

## **RECREATION FEE GUIDELINES FOR THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

**GOAL: Provide recreation sites, services, and settings that meet quality standards to enhance visitor experience and protect natural, heritage, and cultural resources.**

These guidelines help accomplish the goals and objectives in the recreation program work plan entitled, "The BLM's Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services." They also meet one of the priorities outlined in the work plan which is: Provide for and Receive Fair Value in Recreation and they provide interim guidance to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) signed by President Bush December 8, 2004. The overall strategy of the recreation fee program is to retain fee revenues to supplement appropriations and other funding sources, to repair, improve and maintain recreation sites and settings to quality standards (including trying to eliminate the backlog of recreation deferred maintenance), in order to maintain landscape settings, and to enhance the delivery of recreation services.

Recreation sites include developed and semi-developed overnight and day-use facilities. Recreation sites include areas where high levels of use take place and consequently require intensive management. Some of the amenities or services fee revenues can provide include reservation services, enhanced visitor safety and security measures, enhanced interpretive opportunities, facility improvements, restoration projects, and expanded visitor service hours.

### **KEY LESSONS LEARNED:**

1. Fees are acceptable if they have a direct connection to a perceived and/or tangible benefit.
2. Fees are most often supported for developed areas and expanded services.
3. Fairness, consistency, convenience of payment, and accountability are important to visitors.
4. An enduring program is only possible with wide support, especially public and congressional support.
5. One overall fee is desirable over multiple (layering) fees.
6. The approach that agencies use to enforce compliance affects individuals' perceptions about the fairness of fees.
7. On site agency presence increases public acceptance, compliance, and value to the fees they pay.
8. The Public prefer interagency passes.
9. Recreation visitors are not always concerned about who manages the recreation site.

**ASSUMPTIONS:**

1. Future appropriations for recreation will not be enough to meet recreation infrastructure and service needs.
2. Fees are only one part of a more comprehensive funding strategy.
3. The next phase of the fee program will be substantially refined. Fees will be nationally consistent and criteria-based, with a national system of recreation passes.
4. Opportunities for wildland recreation will decrease if we fail to provide sufficient resources to protect natural, heritage and cultural resources and provide for public health and safety.
5. Technology will create new and different demands and greater conflicts among users.
6. Fees may change visitor experience and use patterns.
7. This document outlines interim guidance and establishes the actions that BLM will take to implement Title VIII – Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, H.R. 4818.
8. This guidance is in harmony with the US Forest Service recreation fee “Blueprint.”
9. Fee program will be flexible and dynamic.

**PRINCIPLES:**

1. The recreation fee program must be designed and implemented for the visitor’s convenience and should:
  - a. Be consistent and similar among agencies.
  - b. Provide convenient payment options where appropriate (e.g., credit cards, Internet, off-site sales).
  - c. Require a single fee for standard recreation facilities/services.
2. Fees are only one part of a comprehensive funding strategy that are addressed independently in a larger site specific recreation area implementation or business plan that includes appropriated funding, volunteer assistance, interagency cooperation, grants, partnerships with the private sector, commercial operations, and leveraged funding.
3. Fee revenues will not be used to supplant normal appropriations, i.e., sites that collect fees will not have fee revenues offset by reductions in appropriations or a redirection of base funds.
4. Each BLM Field Office will provide a range of outdoor recreation opportunities including areas where there is no fee charged for participating in recreational activities.
5. Decisions to charge or not to charge a fee will be based upon the services and amenities provided and required to protect the health and safety of the visiting public and the protection of resources.
6. Fees may be levied only where there is a level of developed infrastructure, allocation of use, recreation service is readily apparent, there is significant visitation and a need exists to protect resources and the public’s health and safety.
7. Recreation fee revenues will be retained for use at the recreation site where they are collected and will be used to provide benefits visible to and desired by visitors.
8. The BLM’s goal will be to use 100 percent of the fee revenues at the site of collection but only as long as they can be use efficiently and effectively. Otherwise, revenues are to be used first at the site of collection, second to establish new fee sites within the

field office of collection, and third in the State where fees are collected to offset existing and new fee site costs.

