

## Section 3: Status of REA

### *Introduction*

Since the passage of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act in December of 2004, implementation progress has been made on a variety of issues by all participating agencies. Sites have been inventoried to ensure compliance with the law, and public participation processes have been implemented by all agencies. Progress in public participation includes establishment of an extensive program by BLM and the FS known as Recreation/Resource Advisory Committees (RRACs). A new consistent Interagency Pass program has also been implemented. Passes, decals, and brochures are now available at over 1,500 field sites, the internet, and through select retail partners. A new Federal Lands Photo contest has been implemented, co-sponsored by a corporate sponsor, the National Park Foundation, and NPS on behalf of all the public land management agencies. In addition, the consolidated Recreation.gov website provides trip planning, recreation information, and reservation services for facilities at five agencies. Nearly 10,000 fee projects have been initiated to upgrade visitor facilities, services, and programs.

The Departments have a shared responsibility to ensure that Federal lands continue to play a central role in providing recreational opportunities for the American people. Fulfilling this mission requires maintaining visitor facilities and services, preserving natural and historic resources, and enhancing visitor opportunities with an adequate and steady source of funding. The goal of the REA Program is to collect and retain reasonable fees that can be used to enhance and improve visitor facilities, services, and experiences. The Recreation Fee Program has contributed significantly towards the accomplishment of the Departments' mission to serve as effective stewards of the public lands.

Visitors consistently comment, and surveys confirm, that they are willing to pay reasonable recreation fees if they know the money will be used to improve the site they are visiting. Unlike fees collected under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCFA) the REA Program provides that 80-100 percent of the fee revenue generated remains at the site where it was collected for maintenance and improvements.<sup>5</sup> Consistently, interagency surveys show that high percentages (80-90 percent) of visitors are satisfied with the fee paid for the services provided. Surveys and public contacts suggest that visitors appreciate the significant improvements made to these sites from fee revenues and that visitors are more supportive of fees when the fees are reinvested into the sites and facilities they use.

Under REA, the public also has a voice at the decision making table when fees are proposed. REA strengthened the public participation and civic engagement requirements for all agencies in the establishment of new fees, modifying fees, and designating new fee areas.

- REA established RRACs for BLM and FS. RRACs are composed of a diverse group of stakeholders who represent a wide range of interests, including recreation, environmental, tourism, and tribal and local government interests. As partners in the process, RRACs examine each agency fee proposal thoroughly, offering input, and helping to ensure that the agencies carefully consider public concerns, issues, and questions when developing proposals.

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<sup>5</sup> REA directs that no less than 80 percent of fee revenues collected at a unit or area be used at that unit or area. REA authorizes agencies to reduce this amount to 60 percent under certain circumstances, but this has not been exercised.

- NPS, FWS, and Reclamation developed extensive public involvement and civic engagement processes as mandated by REA. Each agency has specific requirements for conducting outreach to the public, key constituency groups, local government and civic organizations, and congressional representatives. Information obtained from outreach is used to help inform the decision making process.

Participating agencies make efforts to ensure that fees do not become a barrier for potential visitors, for example by providing fee waivers for educational groups. Annual interagency and area specific passes offer frequent visitors an economical way to visit Federal lands. Lifetime passes are available to seniors and to U.S. citizens who are permanent residents with permanent disabilities. These passes also provide the additional benefit of discounted camping.

The REA Program represents a significant step towards providing a consistent recreation fee experience for visitors across Federal agencies. The interagency “America the Beautiful – the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass,” established in January 2007, allows a visitor to access sites managed by five separate agencies using a single pass. Since the introduction of the Interagency Pass Program, over one million passes have been issued to the public affording millions of visitors an economical way to see and experience America’s public lands. For example, a sightseer in Utah and Nevada can view the majestic rock formations of Bryce and Zion National Parks, explore Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area on the Ashley National Forest and hike through BLM-managed Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area using a single pass.

### National Recreation Reservation Service

The REA Program has also been used to help meet visitors’ demand for “one-stop-shopping” as they set out to explore and experience America’s public lands. In February 2007, the E-Government initiative, Recreation One-Stop, which includes the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS), launched its Recreation.gov website. The site offers the public the convenience of making reservations for more than 2,500 locations, day use areas, cabins, and tour information facilities directly through the site or toll-free number. Recreation.gov also provides visitors with instant, one-stop access to maps, recreation activities, and other useful Federal lands information.

Since its launch, Recreation.gov has received almost 15 million site visits and over 2.8 million reservations. Three-quarters of Recreation.gov users place their reservations online, while the rest use the call center (toll-free number) option. Approximately 98 percent of reservations made on Recreation.gov are for camping, but there are also opportunities to purchase permits and tour tickets as well. The agencies are working to expand the offerings on Recreation.gov to ensure the most convenience possible for visitors. The website saw a 30 percent increase in traffic between 2007 and 2008; hence, the public is clearly becoming aware of the site and many people are making it an integral step in their travel planning process. Agencies collected \$66.5 million in revenue in 2007 and \$75.3 million in 2008 through the NRRS. Contractor and administrative costs for NRRS, which totaled approximately \$2.9 million in 2007 and \$3.5 million in 2008, are shared among the participating agencies. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers participates in the NRRS and bears a portion of the costs, but is not an REA agency and therefore collects fees under a separate authority.

### Status of the Bureau of Reclamation’s REA Program

Reclamation’s congressionally directed mission of obtaining partners to manage the recreation resources on its lands and waterbodies is significantly different than the missions of the other REA participating agencies. Reclamation has delegated to its five regional directors the authority to make the final decision as to whether or not a qualified area/site would participate in the REA Program.

Reclamation's primary recreation goal is to find partners to manage all recreation sites located on Reclamation lands and waterbodies. Reclamation often seeks these "managing partners" from non-Federal (such as State or local governments) as well as Federal entities. Of the 289 developed recreation areas at Reclamation projects, the agency has entered into agreements with managing partners for all but 33 areas, and shares management with a managing partner at nine other areas.

