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Sent: Thursday, October 19, 2017 10:30 AM
Subject: News Release: Forest Seeks Comments on Recreation Fee Proposal
Attachments: Rec Fee Proposal.docx; BitterrootNF_Campground1.jpg; Campground2.jpg

Forest Seeks Comments on Recreation Fee Proposal

Hamilton, Montana (October 19, 2017) – The Bitterroot National Forest is inviting the public to review and make comments on proposed changes to its recreation fees at campgrounds and cabin rentals. The proposal would increase fees at 14 campgrounds and three cabin rentals, and also implement new fees at two campgrounds and one rental cabin.

The proposal would also enable the historic Lost Horse Guard Station, built in 1935 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, to be available for public rental, adding to the Forest's popular recreation rental program.

As part of a Region-wide effort, these fee changes are being proposed to support the Forest's ability to continue providing high levels of services to visitors at popular recreation sites. The Forest recently has invested in numerous improvements including a new drinking water system at Lake Como, increased capacity and amenities at group sites and shelters, improved toilet facilities, and new picnic tables and other infrastructure.

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. Many existing campgrounds and cabin/lookout rentals on the Bitterroot NF are not being proposed for a fee increase or new fees, at this time.

The proposal would also help achieve more consistent pricing for sites with similar levels of amenities and capacity and also provide high-quality recreation experiences. For instance, campgrounds featuring services such as water, garbage, and on-site hosts are proposed at \$15 per night – which is in line with the current market.

Sites with fewer amenities are being proposed at \$10 or \$12 per night. The same pricing strategy is being applied to cabin rentals.

Approximately 95% of all fees collected on the Bitterroot National Forest at recreation sites, campgrounds, and cabin rentals stay on the Forest and are used to operate, maintain, and improve local sites.

Specifically, the Forest is proposing the following new fees:

- Lost Horse Guard Station, Darby/Sula Ranger District; proposed at \$50 per night. Advance reservations for this site will be available through www.recreation.gov
- Slate Creek and Sam Billings Memorial Campgrounds, West Fork Ranger District; proposed fee of \$10 per night with an additional \$5 extra vehicle fee per night for more than two vehicles.

The following sites are being proposed for *fee increases*, listed by Ranger District:

Stevensville Ranger District:

- Charles Waters Campground – fee increase from \$10 to \$15 per night, and increase extra vehicle fee of \$3 to \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.
- Larry Creek Group Site – fee increase from \$30 to \$75 per night. Site capacity: 75 people and 10 vehicles, including RVs. Site includes picnic shelter, tables, large campfire circle, grills, toilets, and drinking water.

West Fork Ranger District:

- Alta Campground – fee increase from \$8 to \$15 per night and extra vehicle fee of \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.
- Fales Flat Group Site – fee increase from \$15 to \$30 per night.
- Magruder Ranger’s House cabin rental – fee increase from \$50 to \$100 per night. Two-story, five room log cabin built in the 1930’s and currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places sleeps up to 10 people. It’s located on the Selway River between Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church Wilderness. Rental includes wood furnace for heat, propane kitchen appliances, propane lights. Propane and firewood is provided.
- Rombo Campground – fee increase from \$8 to \$15 per night and extra vehicle fee of \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.

Darby/Sula Ranger District:

- Three Sisters Group Site (Lake Como) – fee increase from \$25 to \$75 per night. The proposal changes the current fee structure of \$25/minimum, plus \$5 per vehicle over 5 vehicles to a flat fee. Site capacity: 75 people and 20 vehicles. Site includes large pavilion, picnic tables, large BBQ grill, campfire rings, toilets, and drinking water.
- Lake Como Campground – fee increase from \$16 to \$25 per night; while removing the \$5 utility hook-up fee that is currently included in all sites.
- Rock Creek Horse Camp – fee increase from \$8 to \$12 per night.

- Three Frogs Campground – fee increase from \$8 to \$12 per night for a single site, and \$25 per night for a double site.
- Woods Cabin – fee increase from \$60 to \$100 per night during the peak season. Overnight fees of \$60 during off-season due to lack of potable water and garbage services. Cabin sleeps up to 15 people and is located on the north shore of Lake Como with large deck and windows offering excellent views of the lake and nearby scenic mountain peaks. Built in 1928 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places the cabin has propane lamps, two wood stoves, wood shed w/firewood, vault toilet, kitchen, dining room, large living room.
- Crazy Creek Campground – fee increase from \$8 to \$12 per night and increase extra vehicle fee from \$3 to \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.
- East Fork Guard Station – fee increase from \$30 to \$50 per night. Rustic cabin on the East Fork of the Bitterroot River sleeps up to 8 with two bunk beds, propane range, electric lights, and wood stove. Firewood is provided. RV and tent camping allowed on site that also features a new, beautiful log pavilion and picnic tables. Site has a 35 person limit.
- Indian Trees Campground – fee increase from \$10 to \$15 per night and increase extra vehicle fee from \$3 to \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.
- Martin Creek Campground – fee increase from \$8 to \$12 per night and increase extra vehicle fee from \$3 to \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.
- Spring Gulch Campground - fee increase from \$12 to \$15 per night and increase extra vehicle fee from \$3 to \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.
- Warm Springs Campground - fee increase from \$8 to \$12 per night and increase extra vehicle fee from \$3 to \$5 per night for more than two vehicles.

In 2004, Congress passed the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act which allows the Forest Service to retain fees collected at certain recreation sites and use these funds locally to operate, maintain and improve these sites. An analysis of surrounding recreation sites with similar amenities indicates that the proposed fees are comparable and reasonable. Once public involvement is complete, this proposal and public comments will be presented to the Western Montana BLM Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) prior to a final decision and implementation. The earliest that these new fees would be implemented is May 2018.

Submit comments about this proposal by November 20, 2017. For more information, questions, or to provide comments about any of these fee changes, please visit www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r1recfee or contact Erica Strayer at (406) 821-4252. You can also mail comments to: Erica Strayer, Bitterroot National Forest, P.O. Box 388, Darby, MT 59829 or email comments to r1recfees@fs.fed.us.

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