9. Fee collection and revenue redistribution methods will use appropriate new technologies, such as internet and credit/smart card transactions where the need for their use has been identified based on visitor input and the site business plan.
10. Program implementation will follow consistent, predictable criteria.
11. Business plans are to be used in determining the appropriateness and level of fees. Plans will include, but not limited to, the level and type of development; cost and safety of collection; type, season, duration, and intensity of visitor use; compliance and enforcement capability; convenience; partnerships; stakeholder input; impacts to underserved communities and local businesses; private sector alternatives; and a communication and marketing plan.
12. BLM Field Offices and Districts will involve the communities of place and interest in decisions about fee project design and how the fee money will be invested.
13. BLM will be accountable for monitoring fiscal integrity, efficiency, implementing national policy, revenue distribution, and evaluation of the fee program.
14. Reports will be provided to the public through annual feedback on revenue collected, expenditures, projects completed, and priority projects for the following fiscal year. Reporting will be in the form of an accountability statement posted at the recreation site of revenue collection. Reporting could also include brochures, newspaper articles, radio spots, and oral presentations.

#### **LEADERSHIP:**

1. National Recreation Fee Leadership Council, co-chaired by Department of the Interior and United States Department of Agriculture, will oversee and coordinate the recreation fee program. Responsibilities include: 1) national consistency; 2) pass policy; 3) collection policy; 4) expenditure criteria; 5) fee receipt distribution methodology and equity; 6) accounting and reporting mechanisms; 7) program evaluation, including feedback loops for adjusting policies and addressing problems; 8) joint research on various aspects of the program, including pass technology and alternatives to enhance public convenience and increase agency program administrative efficiency; and 9) other recreation fee policy and coordination as required.
2. The Washington Office will set Bureau policy and performance measures for the program, based on Fee Council decisions and agency needs. Guidance will be in the form of Instruction Memoranda, and other directives. Broad oversight of and coordination with the States will also be conducted from the WO with feedback from the Recreation and Visitor Services Advisory Team (RVSAT).
3. Accountability for program implementation is through line officers at the various implementation levels. State Directors, through interdisciplinary and possible interagency Recreation Resource Advisory Councils (RRAC), subcommittee of an established State Resource Advisory Council (RAC), or locally formally established recreation interested groups, such as Friends Groups, shall perform oversight of the Recreation Fee Program and ensure that projects comply with law and policy. BLM Field Office Managers shall report to State Directors, who will require each BLM office to (1) submit line-officer-approved business plans, and communication plans

for prospective recreation sites, which will be reviewed by the State Office and approved by the State Director (unless otherwise specified); (2) monitor fee program implementation; and (3) maintain timely and effective fiscal accounting through tools such as business plans, stakeholder reports, and regular technical or program reviews.

4. State Directors and their RRAC or locally established group will implement plans to align with the BLM’s fee program. Initial focus will be on eliminating or modifying fees that are inconsistent with this guidance.

**FEE CATEGORIES**

Public lands recreation sites and services provide an array of benefits and amenities ranging from collective societal goods to personal use. This forms a spectrum of benefits for the provision of visitor services.



On the left are recreational activities that both the using and non using public believe are inherently activities that benefit the public as a whole while on the right are activities in which the user clearly benefits directly and would be required to pay the largest percent of the services cost. Correspondingly, the idea is that use of funding should migrate across this spectrum between appropriated funds and non-appropriated (revenue generated by user fees) funds.

Table 1 shows categories which reflect the range of benefits/amenities and fees for various recreational opportunities on BLM Public Lands.

Table 1

| Category 1   | Category 2   | Category 3   |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>100% Appropriated</b><br/>Basic services, amenities, and structures that provide a benefit to society as a whole: general public lands access, scenic overlook, wayside exhibit, stand alone restrooms or picnic tables, undesignated parking, dispersed areas with low or no investment, information centers, camping at undeveloped sites that do not provide a limited number of facilities</p> | <p><b>Mix of Appropriated and User Generated</b><br/>Enhanced programs and services that provide a mix of societal and individual benefits: developed day-use sites, basic interpretive programs, transportation systems, visitor centers, major attraction for the site, highly impacted day use sites that require management attention to provide for public health and safety and to protect resources</p> | <p><b>Emphasis on User Generated Revenue</b><br/>Services that provide individual benefits: developed campgrounds, cabins, boat launches, designated overnight camping areas, swimming areas, developed hot springs, fishing docks and services, specialized interpretive programs, group day use and overnight sites, equipment rentals, specialized services, reservation services, and all Special Recreation Permits</p> |

1. Free Sites and Services (Category 1) – This category reflects the broad societal benefits of providing general taxpayer-supported recreational opportunities and the

principle that a portion of all BLM Public Lands should be available free of charge to all of the public. In Category 1 we would NOT charge a fee for:

