

Questions & Answers
Designation of Adventure Pass "Free Areas"
(Revised April 6, 2004)

Q1. I bought an annual Adventure Pass last month. I only use the pass when I'm recreating in an area that has just been designated as "Free." Can I get my money back?

Refunds will be issued for annual Adventure Passes on a pro-rated basis. The amount refunded will depend on the number of valid months left on the pass. For example, an annual pass with 6-months remaining would be refunded for 50% of face value. Annual Passes may still be used on the majority of the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forests.

Q2. How do I get my refund?

Persons who wish to request a refund should send their annual Adventure Pass and a written request to:

Fee Project Headquarters – Refund
San Bernardino National Forest
1824 So. Commercenter Circle
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3430

Refund requests must be received by no later than July 31, 2004. The letter should include the reason the refund is being requested and the address to which the check should be mailed. Refunds will be made by government check, and may take up to 60 days to process.

Q3. Can I get my refund from the vendor who sold me the pass?

No. Private vendors will not handle refunds. In order to issue you a check for the pro-rated balance, the refund must be processed at Fee Project Headquarters.

Q4. I purchased several daily passes for use in areas that are now "free." Can I get a refund on my daily passes?

Refunds are not available for Daily Passes. We are announcing the new free areas two months in advance so that visitors who use daily passes can plan their purchases accordingly.

Q5. Can I get a refund on my second vehicle pass?

No. A second vehicle pass is a companion to the Annual Adventure Pass and gives the holder the increased value of taking along a second vehicle (\$5 value), and recouping their cost on the first visit. With nearly two months advance notice of the new Free Areas, visitors have plenty of opportunities to make a visit to their local forest and recoup the value of their second vehicle pass.

Q6. I purchased a Golden Eagle Passport for use in an area that is now "free." Can I get a refund on my Golden Eagle Pass?

Refunds are not available for any Golden Passports. Because the Golden Eagle is a national passport servicing a variety of federal agencies, a large number of recreation opportunities are available where the passport may be used.

Q7. I have questions about whether I qualify for a refund. Who should I contact?

All refunds are handled by Fee Project Headquarters. All questions about refunds should be handled by them. Visitors may contact headquarters staff at (909) 382-2621 or 2622 with specific questions.

Q8. Does the free area designation change other fees in the area, such as campground fees or concessionaire fees at picnic areas and beaches?

No. Existing campground and concession fees for day use areas will remain in effect.

Q9. Why did the Forest Service create non-fee areas?

The Forest Service has a national plan for making the fee program more consistent. One element of that plan is Free Areas. The new "Free Areas," when combined with the 12 Free Days per year offer visitors many options for use of these forests.

Q10. What is the difference between the areas where the Adventure Pass is required and the new non-fee areas? They look the same.

Most non-fee areas have been selected because they currently are not heavily impacted by recreation use and fees are not needed to mitigate unacceptable visitor impacts. They are easily identified on the ground, to eliminate confusion by the public. Free areas are physically located away from heavily impacted sites so that designation as a free area will not result in the displacement of high impact use into the area. (Monterey District was selected for different reasons. See Q&A #11).

Q11. Why was the Monterey Ranger District selected?

The Monterey Ranger District was identified as a free area because complex land ownership patterns make it difficult for visitors to tell where the pass is required. Much of the recreation along the Monterey coast occurs off National Forest land, where the pass is not needed. Also, many visitors do not think of the Monterey Ranger District as part of the "national forests of southern California" because it is so far north. Communication with these visitors, who arrive primarily from the Monterey Peninsula and San Francisco Bay areas, is difficult, and many visitors remain unaware of the program. Designating the entire Ranger District as a free area eliminates visitor confusion and resolves a difficult management situation.

Q12. Why didn't you identify any Free Areas on the Angeles National Forest?

Areas selected as Free Areas are not currently impacted by heavy recreation use and don't, at this point, require the extra management attention made possible by Adventure Pass revenue. They are physically located away from heavily impacted sites so that designation as a free area will not cause displacement of high impact use into the area. The Angeles is nearly surrounded by high-density urban development, and experiences the most severe use impacts.

Q13. Why did you identify the San Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument?

The Monument was identified to ensure consistency with BLM, who manages portions of the monument and does not charge a fee.

Q14. Will additional free areas be designated? I don't live anywhere near the areas you have designated as free.

Not at this time. Visitors who are not able to take advantage of the new free areas can visit their national forest on any of 12 monthly free days. The free days allow visitors in even the most heavily impacted areas to enjoy their National Forest without paying a fee.

Q15. Will Adventure Pass revenues continue to be available to manage the impacts of public use in the new non-fee areas?

No. Fees must be used in the areas in which they are collected.

Q16. You have no free areas in those locations most heavily frequented by low income visitors? Why not?

Low income visitors generally visit the areas closest to the city, where use is heaviest. These areas are currently experiencing the impacts of extremely heavy use. They cannot be managed without the extra management attention made possible by Adventure Pass revenue.

Q17. Have there been any other changes to the Adventure Pass Program?

Yes, we have made several adjustments to the program in response to public input. For example, the forest service now accepts golden eagle/golden age/golden access passports, in lieu of the Adventure Pass. We also implemented the current policy of 12 free days per year as a result of public input. We are always looking for suggestions on how we can improve the program to serve you better while taking care of our natural resources.

Q18. How will I know the locations of fee and non-fee areas?

We will soon be posting updated signs in those areas where fees are no longer required. Maps will soon be available at all Forest service offices and at local vendors. The www.fsAdventurepass.org website is being updated with the new information and our Adventure Pass brochure is being revised to reflect the changes.

Q19. Was there public involvement in this decision to create "Free Areas"?

The decision to offer additional recreation opportunities for those who cannot afford a pass was a direct result of input collected by the Forest Service in the seven years the fee program has been operating. This input was assembled from a variety of sources including comments cards, professional surveys independently conducted by educational institutions, correspondence received from individuals and organizations, and through testimony given before congressional committees.

Q20. Who decided which areas would be free?

The Forest Supervisors on the four Southern California Forests determined which areas would be free.

Q21. How much revenue will the Forest Service lose as a result of establishing free areas?

We estimate we will lose approximately \$300,000, or no more than 10% of our Adventure Pass Revenue.

Q22. Who will pay the costs of managing the new “Free areas” if Adventure Pass funds are no longer available?

Management of Free Areas must be accomplished with appropriated dollars as well as with other resources such as volunteers and partners. Without Adventure Pass revenue, there will be fewer resources available to managers in these areas. Forest managers have the responsibility to set priorities and get work accomplished within the constraints of the budget.

Q23. Aren't visitors in other locations still being asked to unfairly subsidize the free areas? Won't you just divert your appropriated dollars to manage the “Free Areas” and withhold appropriated funds from those areas where visitors are required to pay the fee?

No. Appropriated dollars will be used to cover expenses shared by all recreation areas on the Forest. Other methods such as use of volunteers and partners may be available to help make up the shortfall if appropriated dollars are not sufficient to provide services in free areas.

Q24. Will you still charge fees at developed sites where the Adventure Pass is now accepted as payment?

Forests will review all developed sites on the 4 Forests to determine the level of service provided and the appropriate fee to be charged. This includes charging fees at developed sites within designated free areas. Fees may be adjusted at some sites (either up or down), may be continued at other sites, or may be eliminated where facilities and service are minimal.