



FOREST NEWS

The Newsletter of Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

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One Trillion Trees

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PROTECTING FORESTS AND PREVENTING PANDEMICS
A VICTORY FOR THE TONGASS / EL YUNQUE RECOVERY
FOREST HEALTH IN THE WEST

Photo: Jim Schwabel

Protecting Forests and Preventing Pandemics

Forests are not in today's front-page news, but they should be. The COVID-19 disease-causing virus, its 2002 SARS cousin, HIV, Ebola and yellow fever all originated in forest-dwelling wildlife. So, too, noncontagious diseases like dengue, malaria and Lyme infect people through forest-related mosquito and tick vectors.

About 100 years ago, modern-day HIV passed from a jungle-dwelling infected African ape to the person who likely killed it for food. Forest-inhabiting bats are the original source of the SARS viruses, likely with intermediate animal hosts along the way to human infection. The Ebola virus has been spilling over from sub-Saharan Africa's forest mammals (bats and primates are the culprits) for over 50 years with locally catastrophic results.

Animals have been passing their microorganisms to humans for the quarter-million years we've been around. But with more humans (four times as many as 100 years ago) living more densely, and notwithstanding astonishing advances in biochemistry and medicine, the frequency of new disease outbreaks is increasing.

Vaccines that prevent infection and effective treatment for those who do become infected, while necessary, do not prevent new diseases spilling over from wildlife to people. Preventing spillovers requires changing the way people behave, in particular, people who live on the

frontlines where infectious disease first emerges.

No one chooses to be the original source of an animal-to-human spillover pandemic. And the odds that any given person will be that original source are vanishingly small, on the order of one in a billion. Although it's impossible to eliminate disease spillovers, and we can't predict the precise ecology and circumstances of the next pandemic, we can improve our odds by protecting wild forests and their wildlife inhabitants from ill-advised human use.

The same public health measures that stem an epidemic's riptide can prevent the seminal infectious events. As social distancing slows an infection's spread, so, too, human distancing from forest and wildlife reservoirs of potential disease can prevent an outbreak in the first instance. The back-of-my-envelope math says \$10 billion would buy sufficient protein to replace every pound of wild "bush meat" consumed annually in Africa. That's one-quarter of 1 percent of the current pandemic's estimated cost to the world's economy (not including the lives lost). Spend about 10 times that amount each year — 4 percent of the pandemic's cost — and protection of the world's tropical rainforests could be financed.

An ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure.

Sincerely,



Andy Stahl

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Featured Forest

Photo: Jim Fowler

Francis Marion National Forest

Located 20 miles north of Charleston, S.C., this 258,000-acre National Forest has seen human occupation dating back 10,000 years. Native Americans harvested abundant wildlife and plants and created shell rings — large, curved middens consisting primarily of oyster shells surrounding a clear space. Archaeologists continue to debate the origins and use of shell rings, but most were created between 1000 and 2200 B.C.

When Europeans arrived, they cleared forest land for small farms and large rice plantations. Following the decline of the rice aristocracy, trees were harvested for timber products. Uncontrolled logging, intensive wildlife harvesting and wildfires contributed to a bleak landscape prior to 1936, when President Franklin Roosevelt signed legislation to establish the National Forest, which is named after a Revolutionary War general.

Several endangered and threatened animal and plant species make their homes in the forest, including the red-cockaded woodpecker and American alligator. The forest boasts nearly 120 miles of recreational trails for canoeing, hiking, horseback riding, motorcycling and mountain biking. A network of waterways, from slow-moving blackwater creeks to the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, provide for boating and fishing experiences.

One of the more famous shell rings is located in the forest, the Sewee Shell Ring, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It measures 149 feet in diameter and stands 10 feet tall. These rings provide invaluable archeological records, as they are among the earliest evidence of coastal cultures in the southeastern United States. These archeological treasures are at risk, however, as researchers have demonstrated that rising sea levels threaten 200 prehistoric sites in the National Forest, including the Sewee Shell Ring.



In Depth: One Trillion Trees

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In February 2019, ecologist Thomas Crowther declared that planting 1.2 trillion trees would cancel out the last 10 years of carbon dioxide emissions and help mitigate climate change. Crowther based his statement on the results of a study produced at the Swiss research lab he founded. A year later, the One Trillion Tree Initiative was announced at the 2020 World Economic Forum, where President Trump committed the United States to participating in the program.

