

FOREST NEWS

The Newsletter of Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

Winter 2020



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Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics



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How social media is hurting
(and helping) our public lands.

Shady Dealings in Alaska

In 2001, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman approved a new federal regulation protecting wild and undeveloped areas of our national forests from new logging roads. Glickman emphasized that “allowing road construction and reconstruction on the Tongass National Forest to continue unabated would risk the loss of important roadless area values,” citing the “unique and sensitive ecological character” of America’s largest temperate rainforest.

Last year, Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy petitioned the Trump administration to exempt the Tongass from the nationwide 2001 rule. Dunleavy argued an exemption would “support a diverse and robust forest products sector in southeast Alaska.” In fact, most Tongass timber is exported to China as unprocessed logs, which doesn’t support milling or manufacturing jobs. And, even if it did, fisheries and recreation, which depend on Alaska’s remarkable old-growth forests, are far more important to Alaska’s economy.

It turns out that Gov. Dunleavy didn’t think Alaska could make a strong case for repealing the rule. So the governor asked the U.S. Forest Service for a \$2 million grant to find data that would support the state’s position. The Forest Service replied, “Sure, here’s \$2 million of firefighting

money for you to spend.” Alaska then passed through half-a-million dollars to the Alaska Forestry Association, the state’s leading timber lobbying group. Using your tax dollars, Alaska paid the lobby group to map Tongass forests that the timber industry wants to log.

Imagine if General Motors asked the EPA to loosen air quality rules and the EPA responded by giving GM \$2 million tax dollars to lobby for loosening the rule. That’s what’s going on here.

This shady enterprise was exposed by a reporter at Alaska Public Media who used the Freedom of Information Act to acquire budget documents that show this illicit money laundering. Kudos to the independent news media!

Congress should end this sorry chapter now by passing H.R. 2491, the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2019. This bill would put into law the 2001 roadless regulation, ensuring that no future White House can again threaten these national treasures.

Sincerely,



Andy Stahl

Inside

3 | Featured Forest

The Gila National Forest is remote and rugged, spanning a wide swath of southwest New Mexico.

4 | In Depth

With the advent of social media, the most popular spots on public lands are becoming even more popular.

7 | Briefly

Where does your wood come from? A boulder in Arizona. Huge Idaho logging project challenged in court.

8 | Dispatch

Dogs helping lizards. A move west for the BLM. Removing feral pigs in Kentucky. Managing forest planning.

11 | Inside FSEEE

A letter sent by FSEEE Executive Director Andy Stahl to Forest Service officials in November, regarding a proposal to charge fees for entering wilderness areas in Oregon.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/36/Gila_Natl_Forest_Nima1.JPG

Featured Forest

Gila National Forest

The Gila National Forest covers a significant chunk of southwest New Mexico. At about 3.3 million acres, it's one of our largest national forests.

There are three wilderness areas—the Blue Range, the Gila and the Aldo Leopold. The latter, of course, is named after the famed environmental pioneer who penned *A Sand County Almanac*. The Gila Wilderness, which was the first ever designated by the U.S. Congress, was established after determined lobbying by Leopold. The Gila's borders also include a national monument, which protects cliff dwellings that were occupied by the Mogollon people.

Remote and rugged, the Gila National Forest is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including bears, wolves and, yes, Gila monsters.

One more gem of the Gila—Cosmic Campground. It's the only recognized International Dark Sky Sanctuary in North America, meaning campers there can see the full firmament in its unsullied glory.



In Depth

Check Out My Selfie!

By Matt Rasmussen, Forest News Editor

Not long ago, Blue Pool, on Oregon's Willamette National Forest, was a hidden gem. Locals knew about it. A handful would traipse the two-mile trail leading there to enjoy lunch or a snack and admire the crystal-blue waters.

Then came the social media era. Visitors started taking selfies and posting about the majesty of Blue Pool on social media sites. Suddenly, the gravel parking would fill up each day. There was no space for overflow parking; cars would crowd the shoulders of Highway 126.

People started jumping off cliffs abutting the pond, the waters of which are consistently less than 40 degrees. There is no cellphone service, and the closest emergency services are nearly an

hour away. Two people have died there in the past few years.