Most of the remaining 33 recreation areas are in remote locations that either have a short recreation season and/or low annual visitation. After an internal evaluation of the 33 developed recreation areas directly managed by Reclamation alone, it was determined that only six areas met the criteria to qualify them as REA areas. Of those six areas, New Melones was the only Reclamation recreation area selected to participate in the REA Program. The agency has determined that it would not be effective to implement REA at the other five areas, due to either their remoteness or cost effectiveness realities. The law does not require Reclamation to include eligible facilities in the program. The administrative costs of managing these remote areas would likely exceed the 15 percent limitation requirements established by REA. In the future, if Reclamation determines that the benefits of adding additional sites exceed the costs, consideration will be given to adding additional sites.

In addition and as a result of this internal evaluation, it was determined that Reclamation's participation at REA areas located on Reclamation lands and waterbodies would be as follows:

- Other Federal Agencies: Participation in REA by other Federal agencies at 84 of the 289 developed recreation areas will be determined by that managing agency. For example, participation at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area would be determined by NPS
- Non-Federal Governmental Entities: Reclamation's 66 non-Federal government partners who manage 159 of the 289 developed recreation areas will not participate in REA.
- Reclamation: Participation in REA for areas that meet the criteria, and are directly managed by Reclamation, will be determined by the appropriate regional office.

### *REA Statistics*

This section of the report provides data on revenues, cost of collection, obligations, and visitation. These four categories provide a useful analytic breakdown of each agency's implementation of the program. More detailed data can be found in Appendix A.

### Revenue

The following figures summarize REA revenues collected by the participating agencies (also in Table A-2 of Appendix A).<sup>6</sup>

- REA revenues for all agencies in FY 2006 were \$209.5 million; in FY 2007 they were \$245.5 million; and in FY 2008 they were \$253.2 million. Of the \$253.2 in REA revenue for FY 2008, NPS collected \$171.9 million, FWS collected \$4.7 million, BLM collected \$15.0 million, and FS collected \$61.6 million.

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<sup>6</sup> Revenue figures cited in this section fall into two general categories, which are shown in tabular format in Table A-2. The first is "REA revenue" which comprises revenue collected under the REA authority. The second is "gross revenue" (or "total revenue") which includes REA revenue as well as revenue collected under other authorities. As this report focuses on the REA, "REA revenue" is used more often. However, in some cases "gross revenue" is more appropriate, as with calculations of cost of collection. Table A-2 includes revenues from deed-restricted parks, sales of the National Parks Pass, Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, Transportation fee, and fees collected under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, as well as REA revenues.

- REA revenues for NPS increased from \$136.5 million in FY 2006 to \$165.6 million in FY 2007 to \$171.9 million in FY 2008.
- REA revenues for FWS increased steadily over the past three years from \$4.3 million in FY 2006 to \$4.4 million in FY 2007 to \$4.7 million in FY 2008.
- REA revenues for BLM have varied slightly over the last three years, from \$15.4 million in FY 2006 to \$14.6 million in FY07 to \$15.0 million in FY 2008.
- REA revenues for FS increased from \$50.2 million in FY 2005 to \$61.6 million in FY 2008.
- REA revenues for Reclamation in FY 2008, the first year that Reclamation collected fees under REA, were \$209,611.

## Cost of Collection

In FY 2008, the cost of collection across the REA Program was 14.5 percent of gross fee revenues (including revenues from the Interagency Pass and NPS transportation fees). The cost of collection has been falling since FY 2003, when costs represented 20.7 percent of gross fee revenues (including some non-REA revenues such as revenues from NPS deed-restricted parks, National Parks Pass, and transportation fees). Cost of collection is calculated against gross fee (or “total”) revenue, because in some cases, the cost for collecting REA revenues and some non-REA revenues overlap, making it infeasible to separate costs.<sup>7</sup> REA revenue and gross revenue are identified separately in Table A-2.

- In FY 2008, the average cost of collection for NPS was \$32.0 million or 17.2 percent of gross fee revenues, down from \$32.8 million or 18.1 percent of gross fee revenues in FY 2007. Costs of collection have varied between about 17 and 21 percent of fee revenues since FY 2004. Many small parks in the program have historically had higher collection costs as a percent of the gross revenue they collect. The locations where collection costs represent a large portion of gross revenue typically collect very small amounts of revenue, or have higher costs due to more complex site logistics and collection requirements (e.g., staffed entrance fee stations). The average cost of collection as a percentage of total fee revenue decreased in 2008 due to revenue increases, continued technology improvements, and better tracking and accountability processes. NPS policy is to keep cost of collection below 20 percent.
- In FY 2006, the cost of collection for FWS was \$558,000 or 13.0 percent of gross fee revenues. In FY 2007, the cost of collection was \$595,000 or 13.5 percent. In FY 2008, the cost of collection was \$700,000 or 15.0 percent of gross fee revenues. This fluctuation is consistent with past years. FWS policy is to keep cost of collection below 20 percent.
- In FY 2006, the cost of collection for BLM was \$1.3 million, or 8.3 percent of total recreation fee revenues. In FY 2007, the cost of collection decreased to \$439,000, or 3.0 percent of total fee revenues. In FY 2008, the cost of collection was \$415,000, or 2.8 percent of total fee revenues. Until FY 2007, BLM’s cost of collection included substantial costs associated with installation of fee collection equipment. Cost of collection has declined substantially due to the completion of a large-scale deployment of fee collection equipment in FY 2007, as well as establishment of an improved cost tracking system.
- The cost of collection for the FS was \$4.9 million, or 9.2 percent of total recreation fee revenues in FY 2006, \$5.1 million or 8.4 percent of total fee revenues in FY 2007, and \$5.8 million or 9.4 percent of total fee revenues in FY 2008. FS policy is to keep cost of collection below 15 percent.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, under P.L. 105-391, enacted in 1998, Congress authorized parks to collect a transportation fee and retain the revenue to fund transportation systems. Subsequently, a number of parks established transportation fees. In some cases, parks set aside a part of the entrance fee as a transportation fee.