Since Trump's announcement, U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Ark., has introduced H.R. 5859 to create the Trillion Trees Act, which calls for increasing the number of trees planted in the U.S. from 2.5 billion to 3.3 billion per year. Few people would argue that planting trees is bad, but the Crowther Lab study, Trump's support for One Trillion Trees and Westerman's bill all raise questions.

Professor Forrest Fleischman, Ph.D., in the Department of Forest Resources at the University of Minnesota and former FSEEE employee, questions the basic premise of planting a trillion trees. He

contributed to a recent research effort that shows the Crowther study overestimates the land available to plant trees by about five times. Fleischman has also studied large-scale tree-planting efforts in India, where the government has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to plant trees for ecological restoration.

"There's pressure to plant trees wherever you can, and they're planting trees in a lot of places where they really don't need to," Fleischman said. Planting trees can even be counterproductive in many places because naturally regenerated forests tend to grow faster, absorb more carbon, have more biodiversity, and provide better quality forests.

Another problem, Fleischman noted, "is that a lot of the places that have been identified as places where we could plant trees are places where other things are going on that might be really valuable." For example, we could plant trees in the Midwest, but we currently use most of that land for growing food.

Jim Lutz, a professor of forest ecology at Utah State University, points to peatlands, which sequester more carbon than any other type of land. Yet humans

continue to drain them to make way for things like palm tree plantations to produce cheap cooking oil.

After studying the trees in 48 different forest plots, Lutz recently published a research paper showing that the largest 1 percent of trees contain half of all the above-ground live biomass and, therefore, half of all the carbon. While he supports planting trees, Lutz is more concerned about how many of those trees will thrive and grow old than with the number of trees planted.

President Trump's support for the Trillion Trees effort moves the conversation from science to politics. Even if the Crowther study contains flaws, the goal of One Trillion Tree Initiative is to mitigate the consequences of human-induced climate change. Yet in stating his support for the initiative, Trump has never mentioned climate change.

As the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words," and Trump's relevant actions include rolling back regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, opening millions of acres of public lands to fossil fuel extraction, withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris climate agreement, and denigrating climate activists. The Trump Administration also supports logging in Tongass National Forest, part of the world's largest temperate rainforest and an invaluable resource for carbon sequestration. As Lutz's paper makes clear, planting trees would never compensate for the loss of old-growth trees in the Tongass.

Even while confronted with the COVID-19 emergency and a worldwide oil glut, Trump has proceeded with actions to open

more public lands to oil and gas development and undermine environmental protections. None of the scientific evidence suggests that planting trees would offset the damage done by these actions. The obvious conclusion is that Trump's commitment to planting trees is an easy way to claim he's doing something for the environment while continuing to do the opposite.

But what about Westerman's proposed Trillion Trees Act? The Arkansas congressman holds a master's degree in forestry and has worked as a professional forester. As Westerman was preparing to introduce his bill in Congress, he wrote an editorial for Fox News in which he endorses and exaggerates the conclusions of the Crowther study. He then states, in addition to planting trees, "we need to simultaneously be harvesting billions of trees and manufacturing that wood to fully utilize forests' capacity to remove and store carbon."

The main premise of Westerman's proposal is that young trees sequester carbon faster than mature trees. Therefore, by cutting more trees faster, Westerman asserts, carbon can be sequestered in wood products, and new trees can be planted more quickly to sequester more carbon. Lutz acknowledges that young trees sequester carbon faster, but as his research demonstrates, "You can't sequester a lot of carbon without big trees."

Nonetheless, Westerman's bill proposes "market incentives" (tax credits) based on "sustainability scores" for new construction. These scores would calculate a building's carbon sequestration based on the use of "sustainable" construction

materials, i.e., wood products. In other words, Westerman's bill looks a lot more like a stimulus package for the timber industry than a serious effort to sequester carbon and combat climate change. By proposing large-scale tree planting while continuing to harvest "billions of trees," Westerman is supporting exactly the type of activity that Fleischman, Lutz and others have demonstrated to be counterproductive for both carbon sequestration and forest health.