Across the nation's public lands, the advent of social media has created an unexpected phenomena: Destinations like Blue Pool, once obscure, have been inundated by visitors who have learned about them through viral videos and posts. This has created a unique challenge for managers who used to spend their time on projects such as clearing fallen trees, replacing signs and making sure restrooms are clean.

At the same time, social media has helped open public lands to a diversity of users. Recreational use of national forests and parks has historically been dominated by affluent white people. If more minorities and

young people see the splendor of shared wild places, the argument goes, more political pressure can be brought to bear against powerful forces that want to exploit them for timber, minerals and oil.

Social media has also played a role in facilitating efforts to compensate for the chronic financial shortfalls of federal land management agencies. During the government shutdown of 2018, many posts included images of filthy restrooms and piles of trash in national parks. That sparked volunteer efforts to clean up those sites.

Still, the advent of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat have produced pileups at popular destinations across the nation. The impact of

social media on public lands is complex and evolving.

There's this, too: Geotagging.

When someone visits a beautiful spot on public lands, snaps a shot on their smartphone, then adds a hashtag and posts it, anyone on the planet can find the precise coordinates. There's no need to tell friends and relatives about the place; the whole world can find it.

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At Blue Pool, the Forest Service is moving ahead with plans to pave the access road and increase parking, mainly as a way to provide emergency personnel with better access to the site.

"Broken limbs, injured pelvis—I've seen chest injuries; we've had two fatalities," said Tim Chase, director of the county office charged with responding to such reports. "Having the ability to park in nearer spots and having good access is critical to make contact with a patient."

That, of course, presents a dilemma. Improving infrastructure helps emergency personnel respond to incidents more quickly, but it also allows even more visitors to access the site.

In Colorado, the crowds at Conundrum Hot Springs grew so dense that White River National Forest officials instituted a quota system. The springs, nestled in a dramatic Rocky Mountain valley in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area near Aspen, had been inundated with visitors and

despoiled with human feces and trash.

Also on the White River National Forest, Hanging Lake, sublime and fed by waterfall, attracted 184,000 visitors in 2017. During peak season, the trail leading to the lake counted more than 1,000 visitors each day. A new Forest Service policy limiting that to a maximum of 615 hikers each day has been hailed as a success.

In Wyoming, hikers have carved a "social trail" leading to Delta Lake, which offers a stunning vantage of the Grand Tetons but can't be accessed by a maintained trail.

Posts of places like these have prompted many to seek them out who don't necessarily have skills

in backcountry travel. This has led to several medical incidents, many requiring the resources of search-and-rescue crews and even claiming lives.

In Arkansas, a 20-year-old college student died after falling off Hawksbill Crag on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest last summer. At Delta Lake, Colorado, crews had to respond to two incidents just in July. A 14-year-old girl sprained

her ankle and was carried out by a ranger. Another young person broke a leg and had to be airlifted out by helicopter.

"Delta Lake, it's eating people up," said a ranger with the White River National Forest.

•••

Sharing special occasions and events is natural human nature. When something wonderful happens, when any of us visit a special place, it's our first instinct to share it with friends and relatives. That's completely understandable.

Social media, however, allows interactions that used to be conducted in living rooms and over dining tables to be

Help your friends and family fall in love with public lands—invite them on an adventure with you and show them someplace new. While you're at it, teach them how to be good stewards of Mother Nature and to leave no trace when exploring.

instantly conveyed to the world at large. That, of course, has produced great benefits but has led to challenges far and wide. For public lands, it has led to overcrowded trails, filthy campsites and litter-strewn parking lots.

There is no law that forbids anyone from taking pictures depicting the grandness of our public lands. There's no law that prevents them from sharing

Social Media Tips

The U.S. Department of Interior offers a blog post with tips for the proper use of social media on public lands. The post, which can be found at <https://www.doi.gov/blog/7-tips-using-social-media-public-lands>, offers seven tips:

- 1) Follow the rules for your safety. Ignoring those rules by trying to capture the perfect image can bring fines, but also can (and has) led to serious injuries and deaths.**
- 2) Keep wildlife wild. That means keeping a safe, and responsible, distance from wild animals. Animals should not be approached or pursued for the sake of capturing an ideal image, or a selfie.**
- 3) Stay on the trail. That includes obeying signs with information designed to protect fragile plants and soils.**
- 4) Only take photos. Resist the temptation to pocket that beautiful rock.**
- 5) Plan for the unexpected. Dress for inclement weather, bring plenty of food and water, and understand that cell service may not be available.**
- 6) Share the views. Make sure you leave plenty of room for others to get that wonderful shot.**
- 7) Spread the love of public lands. They are, after all, public—there for the enjoyment of everyone.**

those images far and wide.