- The total cost of collection for Reclamation was \$94,906 in FY 2008. Further details on Reclamation costs and revenues are provided in Table A-9. Reclamation policy is to keep cost of collection below 15 percent.

## Obligation of Revenue

Annual obligations as a percentage of total recreation fee revenues available have increased from approximately 33 percent in FY 2000 to 46 percent in FY 2008. Over this period, both revenues and obligations have substantially increased in absolute terms.

- NPS obligated \$179.3 million to projects in FY 2008. This represents about 104 percent of annual REA revenue. Unobligated balances have declined from \$296.7 million in FY 2006 to \$266.7 million in FY 2008.
- FWS obligations are about equal to revenues. In FY 2006, FWS obligated \$4.2 million; in FY 2007, obligations were \$4.0; and in FY 2008, they were \$4.0 million. Unobligated balances increased from \$4.2 million in FY 2006 to \$5.3 million in FY 2008. FWS updated its Recreation Fee Program Guidance in September 2008 and included direction to increase obligations. FWS expects the new Guidance will result in an increase in obligations beginning in FY 2009.
- BLM obligations were greater than annual REA revenues in FY 2008, approximately equal to annual REA revenues in FY 2007, and somewhat less than annual revenues in FY 2006. Unobligated balances have remained between \$10 and \$11 million over the FY 2007-2008 period.
- FS obligations increased from about \$50 million in FY 2006 to about \$67 million in FY 2008. Unobligated balances declined from \$30.1 million in FY 2006 to \$25.6 million in FY 2008.
- In FY 2008, Reclamation's REA site, New Melones Lake, obligated \$94,906 of the \$209,611 in revenue collected.
- In accordance with REA and Departmental and bureau policies, REA revenue is not used to fund biological monitoring of listed or candidate Endangered Species Act species or for employee bonuses.

## Visitation

Total visitation for the Department of the Interior agencies dropped in 2006 to 365 million from 395 million in 2005.<sup>8</sup> Visitation has essentially remained constant at just under 375 million during 2007 and 2008. Additional visitation data for the Department of the Interior agencies for the period 2003 - 2008 can be found in Appendix A, Table A-1. A discussion of visitation statistics for each REA agency follows.

### *National Park Service*

Annual visitation for NPS increased 1.1 percent in the past two fiscal years, from 271.4 million visits in 2006 to 274.3 million visits in 2008. Recent fluctuations in visitation can be attributed to a variety of factors including: higher gasoline prices, downturns in the economy, new recreational pursuits of visitors, natural disasters (such as eruptions at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park that caused park

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<sup>8</sup> Visitation data are collected by FY for BLM and FWS and by calendar year for NPS and Reclamation.

closures), airline bankruptcy (lower visitation at Hawaii Parks), and increased international travel as a result of the value of the Euro. Table 3 shows the changes in visitation for the top ten revenue-producing NPS sites.

**Table 3. Change in Visitation at Top Ten NPS Sites, by Fee Revenue Collected, 2006 – 2008<sup>1</sup>**

NPS Unit	2006 Visitation	2008 Visitation	2006 Revenue	2008 Revenue	Percent Change in Visitation
Grand Canyon NP	4,268,834	4,488,809	21,967,289	24,954,013	↑ 5.2%
Yosemite NP	3,256,270	3,486,439	14,804,269	17,009,692	↑ 7.1%
Zion NP	2,553,245	2,696,097	6,828,298	9,267,810	↑ 5.6%
Yellowstone NP	2,863,333	3,123,058	7,763,515	8,351,622	↑ 9.1%
Rocky Mountain NP	2,788,337	2,738,022	7,554,887	7,721,871	↓ 1.8%
Shenandoah NP	1,040,636	1,057,770	4,289,167	4,663,436	↑ 1.6%
Glacier NP	1,935,394	2,031,440	3,816,646	4,373,994	↑ 5.0%
Lake Mead NRA	7,854,954	7,451,481	4,060,436	3,949,506	↓ 5.1%
Hawai'i Volcanoes NP	1,781,983	1,317,444	3,940,731	3,942,349	↓ 26.1%
Haleakalā NP	1,471,238	1,347,581	3,299,343	2,663,359	↓ 8.4%

<sup>1</sup> Visitation numbers are calendar year and revenue numbers are fiscal year.

Of the top ten highest revenue-collecting NPS sites in the FY 2006 - FY 2008 revenue period, six experienced an increase in visitation and four experienced a decrease in visitation. It is possible that passes purchased in one location and used at others (such as Yosemite National Park) may have contributed to reduced revenues at some parks.

#### *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

Visitation at NWRs increased over the past three years from 38.4 million in FY 2006 to 40.3 million in FY 2007 to 41.3 million in FY 2008.

#### *Bureau of Land Management*

Visitation at BLM has varied slightly over the past three years, from 55.4 million in FY 2006 to 57.7 million in FY 2007 to 56.8 million in FY 2008.

#### *Bureau of Reclamation*

Visitation at Reclamation's New Melones Lake has varied in the last three years, from 791,282 in 2006 to 872,261 in 2007 and 661,481 in 2008.

#### *Forest Service*

Using data from the FS National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) survey, the FS estimates that there were approximately 179 million National Forest visits in FY 2007. At first glance, the FS visitation estimates may appear significantly different than the 205 million visits estimated for FY 2005 provided in the First Triennial Report, but it is inappropriate to make assumptions about visitation trends with only two figures. NVUM was a new approach to estimating visitation on National Forest lands, and the FY 2005 estimate was based on the first round of utilizing the new survey methodology.