Lutz conducts some of his research at the U.S. Forest Service Wind River Experimental Forest in southern Washington, which includes a stand of old-growth forest. A young stand of trees adjacent to the old-growth stand has many more trees per acre, yet it holds less than a quarter of the carbon of the old-growth stand. Ben Vierra of the National Ecological Observatory Network explained that adding just a thin annual growth layer to a massive old-growth tree is a big deal when it comes to sequestering carbon.

Fleischman said he supports planting trees to help re-establish forests in areas that have suffered from deforestation, but reforestation bears little resemblance to the plantation-style tree planting and harvesting promoted by Westerman's bill. Fleischman points to work being done in eastern Brazil, where there is a long history of deforestation.

"They're trying to figure out what's the most cost-effective way to restore forests. What they're finding is what they call 'assisted natural regeneration' is the best way to go." Fleischman explained that this approach typically involves low-density tree planting — "planting a diversity of trees



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kind of scattered around and then the forest naturally fills in around them. This approach tends to be much cheaper than high-intensity tree planting,” and it “tends to give you a better long-term outcome.”

Fleischman observed that, with large-scale tree planting efforts like Trillion Trees, “we’re seeing people planting trees in rows, often with blocks of a single species.” This plantation scenario is exactly the kind of tree-planting that Westerman’s bill supports, but Fleischman’s research indicates that, in this artificial forest structure, the trees don’t store as much carbon. With each stand of trees being the same age and species, they also tend to die at the same time, and they are more susceptible to pests and disease. “For a natural forest, you want more complexity, and more complexity will lead to more carbon storage.”

As Fleischman said, “The

basic point is that trees don’t need to be planted unless you are trying to change the species mix for commercial purposes. In the vast majority of places in the U.S. where trees can grow, they will grow naturally without someone spending money on planting them.”

Fleischman’s expertise stands at the intersection of political science and environmental policy, providing more of a “big picture” perspective than that of some forestry experts. He concluded, “If the goal is carbon storage, planting trees is not a particularly useful strategy. The main thing you need to do is change the social-economic system that makes it more profitable for people to convert forests into commercial agricultural production. And if you do too much of that, you might end up driving up the cost of food.

“We need to shift our thinking from planting trees to how can we

figure out how to get the people who live there to be incentivized to grow a forest in the long run.”

The other side of the coin, which Trump and Westerman ignore, is deforestation. Fleischman observed, “The big analyses that have been done of the causes of deforestation point to the importance of commercial export-oriented agriculture. A lot of deforestation, for example in the Amazon, is being driven by cultivation of soybeans and cattle ranches. In Indonesia and Southeast Asia, it’s being driven by oil palm (tree plantations).”

Since the relevant science demonstrates that preventing the destruction of natural forests is more important than planting trees, Fleischman concluded that our attention should be focused on reducing demand for these export commodities, a significant proportion of which is imported into the United States.

Briefly

A Victory for the Tongass

U.S. District Judge Sharon Gleason rejected the Trump administration's plan to harvest timber in Alaska's Tongass National Forest. Gleason ruled that project approval violated the National Environmental Policy Act and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

The Forest Service approved the logging plan for 1.8 million acres in the largest temperate rain forest in the world. The plan would have allowed road construction and logging of old-growth trees.

"This is a victory for wildlife, for our precious public forest lands and for the rule of law," said Patrick Lavin, Alaska policy advisor for Defenders of Wildlife.

"We're thrilled the court agreed that the Trump administration broke the law when it approved cutting thousands of acres of old-growth trees. It's critical to protect our remaining old-growth forests to have any chance of stopping the extinction crisis and slowing climate change," said Randi Spivak, public lands director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

It remains unclear whether the project will be completely abandoned as Judge Gleason will allow the Forest Service to file an additional brief.



A Setback at Boundary Waters

Federal District Judge Trevor McFadden, a recent Trump appointee, upheld the Trump administration's decision to reissue two mineral leases for the Twin Metals Minnesota mine project, which risks polluting the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Superior National Forest.

The Obama administration had previously decided not to reissue the leases because of the contamination risk from the proposed underground copper and nickel mine in a major watershed that flows into the wilderness area.

The mining operation would extract sulfide ore, which produces sulfuric acid. In addition to acidifying water resources, sulfuric acid leaches heavy metal toxins from the mined rock.

