

# **Recreation Resource Advisory Committee**

**US Forest Service- Eastern Region  
Fee Proposal**

## **HURON - MANISTEE NATIONAL FORESTS SUMMARY OF FOREST-WIDE PROPOSED FEE CHANGES**

Over the last few years forest personnel have undertaken a comprehensive look at the recreation program on the Huron-Manistee National Forests. Components of the comprehensive look included: National Visitor Use Monitoring; Land and Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement; Travel Management Rule implementation; 2005 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act; Pere Marquette Scenic River Plan; Recreation Special Use Permit renewal; and Recreation Facility Analysis.

### **TYPES OF PROPOSALS**

Resulting from this review, the Huron-Manistee National Forests are submitting seven fee proposals for review by the Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC). Six proposals are to increase fees at sites where fees are currently charged. These proposals are for Day Use, Forest Passes, Campgrounds, Campground Group Use, Au Sable River Corridor Camping, and Kirtland's Warbler Guided Tour. The seventh proposal is to eliminate the fee from one campground and two day use sites.

Huron-Manistee National Forests personnel operate and maintain 174 developed Recreation Sites. The sites include trailheads, campgrounds, day-use picnic areas, boating access, fishing access, interpretive sites, and swimming beaches. There are 66 sites run by Forest Service with FLREA fees, 72 sites run by Forest Service with no fees charged, 28 sites run by concessionaires, and 8 sites proposed in the Recreation Facility Analysis for conversion from developed to free dispersed sites.

## REASONS FOR THE PROPOSED FEE CHANGES

- **Align the fees with local market:** Using 2008 fee rates, An analysis was completed which compared 200 recreation fees at over 120 privately owned recreation sites, 6 National Forests, 3 National Parks, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources rates. Campsite fees were computed allowing for two sleeping units, two vehicles, and eight people. Day-Use fees were based on a vehicle with four people. Fee rates were discounted to exclude extra amenities, such as hook-ups, showers, flush toilets, pool, and internet.
- **Increased amenities and/or greater capacity:** Since the last fee increase in 1995, the sites have had significant improvements such as additional parking, paved parking, paved roads, new or additional toilets, and improved boating ramps, additional interpretive signs, new well-pumps, accessible fire pits, benches, tables, improved access road.
- **Increase in use:** The Huron-Manistee National Forests receive more than three-million visits each year. In the past fifteen years, population has increased by 8.6% in the market area.
- **Inflation & increased maintenance costs:** In recent years, several factors have contributed to increasing costs of doing business. Factors include a 15% increase in contractor's insurance, 39% increase in minimum wage in Michigan, and increased petroleum costs. Because of these factors, costs to operate recreation sites have increased. Examples of cost increases from 2005 to 2007 are garbage disposal up 12%, toilet pumping up 24%, vehicle expense up 32%, supplies up 31%, and utilities up 41%. According to the Bureau of Labor, inflation has increased by 44% between 1995 and 2007.
- **Addressing backlog maintenance:** The majority of National Forest System recreation facilities were constructed between 1930 and 1965. Many facilities are obsolete because of changes in visitor use patterns and activities. Some facilities have deteriorated conditions because of age and original building materials. Due to the amount of deferred maintenance, the facilities need a significant investment in order to improve. The Recreation Facility Analysis identified fee increase as one part of making these recreation sites environmentally and financially sustainable.
- **Removal of sites from the Recreation Enhancement Program on the Forests:** The number of amenities at these sites does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the recreation fee program.

**If approved, the fee changes will be used to accomplish:** During the Recreation Facility Analysis process, a team reviewed 174 recreation sites on the Huron-Manistee National Forests. Each site was reviewed to determine what actions or changes are needed to meet HMNF Land and Resource Management Plan objectives. Objectives include providing outstanding public service, reducing maintenance costs, maintaining the facility to standard, appropriately meeting demands, and supporting the Forest's recreation niche. Fee increases at these sites will result in better public service and higher quality recreation sites. The Forest Service has a national goal of reducing facility deferred-maintenance by 90% by 2020. In addition, it has a five-year goal of reducing deferred maintenance by 20%. The Huron-Manistee National Forests plan a 23% reduction in deferred maintenance at recreation sites within a five-year period. Proposed projects include improving, continuing, or replacing with accessible amenities items such as toilets, picnic tables, fire devices, kiosks, and other amenities. Also proposed, is to continue or increase types and frequency of services.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Extensive public outreach and Congressional notification generated little opposition to the proposal. The methods used were posting 66 recreation sites, sending news releases to 15 media outlets, placing legal notices in five newspapers-of-record, contacting five Congressional offices, contacting four tribal governments, having one-on-one conversations with stakeholders, and posting the proposal on the HMNF website. 16 people made nineteen 19 comments about the fee proposal.

Method	Date(s)	Comments/Results
<b>Posted notice at recreation site inviting comments on the proposal</b>	Posters were placed at all recreation sites between June 23 and June 30. All sites will remain posted through August 2008.	From the posted notices, newspaper articles, and letters sent ... As of August 29, 2008 ... 16 people made 19 different comments about the fee proposal.