Two key factors contribute to the differences between the two estimates. The first key factor relates to significant improvements that occurred between the first and second rounds in the accuracy and consistency of definitions. Simply going through the NVUM process for the first time enabled forest staff to increase their understanding and to improve collection the second time. The second key factor is that the scope and range of locations and times for selected data collection were modified in round two, to better ensure that all types of recreation visitation across the forest throughout the sample year were represented. These improvements have greatly enhanced the validity of all aspects of the NVUM results. It is possible that the changes account for a large portion of the differences in results between the two rounds of data. Because NVUM has only two data sets for some FS units, trends in visitation cannot yet be determined.

## *Public Participation/Outreach*

### Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service

REA requires the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to establish Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (RRACs) in each State or region.<sup>9</sup> RRACs provide local communities with the opportunity to make recommendations on certain types of proposed recreation fee changes. Specifically, RRACs can make recommendations on implementing, eliminating, or changing standard amenity fees, expanded amenity fees, and non-commercial individual special recreation permit fees.

REA allows the agencies to either use existing Federal Advisory Committees, such as BLM Resource Advisory Councils (BLM RACs), or to establish new committees as appropriate. After holding 11 listening sessions in locations across the country in 2005, the FS and BLM elected to use a mix of new RRACs and existing BLM RACs. More information about RRACs is available in Appendix B.

Since 2006, BLM has sought RRAC review of 49 fee changes. Table 4 describes these proposals and the type of change being recommended.

**Table 4. RRAC Recommendations for Bureau of Land Management Fee Changes**

Site Type	Type of Fee Change		
	New Fee	Fee Increase	Total Fee Changes
Standard (Day use such as picnic areas, interpretive sites, and developed trailheads)	2	9	11
Expanded (Primarily Campgrounds)	8	21	29
Special Recreation Permits (Specialized Areas, such as Off-Highway Vehicle, River, or Long-Term Visitor Areas)	3	6	9
Total Proposals	13	36	49

Since 2006, the FS has shared approximately 900 fee proposals with the RRACs. Table 5 describes these proposals recommended by RRACs.

<sup>9</sup> RRACs are required unless, in consultation with the governor of a State, it is determined insufficient interest exists to establish an RRAC in that state. Three states are currently exempted from REA-RRAC requirements: Alaska, Nebraska, and Wyoming.

**Table 5. RRAC Recommendations for Forest Service Fee Changes**

Site Type	Type of Fee Change			
	New Fee	Fee Increase	Fee Decrease	Total Fee Changes
Standard (Day use: such as picnic areas, interpretive sites, boat launches, developed trailheads)	6	214	1	221
Expanded (Campgrounds)	59	435	3	497
Expanded (Cabins)	51	73	1	125
Expanded (Other: such as group sites, dump stations, highly developed boat launches)	12	9	0	21
Special Recreation Permits (Specialized trails, climbing areas, river use)	4	25	0	29
Total Proposals Shared	132	756	5	893

In addition to RRAC review and recommendations, both the FS and BLM provide for extensive public involvement for fee proposals, such as posting signs at affected areas, publishing media articles and press releases, posting information online, meeting with local government officials, and public meetings.

One example of BLM's public outreach efforts on REA sites involves the innovative public partnership structure with the Pueblo de Cochiti of New Mexico. The two organizations have created a unique Inter-Governmental Cooperative Management Agreement that has resulted in the designation of Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, which is an REA site. Since then, BLM and the Pueblo have worked together to protect and promote the preservation of the Tent Rocks Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Some examples of resource management projects accomplished with and leveraged through this partnership include development of a National Recreation Trail and the enhancement of visitor services such as parking and picnic facilities. This innovative partnership is critical to providing a higher level of service and involving the Pueblo government and the public in the development and coordination of resource management.

### National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

NPS. Director's Order DO 75A, contains policies and standards, definitions, roles and responsibilities, etc., for all public involvement efforts at NPS. The NPS guidelines describe in detail how public involvement should be carried out, and emphasize that each park superintendent should align the public input process to include pertinent stakeholders, the state of the economy, and tourism trends. The intention of the fee guidelines is to:

- Assist the parks on compliance with legal public participation requirements to change existing fees, add new fees, or establish new fee areas;
- Notify the public about fee rates and how recreation fee revenues are used; and
- Help parks strategize and leverage funding and staffing in carrying out these requirements.

The guidelines detail the steps that the superintendents must accomplish for any site changing an existing fee, adding a new fee, or establishing a new fee area. Parks establishing a new fee area must

also publish a Notice in the Federal Register. See Appendix C, or <http://www.nps.gov/civic/policy/>, for more details.

FWS. Similar to NPS, FWS also involves the public in the fee proposal process. FWS Recreation Fee Program Guidance includes the following procedures:

1. The Project Leader contacts the Regional Fee Coordinator and Refuge Supervisor to discuss the proposal.
2. The Project Leader informs the public of the proposal.
  - a. A notice describing the proposal is published in a local newspaper.
  - b. The site holds public meetings/open houses, focus groups, makes newsletters, website postings, etc., to share information about the proposal. Generally, the information provided includes:
    - A site description
    - Estimated costs (start-up, operating, maintenance)
    - Projected income
    - A market study of similar nearby services so as not to compete with local businesses
  - c. As part of public outreach, sites gather and review comments concerning proposed changes to the fee program and adjust the proposal if necessary.

## Bureau of Reclamation

Reclamation will continue to conduct extensive REA public involvement activities, as is required of all REA participating agencies. The agency uses a variety of media to engage the public including, but not limited to, Federal Register Notices, press releases, flyers, and websites. Reclamation will also use interagency working groups and open house meetings to involve the general public and other concerned parties.

In addition, the agency has established a detailed internal process on how a new REA area will be established and how Reclamation will involve the public throughout this REA designation process. This internal process can be found in the Reclamation Manual for the Recreation Enhancement Act, Directives and Standards, *Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Program Management*, LND 01-02.

