

Recreation Fees You Pay at Recreation Sites on National Forests

Many locations and recreation facilities on National Forest lands are free to use. There are also some places or some activities where a fee is charged. As a user of the National Forest, you may not see the difference between the types of recreation fees being collected; however, there is often a big difference in how the money is used.

Many ski areas, resorts, outfitter guides and organizational camps are permitted to use the National Forest to provide special recreation opportunities to the public. These **businesses** pay a fee to the government for the use of the public lands. They collect fees from the recreation users for the services they provide. The fees paid by the various businesses to the Forest Service generally go directly to the federal treasury and are not used for recreation on the National Forests where they were collected.

On the Bighorn National Forest, most of the campgrounds are operated by a concessionaire (a business that has been selected to operate and maintain the campground). The Forest Service allows the **concessionaires** to charge the public a fee for the use of the campground, in return for services provided by the concessionaire, such as toilet cleaning, security in the campground, providing drinking water, etc. The concessionaire, in turn, pays a portion of the campground fees to the federal government, which goes to the general treasury. However, in many cases, the Forest Service works with the concessionaire to completing repairs and improvements in the campground or other recreation facility, in lieu of collecting a fee from the concessionaire. This allows these recreation sites to be maintained at a higher quality and sees that the fees paid by the people using the campground are invested back into the site.

One other authority for collecting fees at recreation facilities is the **Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA)**, which allows the Forest Service to collect a fee at certain types of recreation sites and to then use these fees where they were collected. These are facilities or services operated or managed by the Forest Service, such as campgrounds, rental cabins and lookouts. The funds collected are used to help operate and maintain the various recreation sites, to provide new or improved recreation opportunities, to restore or protect areas impacted by recreational use, or to better serve the recreation visitors in other ways. On the Bighorn Muddy Guard Cabin and Hunter Trailhead/Campground are operated under REA. Prior to REA, when fees were collected at similar sites, the funds were deposited in the federal treasury and were not available for use at the site where the fee was collected.

More information about these types of fees and how the funds are used can be found on the National Forest Service website at www.fs.fed.us.