



# Recreation Fee Program

March 2004

*There are twelve fee demonstration projects in the Northern Region. Recreation and user fees improve recreation experiences for visitors.*



*Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Lewis and Clark NF*

## National Blueprint -

The Forest Service is implementing a national Blueprint for recreation fees as a part of the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. The Blueprint provides a consistent framework for the Agency to identify the types of recreation facilities and services for which fees are charged. The Forest Service developed the Blueprint in response to public concerns: convenience of passes, charging fees for only high use or highly developed areas and special services, and increased accountability for investments. Most Northern Region sites already comply with the Blueprint. Implementing the national Blueprint has resulted in a few changes to

recreation fee projects in the Northern Region. Fee demo authority currently expires December 31, 2005. All fee sites participate in at least one fee free day each year.

## Golden Passports -

Golden Eagle, Age or Access Passports are accepted at many regional sites for entrance or a use fee discount. Passports are available at most Forest Service offices.

## Heritage Expeditions -

The Ninemile Wildlands Training Center, Lolo NF, provides public workshops on traditional horse handling, historic building restoration and minimum impact camping techniques.

## Outfitter and Guides Project -

This region wide project is not a new fee. Existing outfitter fees are retained by the local unit to complete projects that benefit outfitted clients as well as the general recreation user. The public and outfitters participate in project selection. Projects include miles of trail maintenance, additional wilderness and river rangers, interpretive and educational materials and signs. Dust abatement, weed spraying and road grading as well as toilet and trailhead improvements have been completed.

## Recreation Lodging Projects -

Historic cabins and lookouts (122 in all) are available for rent to the public. The project not only provides a unique vacation experience but also has resulted in preservation of many historic structures.

## Interpretive Centers -

The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Lewis and Clark NF, and Quake Lake Visitor Center, Gallatin NF, are key area attractions where demonstration fees continue to enhance interpretive programs and services.

## Rendezvous and

## Lolo Pass Ski Trails -

Demonstration fees have provided Olympic quality groomed ski trails and a biathlon course at Rendezvous Ski Trails, Gallatin NF. Trails are groomed and the parking lots plowed with fees generated at Lolo Pass, Clearwater NF.

# 2003 Accomplishments -

## Your fees at work...



### Regionwide Developed Sites/

#### Lake Como Projects -

Over 200 local campgrounds and group use sites retain fees for operation, maintenance and improvement. Users are especially happy with increased garbage and sanitation services as well as hosts, interpretive presentations and improved facilities. The Lake Como project, Bitterroot NF, also provided funds to replace a small boat used to maintain and patrol the shoreline.

#### Crystal Park -

The Crystal Park, Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF, offers an opportunity to dig crystals and recreate along the Pioneer Mountains National Scenic Byway.

#### Lolo Motorway -

Permits are being issued for travel on the Lolo Motorway. The lottery for permits to travel the Lolo Motorway was not initiated this year as use was not as heavy as anticipated.

#### Site Improvements -

On average, 86% of the revenue from fees is being returned to the recreation sites for staffing, maintenance and operation and improvements. The average cost of collection was 14%.

See the table below.

- ✓ Improved services for visitors using the National Forests and Grasslands.
- ✓ Historic renovation of cabins and lookouts used for public rental
- ✓ Construction and maintenance of trails, trailheads, campground, and boating facilities
- ✓ Interpretive services and programs; extension of operating hours/season
- ✓ Wilderness ranger contacts
- ✓ Campground host presence
- ✓ Groomed winter trails and plowed parking lots
- ✓ Heritage expedition opportunities
- ✓ Opportunity to dig crystals



Racetrack Cabin, Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF



Big Larch Campground Amphitheater, Lolo NF

## 2003 Revenues

### Project

Project	2003
Lolo Motorway	\$982
Crystal Park	\$5,237
Flathead Recreation Lodging	\$47,011
Region Recreation Lodging	\$285,986
Como Lake Developed Sites	\$43,796
Quake Lake Visitor Center	\$20,181
Regional Outfitter Guide	\$938,350
Regional Developed Sites	\$808,936
Lewis & Clark Interp Center	\$162,480
Rendezvous/Lolo Ski Trail	\$34,310
Heritage Expeditions	\$43,025
Golden Passports	\$65,874
Total	\$2,456,168

The Northern Region includes National Forests and Grasslands in Montana, northern Idaho and North and South Dakota.

