- Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

The Ely Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest proposes to change fees at two existing fee sites. At Bird Creek Group Picnic Area, fees are currently charged for group use of the area. Current group fees are \$35 to \$65, depending on group size; those fees would not change. The proposal would authorize overnight single family camping for \$8 per night at four of the individual picnic units within the area.

The proposal for the second fee site, White River Campground, would discontinue fees at the site and subsequently remove most or all of the facilities, thereby making the area a non-fee dispersed camping area.

Background Information

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest operates 11 campgrounds and 5 group picnic areas under the fee authority provided by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA). REA was passed in the 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (PL 108-447) signed into law by President Bush on December 8, 2004. The 10-year Act authorizes the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to establish, modify, charge and collect recreation fees at Federal recreation lands and waters as provided for in the Act.

Recreation Fees are not new to the Forest Service. Since the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act was passed in 1964, the Forest Service has had the authority to charge recreation fees for activities such as camping in developed campgrounds. For more information about REA, go to: <http://www.fs.fed.us/passespermits/about-rec-fees.shtml>

Proposal Details

Bird Creek Picnic Area

The proposal is to allow overnight camping at single family picnic sites A, B, D, and E. The proposed fee is \$8.00 per night per site. This fee would be the same as that charged at Timber Creek Campground, a nearby campground with similar amenities.

Bird Creek Recreation Site is located in the Schell Creek Range, northeast of Ely, Nevada. Legal description: T18N, R65E, Section 3, and T19N, R65 E Section 34. See attached map.

In 2005 the Timber Creek Campground water system was rebuilt. During the construction period, camping was not allowed in the campground. Overnight camping was directed to East Creek, Berry Creek, and was also allowed at Bird Creek Picnic Area. Since then, many visitors have expressed the desire that camping again be permitted at Bird Creek. Currently, overnight camping is not allowed; only day-use is permitted. As sites limited to day use only, the site is generally underutilized. Only group day-use fees have been authorized for Bird Creek under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement

Act (REA); this proposal seek the authorization to charge fees for single family camping at the four designated picnic sites.

White River Campground

This proposal would remove White River Campground from the Recreation Fee System; remove the outhouses, fee tube and garbage services from the area; and return the area to an undeveloped dispersed camping area.

The project is located in the White River area southwest of Ely, Nevada in the White River Recreation Area. Legal description: T13N, R59E, Section 33. See attached map.

In 2004, the White River Campground was incorporated into the Recreation Fee System in hopes of using fees generated at this site to help maintain critical amenities such as outhouses and garbage service. Since then, the revenues generated have been minimal and are not sufficient to reduce the growing backlog of deferred maintenance. As a result, facilities have degraded to a point that some form of action is needed.

Public Involvement

Consistent with the provisions of REA that mandate public involvement in the development of fee proposals, the Ely Ranger District has taken several steps to provide opportunities for comment on these proposals:

- Information explaining these proposals and inviting comment was posted at all developed recreation sites on the Ely Ranger District from June 5 through September 5, 2008.
- This information was also published once a month in the local Ely newspaper during that period.
- Information letters were sent to the congressional delegation.
- The proposals were presented to the White Pine County Commission and Public Land Use Advisory Committee.

The one response to this outreach for comments was a letter of support for both proposals from the County Commission and Public Land Use Advisory Committee.

These fee proposals are now scheduled to be presented to the Recreation Subcommittee of the three Nevada Resource Advisory Councils on November 12, 2008. The Northeastern Great Basin RAC will then make recommendations to the Forest Service regarding these proposals.

If you would like more information, please write or call:

Joshua T. Simpson, Natural Resources Specialist
Ely Ranger District
825 Avenue E
Ely, NV 89301
775-289-3031

To provide electronic comments, in rtf or doc: comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-ely@fs.fed.us