What could possibly be the harm in sharing posts about a favorite swimming hole an hour out of town? Believe it or not, it turns out that when hundreds of humans spend time treading water in a contained pool, the water chemistry changes. The skin oil permeates the water, killing native aquatic flora.

Public agencies are beginning to take notice. The Department of Interior recently posted a page on its website about guidelines for using social media on public lands. It includes tips such as “Follow the rules for your safety” and “Keep wildlife wild” and “Stay on the trail.”

The final bullet point says this:

“Help your friends and family fall in love with public lands—invite them on an adventure with you and show them someplace new. While you’re at it, teach them how to be good stewards of Mother Nature and to leave no trace when exploring.”

There in a nutshell lies the complexity of public land management in the age of social media.

Those platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat—are changing our world. Americans have a president who pretty much communicates in a maximum of 280 characters at a time. Public land management is not exempt from the impacts.

To go back to Wyoming.

Christina Adele is a talented photographer who loves the Grand Tetons. She tends a website and a blog. She helps tend the social media efforts for Grand Teton National Park. Her favorite spot on Earth is a place called Schwabacher Landing, a lakeside oasis offering stunning views of the Tetons.

Recently, she wrote that it “broke my heart when I saw a photo with over 10,000 likes on Instagram of a person camping, with a fire, right there at water’s edge of my favorite place.”

She goes on:

“Again, my heart was broken when I saw someone advertising a knife company who sponsors them with a photo of a carving they had done on a tree in the park with the knife in the foreground and the Tetons in the background. I visited said knife company’s Instagram page and sure enough they had shared the photo to their thousands of followers, which only continued to promote the idea that not only is such behavior acceptable, it’s encouraged.”

I love being outdoors. I love to hike, I love to go backpacking with my two sons. As a resident of Eugene, Oregon, I know the Willamette National Forest quite well.

Part of me is happy that the hordes—most of them young—all congregate at Blue Pool, pulled there by all those selfies. That leaves the other wonderful places pretty much alone. But a reckoning has to occur. Is that the future of our public lands? Should they be relegated to the amusement-park model of featured attractions?

Study: Many Wood Products Come from Illegal Logging

Much of the wood imported into the United States is mislabeled, according to a recent study, and the implication is that much of it came from illegal logging operations.

The study, conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, the World Wildlife Fund and the World Resources Institute, found that nearly two out of three tested wood products carried fraudulent claims about their content.

Researchers used forensic techniques to examine 73 wood-based products available to American consumers. They determined that 45 of those products were mislabeled.

The implication is that many wood products sold by major retailers are at least in part composed of content garnered from illegal logging operations. Illegally harvested wood

can be mixed with other wood in an attempt to hide the misdeeds.

Across the globe, illegal logging decimates ecosystems, harming wildlife and sully the water, air and quality of life for local residents.

The study's authors said more resources should be devoted to examine the country's wood imports. "We call for increased training in forensic wood anatomy and its broader application in forest products supply chains to eliminate fraud and combat illegal logging," the researchers wrote.



An Arizona Boulder Mystery

Locals drive past it all the time, a striking quartz-streaked one-ton boulder that sits just off Route 89, in the Prescott National Forest. It's known as Wizard Rock.

One day, this fall, it was gone.

An outcry ensued. The Forest Service issued news releases urging its return. "It's unfortunate when we lose a treasure such as the Wizard Rock," said Sarah Clawson, district ranger for the Bradshaw Ranger District. "Our hope is that it will be returned to us, and these recent recurring events will become an educational opportunity."

Two other boulders have gone missing

from the national forest this year, presumably by people using heavy equipment.

And then, sometime on Halloween night, the boulder was back.

Jason Williams, who's in charge of trails and wilderness areas on the Prescott, posited to the New York Times that the Wizard Rock's return was perhaps "magical."

"We just appreciate that somebody saw the value it had to the community and decided to return it," Williams said.



