

Recreation Resource Advisory Committee

US Forest Service Eastern Region

Fee Proposal

National Forest, State: Hoosier National Forest, Indiana

Site Type: Multi-use Trail System (horse riders and mountain bikers)

FLREA Fee Type: Special recreation permit

Type of proposal: Fee increase

Site Description: This fee applies to the use of 16 trails that provide 219 miles of multiple use trails for use by horse riders and mountain bikers. The trails are located on the steep topography and erosive soil that is common in southern Indiana. The trails receive extensive use primarily by horses (estimate 40,000-50,000 annually) and are open year around. To mitigate the soil and water impacts, many of the trails have been hardened with gravel and all trails have had drainage control devices installed in the form of rolling dips. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use is prohibited on the forest.

Proposed Action: Increase existing fees for daily and annual permits for the use of a specialized trail system by horse riders and mountain bikers.

Current Fee: \$3.00 daily, \$25.00 annual.

Proposed Fee: \$5.00 daily, \$35.00 annual.

Amount Increase: The daily permit would increase by \$2.00 and the annual by \$10.00.

Date of Last Increase: This fee has never been raised since its inception in 1998.

Reason for New Fee or Fee Change: Since the start of this program nine years ago, the need for maintenance funds has increased due to higher use, decreased budgets, and inflation. Trail budgets have not kept pace; the 2007 Hoosier National Forest trail budget was 8% *less* than the previous year. Trail maintenance

on this Forest is very expensive because the soil types, topography, and heavy horse use requires ongoing hardening and drainage maintenance. Also, the proliferation of use from adjacent private horse camps has resulted in more impacts and thus more maintenance needs. When compared to similar providers that charge a fee, the Hoosier National Forest fees are the lowest in the state.

The proposed increase is based on 1) cost to users, 2) comparison with private and public providers, 3) inflation, 4) maintenance costs, and 5) a review of the literature cited at the end of this document.

If recommended, the fee increase will be used for: Funds will be used for ongoing trail maintenance which generally involves reshaping drainage devices and placing gravel. This action is necessary given the soil types found in southern Indiana and the heavy use. In addition, Forest staff will continue to meet annually with user groups to solicit requests for trail related improvements, and apply FLREA funds to those requests if feasible. Examples of past projects resulting from such requests include hitch rails, mounting structures for persons with disabilities, kiosks at trailheads with trail maps, new trailheads, and toilets at trailheads.

If recommended, the proposal will be implemented: January 1, 2008.

Price Comparisons for Similar Facilities & Services:

- **Forest Service:** There are no other national forests in Indiana. National forests in adjacent states do not have a comparable situation. The most similar example is the Wayne National Forest in Ohio that also has a trail fee program, but it is dominated by OHV use (98%) rather than horse or bike use.
- **Local Private and Public Providers:** Because Indiana lacks substantial public land and recreation open space, it is difficult to find private and public providers that are a reasonable comparison to the Hoosier National Forest trail system. Forest staff searched the internet and made phone calls to analyze the private sector. Of 56 private equestrian facilities analyzed, only four allowed users to bring their own horses. Trails were short and acreage small and costs ranged from \$10 per hour to \$10-15 per day. One facility offered unlimited riding for \$30 per month. One private mountain bike facility was found and they charge \$3 per day.

Public providers' fees ranged from free to \$8 per day, and from \$20-25 for annual passes. The closest comparison to the Hoosier National Forest is the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) which offer a \$5 daily pass and \$20 annual pass for horse use. However, at most properties trail users also incur an additional charge from an entry fee of \$4-7 per day, or \$36-46 for an annual entry pass. The net cost for IDNR trail users can be \$9-12 for daily use or \$56-76 for annual use.

Public Participation

Method	Date(s)	Comments/Results
Posted notice at recreation site inviting comments on the proposal (2 months minimum during visitor season)	5/23/2007	Thirty nine responses were received from the news releases, postings, mailing to key contacts, and website. Results for all four efforts are summarized here.
News release and/or notice in local papers inviting comments on the proposal (if news release is not printed, place a paid notice in the newspaper)	5/23/2007	Respondents were 95% horse riders, 2% mountain bikers, and 2% hikers. Results: 15% - Increase is acceptable 5% - Increase is too little 5% - Increase is too much 41% - Keep fee the same 33% - Offered no opinion or no opposition, but wanted hiker to pay also. Many of the other respondents also wanted hikers to pay, regardless of their position on the increase.
Briefed local elected officials on the proposal. List names of officials.	6/1/2007	Senator Evan Bayh Senator Richard Lugar Congressman Baron Hill Congressman Stephen Buyer Congressman Brad Ellsworth No responses were received
Met with affected stakeholder groups to get input on the proposal	12/3/06 1/16/2007 3/4/2004 6/24/2007 7/3/2007	Met with horse clubs and leadership from mountain bike community. Generally members were accepting of the fee increase, but wanted hiker to pay
Posted Federal Register Notice. REQUIRED FOR NEW FEES.		Not applicable; fees are not new
Posted proposal on Forest Website	5/23/2007	See summary above
Other methods		
Mailing to key contacts in user groups	5/23/2007	See summary above
Survey conducted at Hoosier Horse Fair	3/30-4/1/2007	Forty three responses: 84% - proposed increase OK 12% - keep fee the same 4% - lower fees
“Willingness to pay”-survey	9/2005	Inconclusive
Review of scientific literature	4/2007	Used to determine increase

Analysis: There is public support for the proposal. A review of the public responses reveals a full range of opinions depending upon the audience. For example, the Hoosier Horse Fair survey and meeting presentations resulted in a high level of support, while the responses to the news release, mailing, and postings resulted in a low level of support. There was no response to the briefings provided to elected officials.

Some people inherently oppose higher costs of any commodity, yet costs have gone up and budgets have gone down, and the trail program is not sustainable without adequate funding. In spite of the fact that public support is not unanimous, the Forest feels the proposed increase is justified, and is very conservative when compared to similar situations.

The issue of whether or not hikers should pay for trail use appears to be of equal or greater concern than the actual fee increase. Hikers are not charged because:

The fee program is designed to help recover costs from those activities that require a higher level of development and more expense. In this case, the trails used by horses and mountain bikes are subject to greater impacts and require a much higher level of development and maintenance than those used only by hikers. Very little of the Forest's trail maintenance budget is directed toward hiking-only trails because the impact is much less and they do not need that much work. The current Forest budget is adequate to maintain hiking-only trails and does not need to be supplemented with money from the trail permit program. The situation is similar to camping. A fee is charged to camp in a developed campground where campers require a higher level of development such as a graveled pad, electricity, water, and so on. Backcountry or roadside camping, where little development is required, is free.

The 7.7 mile Pate Hollow hiking trail constructed in 2004 is provided as an example. Construction costs were approximately \$9000 and utilized volunteers from the hiking and horse riding communities. In the 3 year time period since construction, about 10 person days and no supplies have been needed for maintenance. The remaining hiking trails on the Forest were also in need of only minimal care. In contrast, maintenance expenditures for the multiple use trails were \$352,000 for the same time period.

Literature Cited:

Chilman, Kenneth. 2005. Rapid assessment visitor use and perceptions Hickory Ridge area. Southern Illinois University Department of Forestry, Carbondale, IL. 5 p.

Crompton, John; Lamb, Charles. 1986. Marketing government and social services. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons. 508 p.

Kyle, Gerard.; Graefe, Alan; Absher, James. 2002. Determining appropriate prices for recreation on public lands. Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 20(2):69-89.

US Department of Labor. 2007. Statistics on inflation and consumer spending. Available online at <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl> Date accessed: March 1, 2007.