Prior to the decision to reissue the leases, the Forest Service was conducting a two-year study of the environmental and economic effects of the mine. The Trump administration canceled the study a few months before its scheduled completion and has refused to release any of the findings to Congress, environmental groups and the state of Minnesota.

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness and nine Minnesota businesses have filed an appeal to overturn McFadden's ruling.



Disgraceful Plans for Utah Monuments

The Trump administration has finalized management plans for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments. Both plans make it easier to obtain rights of way for development. The plans also allow chaining, the practice of dragging chains between bulldozers to uproot trees.

The plans do not apply to the 2 million acres that Trump removed from the monuments, where mineral leases are now allowed on previously protected lands.

At Bears Ears, a five-tribe coalition informed

the Obama administration's creation of the monument. Tribal representatives now say they have been left out of recent planning efforts.

At Grand Staircase members of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance report motorized traffic spreading even into areas that remain protected.

Several lawsuits have been consolidated into a single legal challenge that argues Trump unlawfully stripped monument status from the excised lands.



Dispatch

Updates from El Yunque

El Yunque National Forest encompasses much of Puerto Rico's Sierra de Luquillo Mountains and is the only tropical rain forest in the U.S. National Forest system. Even though it is one of the smallest National Forests, its hundreds of animal and plant species make it one of the most biologically diverse. King Alfonso XII of Spain first protected the forest in 1876, making it one of the oldest forest reserves in the Western Hemisphere, and it became a U.S. National Forest in 1906.

In September 2017, hurricanes Irma and Maria battered Puerto Rico just two weeks apart, causing heavy damage to the island and its famous forest. After Hurricane Maria, Grizelle González, a project leader at El Yunque's International Institute of Tropical Forestry, told *The New York Times*, "The whole forest is completely defoliated." The highest areas, above 3,000 feet, were the hardest hit and "might take a century to recover."

In the aftermath of the hurricanes, El Yunque closed for repairs and restoration work, and with the forest canopy decimated, tropical sun scorched parts of the forest that had not seen sunlight in decades. After three years, workers have managed to reopen El Yunque's roads, but many trails remain closed. The El Portal Visitor Center is expected to reopen in 2021, but only time will tell if all of the forest's unique plant and wildlife species recover from the devastation.

Adding insult to injury, the 2021 budget proposed by the Trump administration would eliminate the International Institute of Tropical Forestry. Closing this important scientific research facility would be part of the administration's plan to eliminate \$22 million of funding for fish and wildlife research, supposedly justified by focusing the agency's efforts on wildfire



Trees stripped of foliage at El Yunque National Forest's La Coca Falls following back-to-back hurricanes in 2017 demonstrate significant recovery some three years later. Photos: El Yunque National Forest, U.S. Forest Service.

management. The move would also cut science staff to the tune of 287 staff-years, equivalent to 41 staffers, each with 7 years of experience.

The institute serves as a center for research about the effects of climate change, which Trump denies. And as FSEEE Executive Director Andy Stahl observed, Forest Service fish and wildlife research has sometimes been at odds with timber industry priorities. "Fish and wildlife research reformed Forest Service logging. But for the work of a generation of Forest Service fish and wildlife scientists, old-growth forests would all be stumps today."

The proposal will likely encounter opposition from Democrats in Congress. House versions of budget legislation are expected around early July so stay tuned.

Protecting America's Wilderness Act

The U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 2546 by a vote of 231-183, sending the bill to the Senate in mid February. The Protecting America's Wilderness Act would designate more than 1.3 million acres as

wilderness at dozens of locations in Washington, Colorado and California, making it one of the most significant land protection efforts in a decade. We highlight three of the proposed areas here.

Moonlight Dome

The proposed Moonlight Dome Wilderness Area would protect 9,117 acres of Olympic National Forest between the West and East forks of the Humptulips River on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. An old-growth forest dominated by Douglas-fir and western hemlock blankets the 4,000-foot peak of Moonlight Dome and nearby Stovepipe Mountain. With no trails or roads into the proposed wilderness area, visitors are few and far between, leaving the wild forest as an oasis for fish and wildlife, including salmon and Roosevelt elk.

The Moonlight Dome region contains one of the country's most extensive stands of old-growth rain forest that has not yet been afforded full protection. The ecological value of old-growth forest combined with the myriad of resident fish and wildlife species deserves the protection that only a wilderness designation can provide. That protection will also ensure that the forest continues to perform its invaluable role of sequestering carbon in this age of climate change.