- a. General access to BLM Public Lands.
  - b. Drive-through, walk/hike-through, horseback ride-through, or float-through only without using the facilities and services unless specifically authorized.
  - c. Solely for parking, undesignated parking or picnicking along roadsides.
  - d. Overlooks, scenic pullouts, or interpretive waysides.
  - e. Dispersed areas with low or no expenditures in facilities or services.
  - f. Information offices and small centers that provide general area information, regulations, orientation, and limited services and/or interpretive exhibits (does not include BLM's larger Interpretive or Visitor Centers).
  - g. Camping at undeveloped sites that do not provide a minimum number of facilities and services as outlined in 3a below.
2. Standard amenity recreation sites and services fee (Category 2) – This category reflects a mix of societal and personal benefits, where it is appropriate for users to share in some of the costs. The decision on whether or not to charge a standard fee meeting the following criteria is based on business plan analysis, which includes local considerations.

Fees for standard amenity recreation sites and services will largely be assessed through a system of passes. These passes would generally be accepted for all passengers in a private vehicle, or for mandatory transportation systems. Standard amenity fees may be assessed for sites and services that meet one of the following criteria:

- a. National Conservation Areas, National Volcanic Monuments,
- b. Developed day-use recreation sites and services as defined in Table 2,
- c. A destination visitor or interpretive center that provides a broad range of interpretive services, programs, and media,
- d. High Impact Recreation Area- Certain day use areas such as those classified as "Intensive Use Area" in Recreation Management Information System (RMIS) where substantial investments have been made for restoration, public safety, sanitation facilities, education, maintenance, and other activities are necessary to protect the health and safety of visitors, cultural resources and the natural environment. Fees can be easily collected and the areas are characterized by heavy public recreation use. They may contain little development. Heavy use results in environmental impacts such as noticeable litter, vandalism, soil compaction or erosion. These areas require intensive management to enhance visitor experiences, address environmental needs and manage conflicting uses. These sites would contain all of the following amenities:
  - Designated developed parking

- Permanent toilet facility
  - Permanent trash receptacle
  - Interpretive sign, exhibit, or kiosk
  - Picnic tables and
  - Security services
- e. Person under the age of 16 years of age and school groups on outings can not be charged a fee at standard amenity recreation sites.
3. Expanded recreation sites and services fees (Category 3) – This category includes sites and services that provide direct benefits primarily to individuals or groups rather than to society as a whole. The individual or group receiving a direct service or using a specialized facility should bear a greater share of the direct costs of providing the service or facility.

Expanded fees cover specialized outdoor recreation sites and services. The decision on whether a basic or expanded fee applies at sites that could fall into category 2 or 3 must take into account local considerations, including fees charged at nearby sites that are similar in nature, value for fee paid, and degree of development. Golden Age, and Access Passports valid at the time of this Act and in accordance with the requirement of a replacement national pass publication of the FR in (a)(3) of the Act shall be valid in accordance with the terms agreed to at the time of issuance of the passport. Valid, (grandfathered) Golden Age and Access passports will only be valid for 50% discount for categories a, b, c, and d. The amount of the fee will be recommended by each individual Field Office, within national guidelines for each type of use (see Table 3). Expanded recreation sites and services include:

- a. Developed campgrounds where a majority of the following amenities are provided: tent or trailer spaces, picnic tables, drinking water, access road, refuse containers, toilet facilities, fee collection by an employee or agent of the BLM, reasonable visitor protection, and (if campfires are permitted in the campground) simple devices for containing a campfire.
- b. Developed boat launches with specialized facilities or services such as: mechanical or hydraulic boat lifts or facilities, multi-lane paved ramps, paved parking, refuse containers, restrooms and other improvements such as boarding floats, loading ramps, fish cleaning stations.
- c. Developed swimming or hot spring sites with a majority (4 out of 7) of the following amenities: bathhouse with plumbing (showers and/or flush toilets), changing rooms, refuse containers, picnic areas, paved parking, attendants (including lifeguards), swimming floats and decks.
- d. Specialized interpretive services such as guided tours, movies, and seminars.

Golden Passports are not valid for the following:

- e. Group day-use or overnight sites or facilities, such as pavilions, or reserved group/multi-family campsites.

