

Forest Service Public Involvement Strategy For Recreation Fees

Public participation in the design and operation of Forest Service recreation programs has long been an important component of unit decision making. The Recreation Enhancement Act provides specific requirements related to implementing new fees and changing existing fees, and informing publics on the use of recreation fee revenues, as well as direction on developing Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (Recreation RACs). In addition to these requirements, Forests can use additional public participation methods to ensure an effective level of public involvement at the sub-regional and local levels.

Desired Outcomes:

- Forests build positive relationships with key stakeholders concerning recreation fees
- Decisions and issues around the recreation fee program are clearly communicated to key stakeholders, including Recreation RACs
- Public issues, perceptions and concerns are understood, discussed in open settings, and addressed
- Publics know their concerns are heard and addressed
- Publics understand the need and benefits of recreation fee program

Tactics:

- A. **Establish a Recreation Resource Advisory Committees** or Recreation sub-committees associated with already established Recreation RACs as appropriate (i.e., at the National, Regional, State or local levels). Recreation RACs meet at least annually.
 1. All meetings of the Recreation RACs will be open to the public and will be announced at least one week in advance in a local paper of record and in the Federal Register.
 2. All records of meetings of the Recreation RACs will be made available for public inspection.
- B. Before **establishing a new recreation fee**, the unit will include options for public feedback to proposal by:
 1. Publishing a notice in the Federal Register six months in advance.

2. Publishing a notice in local newspapers and publications located near the site at which the recreation fee would be established or changed.
- C. Before adding, eliminating, or changing standard or expanded amenity fees or special recreation permits and before changing the recreation fee program in ways that it expands or limits these fees:**
1. Provide opportunities for public feedback by publishing an advance notice in local newspapers and publications located near the site at which the recreation fee would be established or changed.
 2. Give Recreation RACs the opportunity to make recommendations to the Secretary. Recommendations include documentation of general public support.
 3. If the Secretary rejects the Recreation RAC recommendation, then at least 30 days before implementing a decision, the Secretary must issue a notice that identifies the reasons for rejecting the recommendation to the House Committee on Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.
- D. Post notices and report program accomplishments by:**
1. Posting clear notices of standard amenity recreation fees and available recreation passes at appropriate locations in each unit or area where fees are charged.
 2. Including notices of fees in publications distributed in area.
 3. Posting notices of how fees were used at fee site locations as practical.
 4. Annually providing information to the public on the use of recreation fee revenues.
 5. Submitting a report to Congress no later than May 1, 2006 and every three years thereafter. This report will detail the status of the recreation fee program, including an evaluation of the recreation fee program, examples of projects that were funded using fees, future projects and programs for funding with fees, and any recommendations for changes in the overall program.

Regional Recreation Fee Board Role:

This strategy identifies **minimum** public involvement requirements as outlined in REA and as amended by broadening the role of Recreation RACs. Regional recreation fee boards are tasked with identifying public involvement needs for various situations in their

Region, recognizing that the level and method of public involvement should be determined by the amount of public interest in and/or concern about the fee or project.

Each region will decide in what ways regional fee boards will interact with Recreation RACs. For example, regional fee boards may participate in working with Recreation RACs by ensuring new standard and expanded fee amenity proposals are complete and ready for Recreation RAC review. Further, they may review and analyze Recreation RAC recommendations.

Actions Not Requiring Public Involvement:

- 1. No Affect to Public:** The Forest Service will not conduct public involvement activities when the action (changing the fee) does not affect the public. For example, when fee collection is moved from one authority, such as Granger-Thye, to the authority under the Recreation Enhancement Act, people will experience no change in the fee itself. The only change will be in how the Forest Service processes that fee.
- 2. National Recreation Reservation System:** All federal agencies must place all reservations on the National Recreation Reservation System. While this does constitute a new fee in some instances, it is a non-negotiable fee. The Forest Service will appropriately announce (through media, web, on-site notices, etc.) the change to the reservation service, but public comment will not be solicited.
- 3. Concessionaires:** Concessionaire-managed facilities are not covered in the Recreation Enhancement Act. Fee changes at these facilities do not require the same public involvement processes as those operated by the Forest Service. Fee changes will follow the terms of the concessionaire's special use permit.

Public Comments:

When public involvement is conducted, all written public comments must be retained for public record and, as requested, be made available to Recreation Resource Advisory Committees. (Note: According to FSH 6209.11, 41-Part02, comments received at the forest or district level should be retained for 3 years. Comments received at the Washington office or regional office level should be retained for 5 years.)

Documenting Public Comment:

It is expected that Forests and Regions will develop their own methods of documenting public involvement as they proceed with implementing this public involvement strategy.