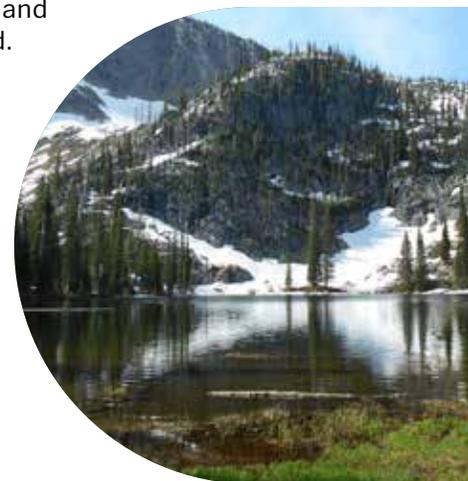
Huge Idaho Logging Project Challenged in Court

Conservationists filed a lawsuit this fall challenging a massive logging project on the Payette National Forest. Payette officials gave the go-ahead for the "Lost Creek-Boulder Creek Landscape Restoration Project," which covers 125 square miles, even after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected it last year.

Forest Service officials added wording to an environmental impact statement that was rejected by the court, and then announced work could ensue immediately. The group Alliance for the Wild Rockies promptly sued, alleging the

Forest Service was essentially overturning the court order.

Payette National Forest Acting Supervisor Tawnya Brummett disagreed, saying the project is "about getting our landscapes back to a more resilient place, protecting threatened species, restoring watersheds, improving recreation access and experience, and supporting our local communities."



Dogs and Lizards

We all know this about dogs—they're serious sniffers. Now, biologists are putting that olfactory prowess to work to help save an endangered lizard in California.

Blunt-nosed leopard lizards used to be common in the San Joaquin Valley. But their populations have plummeted due to habitat disruption and they're now listed as endangered. They're strong little fellows—able to leap about two feet to gobble up prey.

Discerning the location of the rare reptiles is one of the main priorities for wildlife managers. The traditional way of doing that is by trying to find them by sight or by locating their scat. Both methods are problematic—the first carries the risk of adding stress for creatures already under duress. The second is difficult, because the lizards' poop resembles that of many other species and it's hard to find.

Enter the clever canines. Researchers trained three dogs—a German shepherd and two border collies—to recognize the scent of blunt-nosed lizard scat. They roam the arid landscape and lie down when they detect a deposit that carries the correct scent. Scientists are then able to gather the scat, document its location and examine its DNA.

Dogs have already been used to detect a whole range of species, from mink to wolves and cougars.



Researchers hope to add a variety of other reptiles to the list.

The results of the efforts are detailed in a study released last week in *The Journal of Wildlife Management*.

“So many reptilian species have been hit so hard,” Mark Statham, the study’s lead author and associate researcher with the Mammalian Ecology and Conservation Unit of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, told CNN. “A large proportion of them are endangered or threatened. This is a really valuable way for people to be able to survey them.”

BLM Moves West

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which manages more land than any other federal agency, will move its headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado, by the end of next year. The headquarters will be housed in a building that also counts Chevron and other energy companies as tenants.

The Trump Administration contends that it makes sense to move the agency’s leadership, and

much of its staff, westward. The BLM manages nearly 250 million acres of public lands, the vast majority of which is west of the Mississippi.

William Perry Pendley, the BLM’s acting director, says the move will better connect the agency with the people it serves.

“We have not been able to fill many of the positions we have in Washington simply because the people that we need—whether they’re recreational

experts or they're oil and gas people or mining people or ranchers or land use specialists or renewable energy types—they want to live out West,” Pendley said. “They want to make use of the public lands out West. They don't want to go to Washington and have an hour-and-a-half commute one way.”

Others have different views. BLM employees have said they will leave the agency rather than

uproot their families. Several employees have already left the agency.

Employees who spoke to a reporter from the publication *Government Executive* on condition of anonymity said that the move is causing distress among BLM employees. “All lamented plummeting morale, a mistrust of leadership and a growing fear their work is, in reality, being removed rather than simply moved,” according to the report.

Removing Pigs

State and federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, are planning operations this winter to rid feral hogs from Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area.

