

Section 1: Introduction

Every year, over 400 million Americans and visitors from around the world visit America's national parks, national forests, wildlife refuges, and BLM-managed public lands to hike, ride, fish, camp and otherwise enjoy the abundant recreation opportunities offered on our Federal lands. The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA), enacted in 2004, authorizes the Department of the Interior's National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation),² as well as the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (FS), to charge recreation fees on some of those lands.³ The vast majority of Federal lands are free to the public. Approximately 99.5 percent of BLM lands and 98 percent of FS lands (65 percent of FS developed sites) remain available to the public free of charge. At NPS sites across the nation, 147 of 391 sites charge entrance fees under REA. FWS charges entrance fees at 35 of about 450 refuges that are open to the public.

REA's major benefits include facilitating a more seamless and consistent interagency fee program; allowing recreation areas to use revenues to improve services and facilities for visitors; providing a single Federal recreation pass valid for all REA agencies nationwide; and enhancing public engagement in the fee program. Recreation fee revenues also have a positive impact on non-Federal sources of funding by providing the revenues necessary for cooperative agreements and facilitating volunteer work that results in on-the-ground benefits. This report summarizes the agencies' achievements, challenges, and opportunities under the Recreation Fee Program. The agencies continue to fine tune the program based on their experiences and lessons learned.

Since 1996 when Congress established the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program (Fee Demo), over \$2 billion has been collected by the participating agencies. These dollars have translated into tangible improvements in visitor services and infrastructure. Improvements include visitor center rehabilitation, restroom upgrades, road and trail repairs, campground improvements, historic structure enhancements, education and visitor interpretative programs, accessibility improvements, and technology upgrades to improve customer services and implement state of the art reservation and trip planning services for visitors. Since the Recreation Fee Program was initiated, over 10,000 projects have improved on-the-ground facilities, conserved natural resources, enhanced recreation, expanded educational opportunities, and preserved America's heritage. Many of these improvements would not have been completed or would have been delayed without the revenue provided from recreation fees.

Authority to retain and spend recreation fee revenues is critical to maintain and manage Federal lands and effectively address deferred maintenance at national parks, national forests, and other Federal lands. Recreation fees are a reliable and ready source of funding that allows the agencies to respond quickly, as well as plan long-term projects. Many visitors who return to a familiar recreation site are able to see improvements in the places that are special to them.

Section 9 of REA calls for the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to submit reports to Congress on a triennial basis. The first Triennial Report, submitted in May 2006, focused on the transition from Fee Demo to REA, development of internal policies and guidelines, activities of BLM and FS to establish Recreation Resource Advisory Committees, and the implementation of

² Reclamation has a limited involvement in the REA Program compared to the other participating agencies; this limited role will be reflected in this Report.

³ REA was enacted as part of the 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Bill (P.L. 108-447). REA will sunset ten years after the date of enactment, in 2014. REA replaced the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program, which was enacted in section 315 of the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations of 1996 and was subsequently extended through 2004.

the new Interagency Pass.⁴ In the past three years, the agencies have completed implementation and are enhancing management of the Recreation Fee Program.

The second Triennial Report provides information about ongoing programs such as the Interagency Pass program, the activities of Recreation Resource Advisory Committees, and continuing efforts to ensure accountability. In accordance with section 9 of REA, this report:

- Provides examples of past projects accomplished using REA fees;
- Provides examples of planned projects and programs to be accomplished with REA fees;
- Highlights the status of the REA Program implementation, including budgetary data; and
- Makes recommendations for changes in the overall fee system.

⁴ The first Triennial Report can be found at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/passespermits/docs/accomps/wo-rpt-congress/fy05-report-to-congress.pdf>.
