

**Statement of
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**Before the
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives**

**On
H.R. 3283 - the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act**

May 6, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department's views on H.R. 3283, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. I am Tom Thompson, here representing the Department and Under Secretary, Mark Rey. The Department supports H.R. 3283 and wants to work with the Subcommittee and the bill sponsors on submissions of technical correction amendments to the bill.

While the idea of charging fees for recreational use on the national forests has been controversial in some cases, taxpayers generally benefit when the cost of public services are at least partially borne by the direct users of these services. Over the years, surveys conducted regarding recreation fees indicate that most people accept modest fees, especially when they know that the fees are returned to the site where they are collected to enhance their recreation experience. An example of some of these surveys is included in your packet.

Implementation of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program

In January 2004, the Forest Service started implementing the Blueprint for Forest Service Recreation Fees (Blueprint). The Blueprint was developed based on lessons learned in the first years of the program and establishes consistent national criteria for how the recreation fee program will be implemented. The Forest Service has removed over 400 sites that no longer charge a day-use fee under Fee Demo. Some examples of these sites are in my testimony.

H.R. 3283 - the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act

The Department supports H.R. 3283, which would establish a permanent recreation fee program for the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Specifically, H.R. 3283 provides nine provisions for permanent recreation fee authority.

The Department believes an essential aspect of a permanent recreation fee program is that the majority of fees are retained and spent at the site where they are collected to enhance resources, facilities, activities, services, and programs used by the visiting public. In implementing Fee Demo, wherever possible or appropriate, agencies have coordinated fees with private, local, State entities, gateway communities and each other to minimize overlapping costs and simplify fees for the visiting public.

Federal lands have provided Americans and visitors from around the world with special places for recreation, education, reflection and solace. The Forest Service has estimated that over 211 million annual visits occur on National Forests, a two-fold increase since the 1960s. This increase in visitation means an increase in visitor demand for adequate visitor facilities and services.

and just to make memories

Since the inception of Fee Demo in 1996, the Forest Service has shown it can manage a recreational fee program that provides numerous benefits to the American public. In 2003, the Agency generated \$38.8 million which has made a crucial difference in reducing the maintenance backlog, enhancing facilities, and improving visitor services and operations. In your packet is an example of how Fee Demo revenues help to maintain very popular OHV trails on the Wayne National Forest in Ohio.

Whether a person is visiting a day-use site like a trailhead, or recreating at a developed campground, visitors to public lands expect the same amenities, facilities, and services as those enjoying a national park. As Assistant Secretary Lynn Scarlett stated, examples of areas where the public does not differentiate between land management agencies, but expects the same amenities and use of the land in similar locations, is the red rocks areas in Nevada, Arizona, and Utah (depicted on the handouts in your packet). In all three areas, similar recreation opportunities exist within the various natural settings and opportunities.

Conclusion

The Department supports H.R. 3283 and we've learned a great deal from our experiences in administering Fee Demo over the past eight years. It is time to make the recreational fee program permanent. The Department is eager to work with the Subcommittee, the sponsors of H.R. 3283, the Department of the Interior, and our partners on clarifying amendments. This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.