### For more detailed information:

[www.fs.fed.us/r1/recreation/programs](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/recreation/programs)

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**U.S. Forest Service Informational Testimony on HJ 13**  
**A Joint Resolution of the Montana House and Senate Urging Congress**  
**to Repeal the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act**

DATE NO 2  
3/9/05  
HJ 13

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Terry Chute and I represent U.S. Forest Service Northern Regional Forester Gail Kimbell. The Forest Service is not taking a position on this bill. I am here today to provide you with factual information about the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to assist the committee in making an informed decision.

The Fee Demo program enacted by Congress in 1996 was scheduled to expire on December 31, 2005. A new authority--the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act--was enacted by Congress as part of the 2005 Omnibus Appropriations Bill and signed into law on December 8, 2004. This Act applies to Federal recreation lands under the jurisdiction of National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Forest Service.

The new authority addresses public concerns by limiting fees to sites that have a specified level of development or provide visitor services. The Act provides for a high level of public involvement in determining new fee areas and fee schedules by implementing the use of Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) for National Forest and BLM sites to give communities additional opportunities to provide input on the implementation of a fee or the establishment of a specific recreation fee site.

The Act specifically prohibits charging fees for general access to federal lands. This includes activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, camping in undeveloped areas, and driving through federal lands. The Act also prohibits charging fees for parking, picnicking, overlooks, dispersed areas with few or any developed recreation sites; and charging fees for individuals under 16 years of age. We understand that many visitors to lands managed by the Forest Service enjoy recreating in undeveloped areas, and for this reason a vast majority of the sites will remain free under the Act.

The majority of fee revenues are retained at the site of collection and used to improve recreation facilities and enhance visitor service. Typical uses of fee revenues include maintaining campgrounds, fixing boat launches, repairing rental cabins and lookouts, offering interpretive displays and tours, and other amenities that many visitors expect.

In Montana, Forest Service recreation fee program is expected to continue at several programs and sites under the new authority. These include the cabin rental program, outfitter and guide permit administration, Lake Como developed recreation complex, Quake Lake and Lewis & Clark Visitor Centers, Crystal Park, Heritage Expeditions at the Ninemile Ranger Station, and several developed campgrounds. Collection of fees for these services and developed sites, and the ability for the agency to use fee revenue to maintain and improve visitor services, has the support of the public that use these services and facilities. Without the authority to collect and retain recreation fees, visitor services would be reduced or eliminated, maintenance of recreation facilities would suffer, and some sites would likely be closed.

It is important to note that the authority for the Forest Service to collect recreation fees exists outside of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Repeal of this act would not remove Forest Service authority to collect fees, but would remove the agency's authority to retain a portion of collected fees and use them to improve recreation facilities and provide visitor services. Nearly all of the sites and programs in National Forests in Montana where recreation fees are collected under this authority charged fees prior to enactment of the Fee Demo program in 1996. Fees will continue to be collected for developed campgrounds, cabin rentals, and visitor centers even if this law is repealed. However, monies collected will be returned to the US Treasury instead of being invested in providing better recreation facilities and services on National Forests in Montana.

It is true that the Act allows collected fees to be used to establish other fee sites. Here is an example of how that authority has been used on Forests in Montana. The cabin rental program falls under the recreation fee program. These cabins are popular with the public and demand continues to exceed cabin availability. Collected rental fees are retained and used to maintain and repair the rental cabin. Receipts over and beyond what is needed for that particular cabin are sometimes used to restore other historic structures and bring them into the program, thus providing additional recreational opportunities for the public.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am available to answer questions and can provide you with further information at your request.

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## Montana National Forests - Recreation Fee Program

Project Name/Number	Location	Description/Comments
Lake Como Recreation Complex	Bitterroot NF	Includes 3 campgrounds (expanded) and developed day use site with beach, boat launch, and picnic sites (basic)
Quake Lake Visitor Center	Gallatin NF	Includes visitor center outdoor interpr. exhibits, guided programs
Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center	Lewis and Clark NF	Exhibit hall, theater, hourly feature film, daily interpretive programs, summer day camps, school year educational programs
Developed Campgrounds	All NFs in MT	Includes developed campgrounds not under concessionaire contract.
Outfitter & Guides	All NFs in MT	Existing O&G fees retained & used to enhance facilities and services used by the public and outfitted clients.
Crystal Park	Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF	Ensure that recreational mineral collection area is geologically stable and safe. Provide ranger at site for interpretation and contact.
Heritage Expeditions	Lolo NF	Hands-on, traditional skills training provided at the Ninemile Wildlands Training Center
Recreation Lodging	All NFs in MT	Provides maintenance and rehabilitation of over 100 rental cabins in MT

As of 03/07/05