## *Interagency Pass Program*

### Overview of the Interagency Pass Program

REA established the America the Beautiful – the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass (Interagency Pass) to replace the Golden Eagle, Golden Age, Golden Access Passports, and the National Parks Pass. An extensive two-year planning effort was undertaken to: design and fabricate passes, set up fulfillment operations, and develop standard operating procedures for the range of pass products. The Annual, Senior, Access, and Volunteer Passes were made available to approximately 1,500 recreation sites. The Interagency Pass Program was successfully launched on January 1, 2007.

The new Interagency Pass Program was built upon lessons learned from the National Parks Pass Program and the Golden Eagle Passport Program. The primary objectives for the Interagency Pass Program are: (1) make passes more convenient to purchase and use; (2) incorporate technologies to allow for improved data collection and to prevent misuse; (3) provide a durable, collectible, high-quality product that promotes identity and support of Federal recreation lands; and (4) provide opportunities for partnership and education about recreation opportunities on Federal recreation lands.

One of the primary benefits of the new Interagency Pass Program is that it creates a single recreation pass for multiple land management agencies. Visitors traveling to different REA sites no longer have to worry about their pass not being accepted. The new program also is easier and more cost-effective for the Departments to manage. The program is administered by one agency, NPS, on behalf of all the other agencies. The Interagency Pass Program utilizes the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to provide fulfillment operations.

The Departments have developed uniform standard operating procedures (SOPs) for selling and honoring the passes in a consistent way, thereby reducing public confusion. The SOPs address identification requirements, proof of disability, pass validation, and procedures for utilizing third-party vendors to sell passes. National trainings and guidance have been provided to field staff to ensure consistency and good customer service.

To determine the price of the pass, Department of the Interior and NPS contracted with the University of Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center to conduct a study utilizing focus groups, a telephone survey, and data from State parks and Parks Canada. In setting the price of the pass, the agencies considered factors such as visitor services and achieving parity with other passes.

Annual Passes are available at all REA sites where an entrance fee or standard amenity fee is charged. Annual Passes are also sold at Federal field sites, through the Internet, and at over 20 additional third-party vendors including REI, Sierra Trading, and Southern RV. Passes are also sold through cooperating associations, friends groups, and foundations. Senior, Access, and Volunteer Passes can only be obtained in person at a Federal pass issuing location, due to documentation and identification requirements.

### **Types of Passes**

*Annual Pass: \$80.00 per year*

This pass is available to anyone. It is valid for 12 months from the time of purchase and covers entrance and standard amenity fees.

*Senior Pass: \$10.00 lifetime pass*

This lifetime pass is available to U.S. citizens or permanent residents 62 years and older (replaced the Golden Age Passport). This pass covers entrance and standard amenity fees and provides some discounts on expanded amenity fees.

*Access Pass: Free lifetime pass*

This free, lifetime pass is available to U.S. citizens or permanent residents, regardless of age, who certify that they have a permanent disability by showing appropriate documentation or by signing a Statement of Disability. The Access Pass covers entrance and standard amenity fees and provides some discounts on expanded amenity fees.

*Volunteer Pass: Free Annual Pass (value \$80.00/year)*

This pass is issued free of charge to volunteers who log 500 hours of volunteer time. Volunteers' hours will be tracked online using a system being designed and managed by the participating agencies. The Volunteer Pass is valid for 12 months from the time of issue and covers entrance and standard amenity fees.

*Collateral Materials – Free with each pass*

*Decal* - Issued to Annual and Volunteer pass holders with open-top vehicles.

*Hangtag* - Issued to all pass holders utilizing un-staffed Federal recreation areas.

*Brochure* - Issued to all Annual Pass holders.

A comprehensive “Pass Issuance List” was developed in May 2008 that identifies the sites where the various passes may be obtained. Although most visitors simply obtain a pass when they arrive at a site where the pass is needed, this list gives visitors information they need to obtain a pass ahead of time. The list is available on agency websites (such as <http://store.usgs.gov/pass/PassIssuanceList.pdf>) and at many field locations.

### Administration of Pass Program

NPS, on behalf of the other participating agencies, administers the Interagency Pass Program working in partnership with the USGS and the Government Printing Office (GPO).

USGS manages all pass products including inventory management; storage and tracking; shipping to field sites; processing consumer orders; monthly reporting; and call center operation. Through the end of FY 2008, approximately 2.5 million Interagency Passes have been shipped by USGS. NPS, through GPO, contracts with four commercial vendors to produce the passes, hangtags, decals, and brochures.



Figure 7. Winning Photo, Share the Experience Photo Contest, 2009

### Interagency Pass Program Photo Contest

One of the most successful and exciting aspects of the Interagency Pass Program is the “Share the Experience” Photo Contest (Figure 7). The contest is managed by the National Park Foundation on behalf of the agencies. The winning image is used for the Annual and Volunteer Passes and accompanying decal each year. In the first three years of the contest over 36,000 photographs of the nation’s Federal lands have been submitted.

### Interagency Pass Program Costs and Revenues

NPS provided startup funding for the Interagency Passes (\$2.4 million). The agencies have agreed to reimburse NPS when sufficient revenues have accumulated to cover both annual costs of the program and loan repayment. Revenue collected centrally by USGS (e.g., via internet or third party) is used to fund the administrative costs of the program and to reimburse NPS for the startup funding provided. Once these costs are covered, revenues from USGS sales will be split equally among the five participating agencies. This policy will be in place for at least the first five years of the program. Beyond five years, the agencies plan to institute a new central revenue distribution formula when all the agencies are able to collect pass usage statistics. Annual costs associated with administering the Interagency Pass Program have been approximately \$1.6 – \$1.8 million. This compares with total annual Interagency Pass revenue of approximately \$29 million.

