

ISSUE: **USACE RECREATION FEES**

BACKGROUND:

In 1995, the Congress undertook major changes to the federal recreation fees program established as part of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. Through an amendment to the FY96 Interior appropriations legislation, the Congress created the National Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. "Fee Demo" authorized four federal agencies to define recreation fee programs and test them out in at least ten and no more than 50 sites, and further provided for retention of at least 80% of the new fees at the collecting site, available for expenditure without further action by the Congress and designed to supplement the normal appropriations process. Subsequently, Congress extended the demo period, essentially eliminated the cap on the number of sites covered by the program and made the retention apply to all recreation fees, not just new fees. Based upon the lessons of "Fee Demo," the Congress passed a ten year fee program embracing most of the initial provisions in December 2004 (FLREA). However, the 2004 action extended the program to the a fifth federal agency – the Bureau of Reclamation – and created a new network of advisory bodies for Forest Service and BLM fee efforts. These programs now provide some \$200 million annually in resources for the federal agencies.

Recreation interests sought to include the US Army Corps of Engineers, the largest single provider of federal recreation opportunities, under "Fee Demo" from the inception but encountered resistance from the leadership of the Corps' authorizing committee in the House. Attempts were again made to add the Corps in 2004, but again jurisdictional issues arose. As a consequence, the USACE cannot now: collect and retain recreation fees to help provide services and facilities desired by the public; cannot sell the new unified America the Beautiful Pass, including the derivatives for seniors; cannot honor the new America the Beautiful Pass. If a new veterans version of the America the Beautiful Pass is approved by Congress, as expected, it is especially ironic that the Corps – a unit of the U.S. Army – will be unable to honor the new pass. Moreover, current budget provisions appear likely to force recreation site closures in FY08 and beyond. The Administration has proposed to cover the USACE under FLREA in recent budget submissions but has proposed that the retention provisions apply solely to fees above current collection levels.

ACTION NEEDED:

USACE is a primary recreation provider and needs appropriate recreation fee authority. Moreover, a central goal of FLREA – a unified federal re-creation fee program – is undermined by the failure to include USACE. ***We ask your active efforts to add USACE to coverage under FLREA.***

MORE INFORMATION:

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