In previous decades, the Forest Service considered allowing this area to be logged. In 1994, the Forest Service decided this pristine forest was more valuable for its ecological resources than for construction materials. Since that decision, Moonlight Dome has been waiting for Congress to provide permanent protection. We hope the wait will soon be over.

Browns Canyon

In Colorado, H.R. 2546 proposes to designate 17,922 acres as the Browns Canyon Wilderness Area. The story of Browns Canyon wilderness dates back to 1972 when the Forest Service conducted its Roadless Area Review and Evaluation known as RARE I. RARE I identified more than 100,000 acres of San Isabel National Forest in the Browns Canyon area as possessing wilderness qualities.

The 1976 Federal Land Management Policy Act directed the Bureau of Land Management to review its land for best management practices, including land adjacent to the Forest Service roadless area. As a result, the BLM designated more than 6,000 acres along Browns Canyon as a wilderness study area (WSA) in 1980. A 1991 BLM wilderness study report recommended the Browns Canyon WSA for wilderness designation.

In the meantime, motorized backcountry traffic



Photo: Jennifer Fairbrother

had whittled away at the National Forest roadless acreage. A wilderness bill was introduced in 1991 that would have protected almost 35,000 acres of Forest Service and BLM land in and around Browns Canyon. That effort failed in Congress, as did subsequent attempts to designate the area as wilderness.

In 2015, following another failed attempt to gain a wilderness designation, President Obama designated 21,586 acres as Browns Canyon National Monument under the authority of the 1906 Antiquities Act, signed into law by Teddy Roosevelt. As the presidential proclamation establishing the monument states, "In central Colorado's vibrant upper Arkansas River valley, the rugged granite cliffs, colorful rock outcroppings,

Photo: Logan Myers



and stunning mountain vistas of Browns Canyon form an iconic landscape that attracts visitors from around the world.”

In fact, the section of the Arkansas River that includes Browns Canyon is the nation’s number one destination for whitewater rafting. This portion of the river also boasts a Gold Medal trout fishery and a Wild and Scenic designation. Outdoor recreation powers the local economies of the small communities along the river, towns like Buena Vista and Salida, which were founded during Colorado’s mining boom but had to redefine themselves after their mining economies went bust.

The national monument includes the BLM WSA and some of the last remaining acreage of the Forest Service roadless area. This land within the national monument as well as land adjacent to the monument would constitute the proposed wilderness area.

Pattison

H.R. 2546 would also protect 28,400 acres of backcountry in the mountainous Shasta-Trinity National Forest of northern California. Like Browns Canyon, the land in the proposed Pattison Wilderness Area has seen repeated efforts to establish wilderness protections, dating back to the early 1980s. The proposed wilderness area encompasses old-growth and mixed hardwood forests that provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife, including endangered spotted owls. The Pattison area’s Hayfork Creek and its tributaries provide important cold-water habitat for salmon and steelhead.

The region also provides outstanding opportunities for

outdoor recreation, including hiking, camping, fishing and kayaking. During the high-water season, Hayfork Creek attracts expert kayakers who challenge the class IV-V whitewater, and Forest Service officials have recommended Hayfork for Wild and Scenic River protection. Pattison trails used by today’s hikers once served as key transportation routes for local tribes and early pioneers.

Another important feature of Pattison’s forest is fire. Every ecological nook and cranny of the Pattison landscape cries out for fire, and in 2015 Pattison’s forest burned again, as it has for millennia. This time the Forest Service focused on protecting ranches and homes that lie outside the proposed wilderness. The fire hopped around, burning hot in a few places but not in most parts of the forest.

Fire is an essential part of many wild landscapes. The Forest Service (and the public) have faced a steep learning curve when it comes to the ecological lessons that fire teaches. The Pattison landscape is a fine example of how wilderness and fire coexist on the land — each

essential to the other. Wilderness creates big, wild places where fire can roam free. Fire restores forests, rejuvenating plants and trees and creating productive fish and wildlife habitats. By designating the Pattison Wilderness, Congress will acknowledge that it has nothing to fear from fire in wilderness.