One hundred percent of revenue from Interagency Pass sales at REA sites remains available to the agencies. Generally at least 80 percent (or 60 percent as specified in REA) of pass revenues are

retained and expended at the unit where they are purchased. From start of the program through September 31, 2008, approximately 2.5 million passes were shipped to interagency field sites.

- In 2007, approximately 720,000 passes were sold, generating about \$25 million in revenue.
- In 2008, approximately 760,000 passes were sold, generating nearly \$29 million in revenue; \$260,000 by BLM, \$290,000 by FWS, \$24.7 million by NPS, \$820 by Reclamation, \$1.7 million by FS, and \$1.9 million via central sales.

## *Accountability*

### **National Park Service**

NPS has implemented Comprehensive Plans as a management tool for the Recreation Fee Program, which has enabled individual parks to articulate their strategic use of fee revenues. Recreation Fee Comprehensive Plans (RFCPs):

- Provide data for management decisions;
- Ensure that expenditures are properly planned and in compliance with the law and NPS policy; and
- Allow NPS to track and report accomplishments.

In the FY 2007 appropriations language, the RFCP became the cornerstone of the fee expenditure approval process. Each park completes an annual update of its RFCP, in which an obligation strategy is identified to complete approved projects. The RFCP is also the instrument parks use to submit new projects for approval. The RFCP identifies the use of fee revenues in a 5-Year Plan. The regions review and approve the RFCP prior to review and approval by Washington Office project management staff. Projects are reviewed for compliance with REA and to ensure that they are consistent with the expenditure criteria, particularly the “direct visitor connection.” The RFCP also identifies how a park and region intend to contribute towards servicewide performance goals. These plans assist the parks by removing the obstacles created by poor project planning and sequencing. The plans allow regions to assist in funding decisions, to identify execution barriers, to identify a park’s project status and reporting, and to provide oversight to ensure revenues are managed in an accountable and “business-like” manner. The Comprehensive Plans continue to enhance NPS’s credibility and accountability and provide a mechanism for report planning and documenting performance measures.

The annual Recreation Fee Servicewide Comprehensive Call is used by NPS Washington Office to ensure that expenditures are properly planned and in compliance with the law and NPS policy. The guidance contains information about authorized expenditure types and proper procedures for entering projects in the Project Management Information System. The guidance also identifies targets for deferred maintenance and cost of collection.

### *Audits*

NPS provides guidance to sites for program reviews and audits in the Reference Manual-22: Recreation Fee Guideline. These audits include fee compliance or “road audits;” honor system; cash register or point-of-sale system; unannounced internal reviews; and change (imprest) funds. The guidelines include frequency and level of responsibility. The Accounting Operations Center (AOC) for NPS also conducts internal control reviews at parks. The team uses the Internal Control

Questionnaire which is available on the AOC website for parks to review. The Fee Program section of this questionnaire provides a framework for parks to review and evaluate their fee operations at any time. In 2008 offsite and onsite reviews were completed for 25 parks by Washington Office and regional staff.

Onsite reviews included topics such as employee safety, lighting, and security systems; adherence to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the U.S. Department of the Treasury cash management regulations; compliance with REA for expenditures; security of funds; reconciliation of all government assets, cash, and passes; and accurate website information for the public. Offsite reviews encompass detailed analysis of compliance with OMB and Treasury cash management guidelines; correct use of revenue according to REA and guidelines for cost of collection and related projects; and correct use of primary work elements for both revenue and expenditures to insure accountability and accurate website information for the public.

#### *Point-of-sale (Cash Register) System (POSS)*

NPS is in the process of procuring a servicewide point-of-sale (cash register) system for all fee collection parks. This system will provide standardized ways to collect, deposit, and reconcile funds. It will allow centralized reporting of detailed transaction information as well as provide summary reports that will aid in analysis and improved accountability of funds. The point-of-sale system will streamline wait times for paying customers by providing quicker transaction times and allow for more expedient and modern payment options such as credit card and pre-authorized debit. The system includes an improved serialized inventory system for management of passes and accountable property. The POSS will have the capability to collect statistical and demographic visitor information, which will assist managers in better park management.

The POSS Request for Proposals was issued in August 2008. Bids have been received and reviewed by a source selection team. Contract award is tentatively planned for spring of 2009 and phase 1 of implementation is planned for the following winter. The plan is to have the servicewide system in place for all fee collection parks by 2011 barring any unforeseen complications.

Having one contract will streamline duplicative contracting efforts and will likely provide cost savings due to economies of scale (larger purchase, more cost savings). It will also be easier to train fee collection staff on one consistent operating system. Having one system will better ensure that all transactions and personal information meet security standards and requirements.

#### **U.S Fish and Wildlife Service**

FWS updated its Recreation Fee Program Guidance in September 2008. This contains detailed collection and accounting procedures on monitoring and reconciling accounts, and creating business plans. For example, the guidance on business plans states: "Recreation Fee sites that collect \$5,000 annually or more must develop and follow a business plan. Business plans include five-year plans for collections and expenditures, but may include other information, Best Practices, etc. that the site finds useful." The Guidance includes a suggested format that sites may also use for annual reporting.

Recently, the FWS Finance Center implemented electronic collection transmittals for all collections, including recreation fees. This is done through the Pay.gov system. In addition, FWS Division of Financial Management (DFM) has added the Recreation Fee Collection Process to its OMB A-123 review of internal controls over financial reporting. This review focuses on appropriate internal controls, while taking into consideration the cost-effectiveness of control procedures. DFM has also

updated and expanded coverage of fee collections by field stations in its Financial Process Questionnaire that it sends to 25 percent of Service field stations each year.

## Bureau of Land Management

In 2006, BLM issued guidance on recreation fee collection procedures. This directive prescribed the procedures for recreation fee collections for recreation sites. The guidance included such items as: recreation fee collections; recreation collections affidavit; collection officer designation memorandum; notice to customers making payment by check; and notice to customers presenting checks. In 2007, BLM updated its Recreation Fees and Permit Manual outlining procedures for accountability.