- f. Use of hookups for electricity, cable, or sewer.
- g. Use of sanitary dump stations.
- h. Use of areas where emergency medical or first-aid services are administered from facilities staffed by public employees or employees under a contract or reciprocal agreement with the Federal Government.
- i. Facility or equipment rentals, such as cabins, lookouts, and historic structures, and specialized equipment such as hookups for water, electricity, cable, and sewer, sanitary dump stations, audio tour equipment, portable sanitation devices, boating equipment, binoculars, and similar recreation equipment.
- j. Specialized services that require significant non-routine agency expenditures and/or additional attention by agency staff such as intensive management of off highway vehicle (OHV) recreation areas (including snowmobiles), routinely groomed cross country ski trails, and extensive conservation programs, and all Special Recreation Permits.
- k. Optional transportation services/systems.
- l. Reservation services, use and application fees (where Special Recreation Permit fees are required, they shall be in lieu of any basic fees assessed to access the expanded fee site). The fee level should fund an appropriate portion of the expenses directly related to the activity for which the fee is being charged, and may include a single permit-processing or reservation fee.
- m. Concessionaire services are not included in the recreation fee program and are not covered by passes, except as agreed to in advance between parties.

## **EXPENDITURES**

1. Field Office Expenditures – It is BLM’s policy to retain 100 percent of recreation fee receipts at the site of collection for each Field Office except as noted in number 2. below. Of this amount, at least 85% shall be used for recreation related: backlogged repair and maintenance projects, interpretation, signage, habitat or facility enhancement, resource preservation, maintenance, law enforcement directly related to recreation use, support of volunteer projects, Challenge Cost Share projects, and similar partnership authorities directly relating to visitor enjoyment, visitor access, and health and safety at recreation fee projects.
2. Administration, Overhead, and Indirect Costs -- The BLM may use not more than an average of 15 percent of total recreation generated revenues collected under this Act for administration, overhead, and indirect costs related to the recreation fee program except in the case of Special Recreation Permits (SRP) where this amount can not be

exceeded for overhead and indirect costs related to issuing and administering the SRP.

3. Limitation on Use of Fees – The BLM may not use any recreation fees for biological monitoring on Federal recreational lands and waters under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 for listed or candidate species nor for employee bonuses.
4. State & National Expenditures – Expenditures shall be used (1) to reduce recreation deferred maintenance; (2) for a revolving fund focused on recreation projects authorized by legislation that provide a demonstrable improvement to BLM Public Land recreation sites and services that would otherwise take years to realize; (3) for funding recreation enhancements through volunteer projects and the Challenge Cost Share program; and (4) for limited State and National recreation fee program administration.

## **FEE STRUCTURE**

Recreation fees will be based upon a pass system for standard recreation sites/services and where appropriate for expanded recreation sites/services.

Basic Pass System – Consistent with the principle of a single fee for standard recreation sites and services, a pass system will be used for this purpose (see “Fee Category #2” above). The pass system will be implemented to minimize fee layering and avoid multiple fees at nearby sites.

- a) Types of Passes. A visitor may purchase the following passes:

BLM Site Specific Recreation Pass – A BLM Recreation Pass will be available for basic recreation sites and services on a specific BLM recreation site for which it has been purchased. This pass may be valid for a single day, for a period of up to 12 months from the date of purchase, or for calendar year as determined in the business plan. Passes may also be developed for expanded fee sites (see below).

Multi-BLM or Interagency or State Passes- These passes may be developed by travel region or state and may include multiple federal, state, and county agencies.

National Passes – For visitor convenience, an interagency national pass will be developed “America the Beautiful - National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.” Until this pass is available, the Golden Passports, i.e., Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and Golden Access Passports, will be accepted as the national pass for all sites and areas that meet the definition for standard amenity fees (change “entrance” fee definition from Land and Water Conservation Fund Act-LWCFA-to align with the “standard amenity” fee definition). Until they are replaced, Golden Age and Golden Access passports will continue to provide benefits as currently authorized for expanded amenity recreation fee sites in category 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, (50% discount). Passes will not be accepted for sites and services meeting category 3e, 3f, 3g, 3h, 3i, 3j, 3k, 3l, or 3m.

Pass Administration. Passes will be sold as an internet transaction and at sites or points-of-contact most convenient for the public. Passes will be sold per vehicle, and compliance will generally be vehicle-based. Where vehicle-based passes are impractical or not enforceable (as in walk-up sites), fees may be assessed on a per-person daily fee basis or with a basic fee pass (valid for the holder and 3 persons). State and Field Offices may set policies for issuing agency passes in exchange for volunteer services. Issuance of Golden Eagle Passports for volunteers will be based on interagency policy.