Officials have approved plans to use helicopters to chase down the hogs and shoot them. They will also set out traps in an effort to stem the alarming increase in the number of hogs in the area, which spans 170,000 acres between Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake.

The hogs, which reproduce at a rapid rate, have become increasingly troublesome, damaging the area's native habitat. The Forest Service, which has jurisdiction over the area, has worked with other agencies to eradicate the animals, but their numbers continue to grow.

In the winter of 2018, 70 hogs were trapped and euthanized. Last winter, that number grew to 124. Hogs can produce two litters each year, typically producing five to ten piglets. Those offspring can give birth to a new generation in less than a year.

Officials say some of the hogs may have been released by hunting enthusiasts. That's illegal, as is



hunting hogs in Land Between the Lakes.

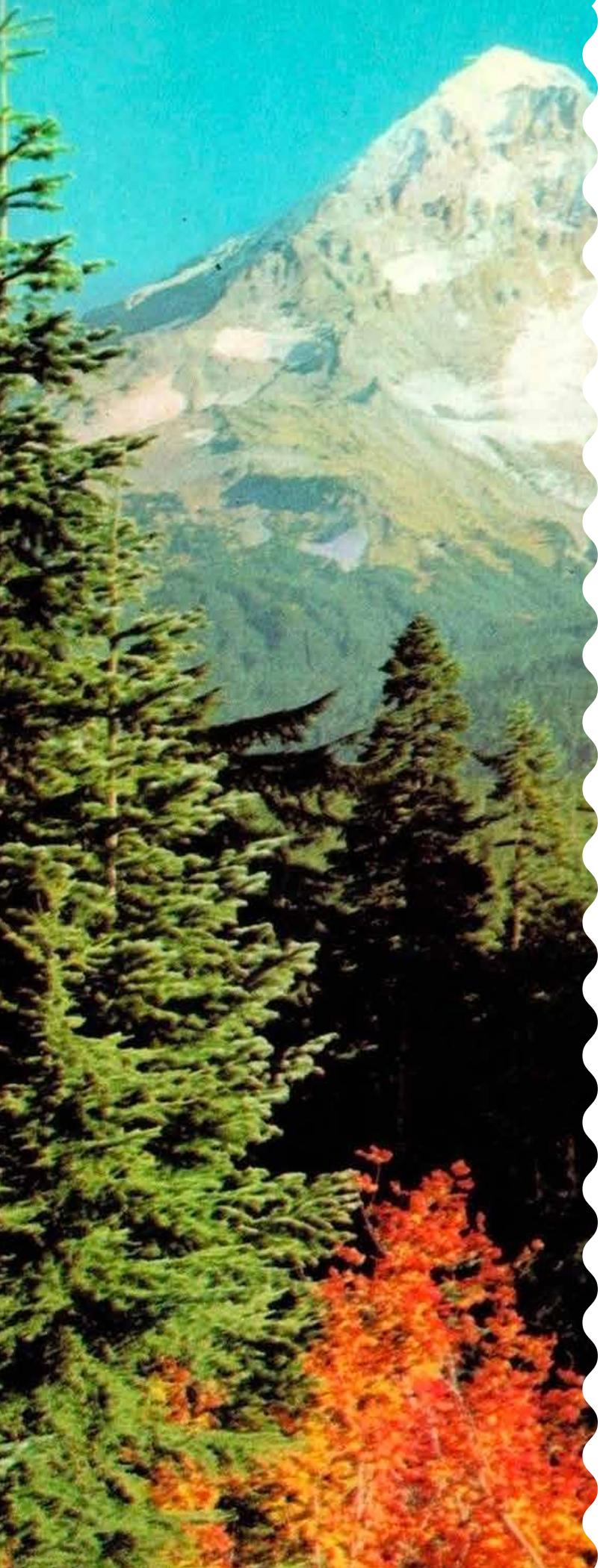
“We will let nature take its course with the carcasses,” said Brad Robins, who works for the Department of Wildlife Services. “Many times, the animals are killed in areas that make it almost impossible to find them once on the ground.”

Locals Gain Clout in Forest Planning

There's a federal statute that the Forest Service often ignores. The National Forest Management Act, signed into law in 1976, requires the agency to update management plans for national forests every 10 or 15 years. Yet forest plan revisions are often mired in controversy,

dragging on well past that timeframe.