To ensure proper oversight, audits/evaluations are conducted on an annual basis. The focus of these audits/evaluations is to review how State and Field Offices are complying with guidance and implementing the fee program, and to ensure fair return to the government from entities conducting business on public lands. The purpose of the audits/evaluations is to identify both internal and external program deficiencies and to discover ways to improve the Recreation Fee Program. These audits/evaluations also examine fiscal processing compliance and financial controls.

## Forest Service

The FS issued Interim Guidelines for Implementation of REA in April 2005. The agency has developed numerous tools, including national signage guidance, as well as fee analysis tools and templates to assist in the preparation of fee proposals for presentation to the public and to RRACs. These tools ensure that information provided to the public will be easy to understand and consistent from site to site. To provide regular financial oversight, REA revenue and expenditure data are collected from national forests and national grasslands annually. These data are reviewed for accountability purposes and used in the preparation of this report. Some forests are even using it online to inform the public of fee projects.

The FS is finalizing directives for implementation of REA. The agency expects to issue most of the directives and publish the remainder for public comment in 2009.

In addition to local feedback from comment cards and public meetings, the FS also seeks feedback on visitor satisfaction through NVUM. In 2007, NVUM estimated that for 83 percent of visits to sites where fees were charged, the visitor was satisfied with the value received for the fee paid.

## Bureau of Reclamation

Reclamation has taken the following steps to implement REA:

- Established Reclamation Manual Directive and Standard, *Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Program Management*, LND 01-02, that outlines, among other things, Reclamation's (1) procedures for ordering, selling, and acceptance of recreation passes at REA areas (2) process for designating new REA sites; (3) process for increasing fees at existing REA sites; and (4) process for collecting, accounting for, and distribution of REA fees and revenues.
- Invested a limited amount of non-Recreation fee revenues on capital improvements such as fee collection stations and on materials and supplies necessary to implement fee collection activities (e.g., a safe that would allow Reclamation to properly secure accountable property such as REA passes and decals).

- Requested and obtained OMB approval to administer a survey to the general public that would allow Reclamation to obtain valuable data to meet its Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) performance measure for fiscal year 2009 (i.e., collect data related to the “percent of customers satisfied with the value for fee paid”).

Reclamation plans to use any revenues received from third party sales of REA pass to (1) improve recreation areas directly managed by Reclamation so that they may meet REA criteria for future participation; and (2) further Reclamation’s recreation mission goal by improving recreation areas to make them more attractive for management by potential partners. By pursuing these two courses of action, participation in REA will become an integral part of Reclamation’s approach to recreation management on its lands and waterbodies.

## *Structure of the Program*

### Changes in number of sites since last report

#### **National Park Service**

Currently, there are 196 NPS sites out of 391 sites that charge fees under REA. The following five parks ceased collecting fees from 2006 to 2008, primarily due to difficult logistics associated with collecting fees: Big Hole National Battlefield, Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Women’s Rights National Historical Park, Fort Larned National Historic Site, and Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. A decision was made to waive bicyclist fees at Assateague National Seashore and to align fee structure with Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge in FY 2007. This reduced confusion for visitors, since the sites are located adjacent to each other and there is a reciprocal pass arrangement at both parks. In 2007, Cape Cod National Seashore ceased collecting a per person fee due to concern for visitor and employee safety. The alignment of the road forced pedestrians to be on the wrong side of the street which created an unsafe situation.

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

FWS manages 549 refuges, of which about 450 are open to the public. Of these, only 35 charge entrance fees. In addition to refuges, FWS has over 200 waterfowl production areas, 69 national fish hatcheries, and 95 coordination areas and administrative sites. Over 96 percent of FWS sites that are open to the public have free entry.

Over the past several years, FWS has consolidated many of its National Wildlife Refuges into National Wildlife Refuge Complexes for management purposes. This included a number of fee sites. Thus, while the FWS fee program has expanded, bringing in two new fee sites, the overall number of reporting sites has decreased from about 180 sites to 158 due to the consolidation into Complexes.

Currently about a dozen non-refuge sites as well as non-fee refuges now sell Interagency Passes due to public demand. These include National Fish Hatcheries, Wetland Management Districts, and Ecological Services Field Offices. Many of these sites are near U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sites. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has opted to honor the Interagency Senior and Access Passes, but because it is not an REA agency, it cannot issue them.

## **Bureau of Land Management**

The vast majority of recreation on the 256 million acres of BLM-managed land is dispersed and does not involve any fee. BLM manages close to 3,600 recreation sites, of which approximately 300 (less than ten percent) require fees. The remainder are free. There have been 36 fee increases on BLM REA sites and 13 new fee sites added since the first Triennial Report to Congress. These changes were all reviewed and approved by the appropriate RRAC.

## **Forest Service**

The FS manages about 17,500 developed recreation sites, of which approximately 4,185 (24 percent) require fees under REA. Approximately 2,000 (11 percent) require other types of fees, and 11,000 (65 percent) are free. The number of FS sites in the Recreation Fee Program has remained relatively stable between FY 2006 and FY 2008. Of the 4,185 sites included in the Recreation Fee Program, most are campgrounds. From FY 2006 to FY 2008, 105 fee sites have been added through the RRAC process, and five have been removed from the Recreation Fee Program and are now free to the public.

The FS recently undertook a process called Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA), which identifies actions proposed for the short-term and sets the stage for long-term planning for recreation sites. Forests that have completed the RFA process develop a five year proposed Program of Work that will help the Forest meet the needs of the public. One management option identified by RFA is the use of fees or changing fees. As Forests begin working toward their five year Programs of Work, some fee proposals may be developed and presented to the public and RRACs.

## **Bureau of Reclamation**

Reclamation has designated one REA area since the First Triennial Report to Congress, New Melones Lake.