<p><b>News release and/or notice in local papers inviting comments on the proposal</b></p>	<p>Public notices were sent to 5 newspapers-of-record on June 28, 2008 (published between June 30 and July 11). News releases were sent to 15 media outlets on June 26, 2008.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 comments were no fees anywhere</li> <li>• 6 comments said leave fee as they are now in 2008</li> <li>• 4 comments supported a fee increase but less than proposed</li> <li>• 5 comments supported the proposed fee increases (some would like to see improved services and facilities)</li> <li>• 1 comment said National Forests should increase fees more.</li> <li>• 1 comment said additional fees were needed</li> </ul>
<p><b>Briefed local elected officials and Tribal leaders on the proposal. List names of officials.</b></p>	<p>5 Congressional Offices were notified on June 2, 2008, which included Sen. Carl Levin, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Cong. David Camp (4), Cong. Bart Stupak (1), and Cong. Peter Hoekstra (2). On June 30, 2008, tribal leaders representing Little River Band, Grand Traverse Band, Little Traverse Band, and Sault Ste Marie Band were notified.</p>	<p>When called ... congressional delegation members and tribal leaders had no comments or concerns, but appreciated the notice about the proposed fee increase. The Michigan Department of Natural Resource Chief Lynne Boyd supported the fee increase and recognized rising costs and the need to provide healthy and safe recreation facilities.</p>

<p><b>Met with affected stakeholder groups for input on the proposal</b></p>	<p>One-on-one contacts were made with stakeholders at recreation sites and at FS offices. No groups requested presentations at meetings.</p>	<p>See comments at start of this column</p>
<p><b>Posted proposal on Forest Website</b></p>	<p>The public notice and other information were posted on the HMNF website on June 26, 2008.</p>	<p>See comments at start of this column</p>
<p><b>Other methods</b></p>	<p>On June 26, 2008, letters were sent to 1,500 Friends of the Forest and people who commented on the 2006 Forests Plan.</p>	<p>See comments at start of this column</p>

<b>SOME SPECIFIC COMMENTS RECEIVED</b>
<p>Loud Pond - AuSable corridor Camping Fee - commenter, brother, and father visit/camp at Loud Pond in the AuSable corridor 5 to 10 times per years, commenter understands need for increase but finds increases to be another hardship along with other increasing costs such as fuel, groceries, and gear. He will eventually find other places to go, because declining fisheries, campsite visible to neighboring site, barking dogs, blasting radio, lost tranquil retreat, everything costs too much</p>
<p>Pine River access site - Day Use Fee - watercraft livery owner. The FS should not implement the proposed fee increase. They should cut the ridiculous waste that cast such a negative light on the Agency. Stop the discrimination; bring all forest users into the user-pay column. Commenter does not like a limiting watercraft permit system on the Pine River. There is a lack of law enforcement at access sites, too many drunken river users.</p>
<p>Pine River access sites - Day Use Fee - "By keeping the access for the public as simple as possible the costs to maintain will fall within the funds allocated from the federal tax system. Again, the infrastructure was built with taxpayer monies many years ago. Please restore the manual hand pump for water at Peterson Landing on the Pine River!"</p>
<p>AuSable Access Site - 4001 Landing - Day Use Fee - Need to improve, maintenance, weed whip, and mow the grass. There is a traffic hazard from people choosing to park in road and not parking areas.</p>
<p>Au Sable River - Livery owner - Camping fee - "I believe that the ones [fee increase] on camping would be fine and actually be beneficial..."</p>
<p>Pine River - watercraft livery owner -it is apparent that in any economy, maintenance is costly and this is an issue that surrounds us daily. ... I believe that it [the increase] is very excessive... I ask that you ... reconsider a more prudent approach.</p>
<p>Pine River - livery owner - "I understand that the maintenance costs are raising for the sites, as well as everything else associated with keeping the sites open. But I really think that the fee increases are way too high."</p>
<p>"What are our taxes for."</p>
<p>"Seeing fees are going up! A bigger outhouse at Brush Lake, and add hand pump. Add 4 or 5 lots at Twinwood Lake. Add 3 or 4 lots at Hungerford Lake. A better boat ramp at Walkup Lake. Better roads to Condon Lake and Shelley Lake."</p>
<p>... I can understand moderate rate adjustment. ... however, some proposed increases are outrageous ... I have always disagreed with the user fees; the one that comes to mind is charges at parking lots for XC skiing.  "The incoming revenues from the sale of timber have the potential of covering the HMNF budget, hence no need to increase the rates, maybe eliminating some user fees altogether, and no drain on the taxpayers."</p>
<p>Hungerford Horse Camp - Yes! There is a need for improvements one is the well, the solar panel needs to be fixed or replace to get water and the pit toilets need to be</p>

cleaned out more often and toilet paper to be available.
Called on telephone - Supports the proposed fee increases. I often hear complaints of fees at my private camp facilities by visitors who say they can camp for free on the National Forest especially when no one is checking.
Called on telephone - Not increasing enough! National Forest is a great deal and provides wonderful recreation opportunities.
Twinwood Lake - If raising the fees will help to allow better policing of the area to help ensure fair public use of these areas then I'm all for it. Not enough capacity, need more law enforcement. National Forests needs to make stay limit of 14 days <u>per year</u> . Partiers show disrespect for other visitors and environment.
Lends support for proposed fee increases. Your ability to provide 39% of your recreation facilities at no fee provides a good balance of options for Michigan's citizens.