

Minutes

Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) Work Group Meeting

August 22, 2007

1. A meeting of the REA Work Group was convened via conference call at 1:00 p.m. on August 22, 2007. A toll free bridge line number was kindly arranged by Deborah Stevens for this conference call. Purpose of the meeting was to review and discuss a fee change proposal by the Tonto National Forest for the private river permit system for the Salt River Canyon Wilderness.
2. Attendees:
 - a. REA Work Group members: Glen Collins, Frances Werner, Jay Adkins, and Steve Saway (Norman Perry indicated he would be traveling that day but would try to call in if possible).
 - b. Forest Service personnel: Jeff Saari, Southwestern Region; Dave Killebrew, Connie Lane, and Don Sullivan, Tonto National Forest.
 - c. BLM representatives: Don Applegate, Arizona Recreation Program Lead, BLM Arizona State Office.
3. The following documents were posted to the RRAC web site prior to the conference call and contain details on the fee proposal:
 - a. Upper Salt River Canyon Wilderness Private River Permit System, Proposed Fee Structure Change (adobe acrobat document).
 - b. Salt River Canyon Wilderness Private River Permit System, Proposed Fee Structure Change (PowerPoint presentation). (Note: this file was too large for some of the REA Work Group members to download with a dial-up internet connection. A hard copy for Frances Werner had been requested but not yet received.)
4. Discussion:
 - a. The Chair asked all attendees to introduce themselves and then discussed the purpose of the meeting. Next, the Tonto National Forest representatives provided background on the Salt River Canyon Wilderness private river permit system and presented details on the fee change proposal using the documents mentioned above.
 - b. During the presentation, the briefers fielded questions and comments by the REA Work Group members. Some points raised by this discussion include the following:
 - The permit system covers about 32 miles of the Salt River Canyon Wilderness, between Gleason Flat and the take out immediately downstream of the Hwy 288 bridge. Permit users must also pay the White Mountain Apache Tribe \$15 per person per day (for 2 days) to run the river where it passes by tribal lands.
 - The fee proposal does not apply to outfitter-guides, which is governed by a separate process.
 - On average, there are about 1400 applications each season. Of this number, 240 permits are issued. Average group size is 9 people.

-- Recreation use of the river at Horseshoe Bend (which is accessible by vehicle) is not addressed by revenues from the private river permit fees. However, this may need to be re-considered as improvements are needed in the area.

-- The Forest's projected annual O&M costs (\$73,760) exceed the anticipated revenues from the private river permits. But the fee change proposal is expected to increase revenues from \$32,000 to \$44,000. The Forest will use the increased revenues to increase patrols, increase and improve services, and improve facilities.

-- The proposed permit fee is a flat \$125 fee (current fee is \$75) for one group up to 15 people. The Forest prefers a flat fee versus a per person fee which is harder to administer. The Forest also contends that group size does not significantly impact the costs of service. However, it was noted that the majority of other Western States' river permit fees are structured as per person. The flat fee can be viewed as inequitable for smaller groups.

-- The Forest has solicited public comments via their web site and also via press releases to local newspapers. The public comment period ends on August 31st. To date, there have been a few responses and mixed views. Some concerns expressed include (1) can the fee be refundable if the river is not runnable, and (2) can there be different fees for smaller versus larger groups.

4. After the discussion, it was agreed that the Tonto National Forest will provide the REA Work Group members an updated narrative proposal and updated PowerPoint presentation to pre-view before the next REA Work Group meeting on September 5th and next RAC meeting on September 6th. The updated fee proposal will include additional public comments through August 31st. Forest Service representatives will also attend the next REA Work Group and RAC meetings to present the updated proposal and updated public comments.

5. The Chair asked the callers how they felt about meeting via conference call. The callers' comments were favorable and indicated that speakers could be heard better than when calling in to a speaker phone. This format may be useful for future work group meetings.

6. Meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:36 p.m.

7. Minutes submitted by: Steve Saway, REA Work Group Chair

8. Date approved: September 5, 2007