The management plans are designed to provide long-term guidance about priorities for the nation's 154 national forests. Which areas should be protected for recreation and wildlife? Which areas should be open to logging and mining? The idea



is to give decision-makers and the public general guidance when on-the-ground decisions must be made.

The 1976 law is quite clear. It states that national forest management plans must “be revised from time to time when the (Secretary of Agriculture) finds conditions in a unit have significantly changed, but at least every fifteen years.”

But the planning process often becomes mired in controversy. As an example, consider the Blue Mountains, which span the boundaries of Washington, Oregon and Idaho. There are three national forests in the Blues—the Wallowa-Whitman, the Malheur and the Umatilla.

The management plans that currently govern those national forests were adopted in 1990.

All three national forests are working together in an attempt to adopt new management plans. But they keep running into roadblocks, mainly from local politicians and citizens who take umbrage at the proposed provisions.

Draft versions of the plans were released in 2014. The Forest Service withdrew those after receiving intense criticism. Last March, Glenn Casamassa, who oversees all national forests in the Pacific Northwest, withdrew the latest proposed plans. Now, the Forest Service is agreeing to give locals more input in deciding how the three forests are managed. A “Blues Intergovernmental Council” has been formed, which includes county commissioners as well as Forest Service managers.

Eric Watrud, who oversees the Umatilla National Forest, said the initiative is designed to give local officials and residents more say over how the forests are managed.

“We have the responsibility of stewarding the management of these three national forests, which are a national and local treasure,” Watrud said. “And so there’s a tremendous amount of interest, and our intent is to make sure that we’re incorporating that feedback, incorporating those ideas and local suggestions in order to make sure that we accomplish that goal.”

Inside FSEEE

Below is a letter sent by FSEEE Executive Director Andy Stahl to Forest Service officials in November, regarding a proposal to charge fees for entering wilderness areas in Oregon. In addition to the merits of the argument, it's an example of how carefully we watchdog Forest Service actions, and how important it is to understand the intricacies of pertaining laws.

To Whom it May Concern,

The Forest Service can regulate recreational use of wilderness areas, for example, by imposing quotas on the number of wilderness use permits it issues.

But its general authority to regulate wilderness use (found in the 1897 Organic Act and 1964 Wilderness Act) is distinct from its authority to charge a fee for that use (found in the 2004 Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act).

The FS claims that FLREA's "special recreation permit fee" authorizes fees for hiking, backpacking, and camping in wilderness areas. I don't agree. Here's what FLREA says:

"The Secretary may issue a special recreation permit, and charge a special recreation permit fee in connection with the issuance of the permit, for specialized recreation uses of Federal recreational lands and waters, such as group activities, recreation events, motorized recreational vehicle use." 16 USC 1602(h).

Thus, the permit and fee are intended for "specialized recreation uses," such as "group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicle use." Hiking, camping, and backpacking are not "specialized" recreation uses. They are regular, vanilla-flavored, standard uses. Nor does hiking in a wilderness area make hiking a "specialized" recreational use. In other words, it's the nature of the recreation, not where it is located, that determines whether the recreational use is "special."

In sum, Congress has authorized fees for standard recreational uses (e.g., hiking) in certain places (National Conservation Areas and Volcanic Monuments), and where the FS has provided certain

amenities (e.g., parking, toilets, trash bin, picnic table). Congress has also authorized fees for use of certain "facilities and services," e.g., boat launches, cabin rentals, and sewer hook-ups. Finally, Congress has authorized fees for group activities, recreation events, motorized recreational vehicles, and other "special" recreational uses.

What Congress has not authorized is fees for standard, i.e. not "special," recreational use in wilderness areas. Wilderness areas do not meet the location criteria for standard amenity fees nor the amenity criteria for expanded recreation fees. In fact, most recreational use of wilderness (e.g., walking, backpacking, camping) falls squarely within Congress' express prohibition against fees. In other words, wilderness hiking is "general access" in areas with "low or no investment," undertaken by "persons" who are "hiking through Federal recreational lands and waters without using the facilities and services" or "camping at undeveloped sites." 16 USC 6802(d).

I encourage you to use your existing legal authorities to ensure wilderness areas are managed consistent with the Wilderness Act without resorting to extra-legal fees.

Sincerely,



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