## **Pricing structure**

### **National Park Service**

As a result of a fee study conducted by McKinsey and Company in 2001, NPS instituted a servicewide entrance fee pricing structure in 2006. This was done to simplify and standardize entrance fees across parks of similar types. Parks were grouped into categories according to legislative designation and other factors; and fee rates were consistently set based on those categories. Group 1 includes National Historic Sites, National Military Parks, National Battlefield Parks, National Memorials/Shrines, National Preserves, and Parkways. Group 2 includes National Seashores, National Recreation Areas, National Monuments, National Lakeshores, and National Historic Parks. Groups 3 and 4 include National Parks. Civic engagement has been a critical part of implementation. All parks are required to adhere to a public participation guideline that requires public involvement activities and congressional consultation.

**Group 1:** \$5 per person/\$10 per vehicle/\$20 Annual Pass/\$5 motorcycle

**Group 2:** \$7 per person/\$15 per vehicle/\$30 Annual Pass/\$10 motorcycle

**Group 3:** \$10 per person/\$20 per vehicle/\$40 Annual Pass/\$15 motorcycle

**Group 4:** \$12 per person/\$25 per vehicle/\$50 Annual Pass/\$20 motorcycle

Implementation of the new pricing structure began in 2006 and 2007. In 2006 twenty-three NPS units completed civic engagement and implemented the pricing structure. In 2007 eleven units implemented the new pricing structure.

In 2008, the Director of NPS put a moratorium on fee increases with the exception of those with unique or compelling reasons. Assateague Island National Seashore was the only park in 2008 that increased the entrance fee, in order to align with the neighboring Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. Five parks requested increases for expanded amenity fees, mostly for campgrounds, in order to keep the rates comparable to local conditions and because of new contract costs of the National Recreation Reservation Service (NRRS). Those parks were Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Site, Arches National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, Padre Islands National Seashore, and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

FWS requires that sites do a market analysis before starting a new fee activity or adjusting fees. This ensures that FWS fees stay within the same fee range as similar State or private fee activities. Since the majority of FWS fee activities are hunts, and since some hunts (deer, for example) vary greatly in price across the country (within State/private sector), FWS looks for price consistency within regions rather than nationwide. Entrance fees, however, are becoming more consistent. Daily fees are typically \$5 per vehicle, and refuge-specific Annual Passes are \$15. That is the same price as a Federal Duck Stamp, which also gives the holder entrance to a refuge.

### **Bureau of Land Management**

After the passage of REA, BLM issued guidance on fee structures. The Guidance requires that fees be established according to the amenities that are offered to the public. The level of amenities was categorized from low, moderate, and high. The Guidance recommends the establishment of prices ranging from \$5 to \$30.

### **Forest Service**

The FS does not have a nationwide pricing structure. Rates are based on local market conditions; however, several tools have been developed for use nationally to assist forests in analyzing pricing factors such as facilities available, operation and maintenance costs, condition of the site, uniqueness of the setting, and other local recreation providers. These tools are often used in fee proposals for presentation to RRACs. Nationally, the average day use fee in a national forest is approximately \$6, and the average overnight fee is approximately \$9.

## ***Ongoing Activities to Improve REA Management***

The Departments are continually striving to make the REA Program the best and most efficient vehicle for providing high-quality Federal recreation facilities and services to the American public. The Departments meet regularly to review the status of the program and discuss possible program improvements. Some examples of recommended changes to the overall fee system that are currently under consideration by the Departments include:

- Improvements to Recreation.gov, including expanding the site to include online permitting, lotteries and reservations for special park uses.
- Allowing Senior and Access Pass sales/issuance through the mail or internet.
- Providing decals to Senior and Access pass holders that have open-topped vehicles.
- Providing additional information about where passes are accepted, updating publications, and enhancing marketing in order to provide the public with more options for purchasing passes.
- NPS is implementing a number of improvements that include:

- A servicewide point-of-sale system that will create a standardized system for effective, efficient collection, accounting, reporting and management of NPS fee revenues. This system will improve the visitor experience by reducing wait times at many park entrance stations. NPS is also working to provide enhanced guidance and increased training opportunities for front line employees as well as park managers.
- Redesigning the NPS.gov site to make information easier to find and fee rates more apparent.
- NPS is exploring options to allow for more convenient fee payment options and fee payments online.
- The FS has committed to reviewing its High Impact Recreation Areas (HIRAs) and presenting them to the RRACs. In 2007-2008, the FS undertook a national review, and will present the findings to RRACs about recreation fee areas. Changes to some of these areas may be made in consultation with RRACs and the public.
- BLM has identified a need for more training. Through the National Training Center, distance learning courses are under development addressing the overall Recreation Fee Program management, data collection, and commercial use.

REA agencies recognize a need to improve internal planning and internal and external communication with regard to projects that require sites to accumulate fee dollars from year to year. Further, the agencies hope to see an increase in obligations during FY 2009 and beyond:

- To reduce the unobligated balance of recreation fees, NPS has implemented a system for each park that collects fees to use the Recreation Fee Comprehensive Plan which documents projects for five years. Each fee collecting park completes an annual update of their plan which includes a timeline for completing approved projects. Using this management tool, projects are reviewed for compliance with REA and consistency with the expenditure criteria particularly the direct visitor connection. The plans continue to enhance NPS's accountability, as well as provide a mechanism for reporting and documenting performance accomplishments.
- To encourage use of unobligated funds, FWS has set an annual target obligation rate of 50 percent for the recreation fee account. This requirement is now contained in the FWS Guidance for the Recreation Fee Program.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The FWS guidance advises sites to look at their available balances, and if they are more than 50 percent of a site's annual collections, to allocate funds to projects such as visitor services or maintenance. Accumulating two or more years of funding to pay for one big project is permitted, provided that the project is planned for and listed in a business plan.