Wilderness designations for Moonlight Dome, Browns Canyon, Pattison and the other proposed wilderness areas will provide numerous benefits. One of the bill’s sponsors, Congresswoman Diana DeGette, D-Colo., believes H.R. 2546 is an important step toward meeting the goals of the Global Deal for Nature, which calls for protecting 30 percent of Earth’s ecosystems by 2030. The Global Deal for Nature is a science-driven plan to preserve diversity and avoid catastrophic climate change. As DeGette has said, “Preserving more of our public land is one of the best short-term solutions we as a nation can take to respond to the climate crisis.”

Photo: Jason Smith



Unhealthy Forests: A Sequence of Destruction

by Douglas L. Parker

During my 39-year career with the U.S. Forest Service, I observed the adverse effects on forest health of various forest management practices in the West. While forest health is a difficult term to describe, “tree decline” is an important factor. A gradual decline in the health and vigor of a tree species involves a succession of events, beginning with predisposing factors that make trees more or less sensitive to inciting factors.

Drought is a significant inciting factor as it makes trees more susceptible to other factors, especially insects like bark beetles. A 1994 publication by W.W. Covington and M.M. Moore — “Southwestern Ponderosa Forest Structure: Changes since Euro-American Settlement” — provides a compelling view of the state of ponderosa pine forest health in Arizona. They found that pre-settlement tree density averaged 23 trees per acre, but the density had increased to an average of 850 trees per acre about 100 years later. The extreme increase in tree density was mostly caused by forest management practices that reduced tree vigor and subjected pine forests to insect and disease depredations.

A 1995 report by Lance R. Clark and R. Neil Sampson, “Forest Ecosystem Health in the Inland West: A Science and Policy Reader,” presents a comprehensive

summary of the forest types most at risk. They indicate the major factor in the current condition of these forests is the intentional and inadvertent actions of people. None of the historical accounts I reviewed addresses the overall effectiveness of pest suppression efforts, discusses practices that adversely affected forest health, or identifies negative consequences of control efforts.

I suspect the massive loss of conifer species over millions of acres in the West, beginning around the 1920s, created a sense of alarm that led managers to take extreme measures to control bark beetle infestations. The effects of forest diseases were much more subtle and did not concern foresters at the time. During the same period, foresters were tasked with achieving annual timber harvest targets and controlling and preventing wildfires. These efforts were successful, but they contributed to reducing the vigor of forests.

Please understand that I’m not trying to make value judgments about the individuals who managed our forests and helped build the West. Even if they did not understand the consequences of their actions, our predecessors had good reasons for those actions. Also, excellent work was and is currently being done to improve forest health in some areas.

However, I suspect that too



Photo: Joe Stone

many forested areas are in a declining state of health, and we have some strong indications that we may be faced with rapid and severe decline in forest health, especially considering the potential influences of a warming climate.

Nevertheless, forest managers cannot keep implementing the same management actions and think they will get a different outcome. I suggest that a better approach would be to use facts and reason to make the changes needed to prevent a continued decline in forest health. It will be difficult and costly to correct forest health problems, and I suspect adequate funding will not always be available to accomplish the level of restoration needed.

In a large percentage of forested areas, I believe a decision to do nothing will be preferable to an alternative involving pest control or logging operations that may make the situation worse. I hope that current Forest Service employees avoid making the same types of mistakes as their predecessors.

This article has been edited for length. The complete article is here: <https://bit.ly/3beDprX>.



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Forest Service Takes FSEEE's Advice

Last winter, the Forest Service proposed that people pay a fee to hike or camp in central Oregon's undeveloped wilderness areas. The agency argued that wilderness areas are "special" places in which Congress has authorized hiking and camping fees. FSEEE pointed out the Forest Service was reading the law backwards. Congress authorized fees for special uses — not special places — and, in fact, has barred the Forest Service from charging fees for vanilla-flavored hiking and camping.

This February, the Forest Service changed its tune and announced it was dropping the wilderness fee proposal. Citing the "valuable" public input it had received, the Forest Service did not otherwise explain its change of heart. The on-going pandemic has also suspended a proposed new wilderness use permit, which would now be available at no charge — except for a "processing" fee of \$1 per person for day use (\$6 for overnight) paid to the private contractor that operates the Recreation.gov reservation site.



Photo: Andrew Opila