Expanded Amenity Fees will be assessed on an individual point-of-service basis. They apply to items covered in “Fee Category #3” above. A multi-visit annual pass may be developed to provide value where expanded amenity fees are charged.

**NATIONAL CONSISTENCY/LOCAL FLEXIBILITY:** Adherence to these guidelines will help achieve national consistency. Major exceptions to respond to local situations must comply with legal authority, have demonstrated local support, and first be reviewed and recommended by the local Field Office, RRAC and any special friends or special interest groups, District Managers and State Director prior to final approval by the BLM Director.

**EFFECT OF REGULATIONS:** A regulation or policy issued under a provision of law repealed by the FLREA shall remain in effect to the extent such a regulation or policy is consistent with the provisions of this Act until the Secretary issues a regulation, guideline, or policy under this Act that supersedes the earlier regulation.

**Table 2                      Developed Day-Use Sites and Services**

| <b>Sites and Services Category</b> | <b>Sites and Services Descriptors</b>   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Developed Day-Use Sites            | <p>All “Standard Amenity” recreation sites and services must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Facilitate DAY-USE recreation or serve DAY-USE recreationists;</li> <li>❑ Consist of site modifications that protect resources and provide for public health and safety;</li> <li>❑ Be a well defined recreation site;</li> <li>❑ Allow for fees to be convenient &amp; efficiently collected</li> <li>❑ Have toilet facilities</li> <li>❑ Have designated defined parking (paved or well-surfaced);</li> <li>❑ Have identification and informational sign; AND</li> <li>❑ Provide picnic tables,</li> <li>❑ Provide security services</li> <li>❑ Have interpretive sign(s), exhibit(s), kiosk(s),</li> <li>❑ Have trash receptacle,</li> </ul> <p>Examples: Trailheads for basic cross-country ski trails, hiking, biking, horseback, or multiple use, interpretive sites, river, lake or reservoir parking sites, swimming beaches, or developed picnic sites.</p> |

Table 2 – Developed Day-Use Sites and Services (continued)

| <p><b>Sites and Services Category</b></p>                 | <p><b>Sites and Services Descriptors</b></p>   |
|---|--|
| <p>Destination Visitor/Interpretive/Discovery Centers</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Sites and facilities designed and managed to provide a broad range of information and interpretive programs. These facilities may have a natural or cultural attraction as a major theme, and provide basic services. Basic interpretive services include short interpretive talks at campgrounds and visitor centers that are not charged separately from the Standard Amenity use fee.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Developed Recreation Sites Along Highway Corridors</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ A collection of significantly developed recreation sites (as described above) situated along a heavily used paved or improved gravel road corridor. The use of the corridor, including the associated sites, requires intensive management. Fees are not charged for use of the highway or access to private land or business.</li> </ul>   |

**Table 3 – Campgrounds Level of Development Table Guidelines**

| Level of Development   | Amenities*  | Price Range/site/night** |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| Low Cost of Development<br>(\$15 - \$50 K – Current Replacement Value (CRV)) | Designated Site<br>Maintained roads<br>Parking bumpers<br>Tables<br>Fire Ring<br>Pit/Vault toilet<br>Trash collection<br>Kiosk  | \$5 - \$13               |
| Moderate Cost of Development<br>(\$51 - \$100 K – CRV)                       | Selections from above +<br>Pit or Vault toilet<br>Water<br>Fire rings/grill<br>Tent pads<br>Shade ramada<br>Law Enforcement<br>Boat, equestrian, OHV ramps<br>Fish cleaning station<br>Regular Maintenance  | \$10 - \$20              |
| High Cost of Development<br>(> \$100 K – CRV)                                | Selected items in the above levels +<br>On site presence<br>Potable water<br>Water hook up<br>Electrical hook up<br>Sewer hook up<br>Sewer RV dump station<br>Flush or Vault Toilets<br>Showers<br>Paved Roads<br>Trails, maintained<br>Docks<br>Phone Service<br>Concessions | \$18 - \$30              |

\* These are examples of amenities for this level of development. It is not necessary to have all the items but to provide guidance as to the level of development. These may not be exhaustive.

\*\* The price overlap is intended in order to accommodate the wide range in facilities in varying degrees of appraised values in a wide variety of locations.