



## Bitterroot National Forest

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# News Release

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## **Bitterroot National Forest Announces Recreation Fee Changes and adding Lost Horse Guard Station to Rental Program**

*Fees obtained are reinvested locally to maintain and improve recreation sites*

Hamilton, Montana (February 24, 2021) – The Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) is moving forward with implementing fee changes for developed recreation sites as recommended by the Ravalli County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) and as approved by the Regional Forester. Fees collected at these sites are retained by the BNF and provide critical support for maintaining high-quality recreation experiences and funding maintenance and improvements of developed recreation facilities and trails.

The changes are part of a Region-wide effort by the Forest Service to better align prices with the services and amenities provided to visitors at popular recreation sites. Reasonable fees, paid by users of these sites and services, will help ensure that the forest can continue maintaining and improving sites for future generations.

Implementation of these changes is the result of over three years of public engagement that included a public comment opportunity in 2017 and meetings with the Ravalli County RAC, which unanimously recommended the fee increases a few months ago.

The changes to campgrounds with existing fees will take effect for the 2021 summer season. Fees at new sites will not be implemented until 2022. Changes to online reservations (cabin rentals, campsites, group sites) will take place as soon as possible and in coordination with the online reservation system [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). All reservations made prior to the fee change will still be honored at the previous rates.

“We recognize the important role that recreation and the use of these sites play in our communities and with those who visit the Bitterroot National Forest,” stated Matt Anderson, Forest Supervisor. “The new fees will allow continued investment in these sites to ensure the public’s use and enjoyment into the future.”

Approximately 95% of all fees collected at recreation sites, campgrounds, and cabin rentals stay on the forest and are used to operate, maintain, and improve local recreation sites. The BNF has not raised its fees in nearly 20 years and currently has \$780,000 in deferred maintenance needs at campgrounds and cabin rentals where fees will increase this summer. To see a table of the new fees please visit [www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot](http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot).

“While the number of people visiting our National Forest is increasing annually, our budget is not,” said Anderson. “We completed a cost analysis of all our campgrounds and cabin fees and found them to be extremely low, in some cases about half of what others with similar amenities are charging. Our goal is to provide a wide spectrum of recreation opportunities across the forest, with fee and non-fee sites. Fee increases at certain sites will allow us to invest in the safety and maintenance that is appropriate for the high levels of use that the forest is experiencing.”

The new changes also include adding the historic Lost Horse Guard Station, built in 1935 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, to the forest’s popular recreation rental program. The cabin is located on the Darby Ranger District near Lost Horse Creek and the scenic Schumaker Campground and Twin Lakes. The cabin will undergo some renovations this summer and will likely be available to rent beginning in 2022. The Three Sisters Group Site at Lake Como will also be available for rent through [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) sometime this spring.

Many forest campgrounds, along with trails and recreation sites are still free to the public and do not require any fees. Fee sites are normally high use, developed areas with more amenities provided that require daily maintenance, cleaning, and upkeep. The vast majority of recreation opportunities and sites across the forest will remain free to the public.

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