

E. USDA FS

INTRODUCTION

The USDA FS manages 192 million acres in 155 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands across the United States and Puerto Rico. The USDA FS's large and ecologically diverse land base makes it a leading provider of outdoor recreation. Over 90 percent of National Forest System lands are free; 38 percent of USDA FS managed recreation sites charge fees, typically for specific activities such as camping or boating.

When the Fee Demo Program began, the agency encouraged development of projects of all sizes and fee types, differential pricing, and first-time fees for some activities, facilities, and services. Under the Fee Demo Program, the USDA FS remains critically aware of the need to provide clearly defined benefits to those who pay fees for facilities and services.

The USDA FS has allowed Fee Demo projects to retain 90-100 percent of their total collections. Funds are also provided to new projects to cover start-up costs, to fund difficult local maintenance, to provide public information, and to fund priority improvements. This approach has increased the effectiveness of project implementation and has added a professional business focus to program oversight and management.

Local spending decisions are guided by public involvement, project priorities, land management planning, national priorities, the need to address critical deferred maintenance, community assessments, project business plans, and public communications plans related to each project. To maintain national consistency, regional Fee Demo Boards approve business plans and provide overall project oversight; national field reviews are also conducted periodically.

In FY 2003, the USDA FS had 105 Fee Demo projects. Most projects on National Forest System lands are site-specific, such as campgrounds, cabin and fire lookout rentals, heritage expeditions, outfitting and guiding permits, visitor centers, and reservation services for camping and climbing. Entrance stations are impractical on most National Forests due to the large number of access points and the scope of dispersed recreation activities. Dispersed recreation, such as hiking a trail, has management costs. For example, trails must be maintained, and toilet and parking facilities must be provided at many trailheads.

As the program has evolved, the USDA FS has modified some projects to meet visitor needs more effectively. For example, the Enterprise Forests of Southern California have offered more free days during the year and have designated 500,000 acres as fee-free. Partnerships with county, state and other federal agencies have also increased, allowing for more streamlined delivery of recreational opportunities.

In FY 2003, the USDA FS developed and implemented a Blueprint for Recreation Fees. Based on lessons learned from Fee Demo projects, the Blueprint was developed to provide a nationally consistent framework to identify the types of recreation activities and services for which fees will be charged. Fees are charged only in areas where higher levels of recreational development and services are provided. For example, to charge a basic fee, a day-use recreation site must have a convenient payment plan, meet national quality standards, have defined parking, have

informational signs, and have at least three other visitor elements, such as a toilet, picnic tables, trash receptacles, or a boat dock or ramp.

One of the most important changes made as a result of the Blueprint is the acceptance of Golden Eagle passports at many more Fee Demo sites, as well as removal of many sites from the Fee Demo Program. For example, over 400 sites, primarily in Oregon and Washington, were removed from the Fee Demo Program because they did not meet the criteria identified in the Blueprint.

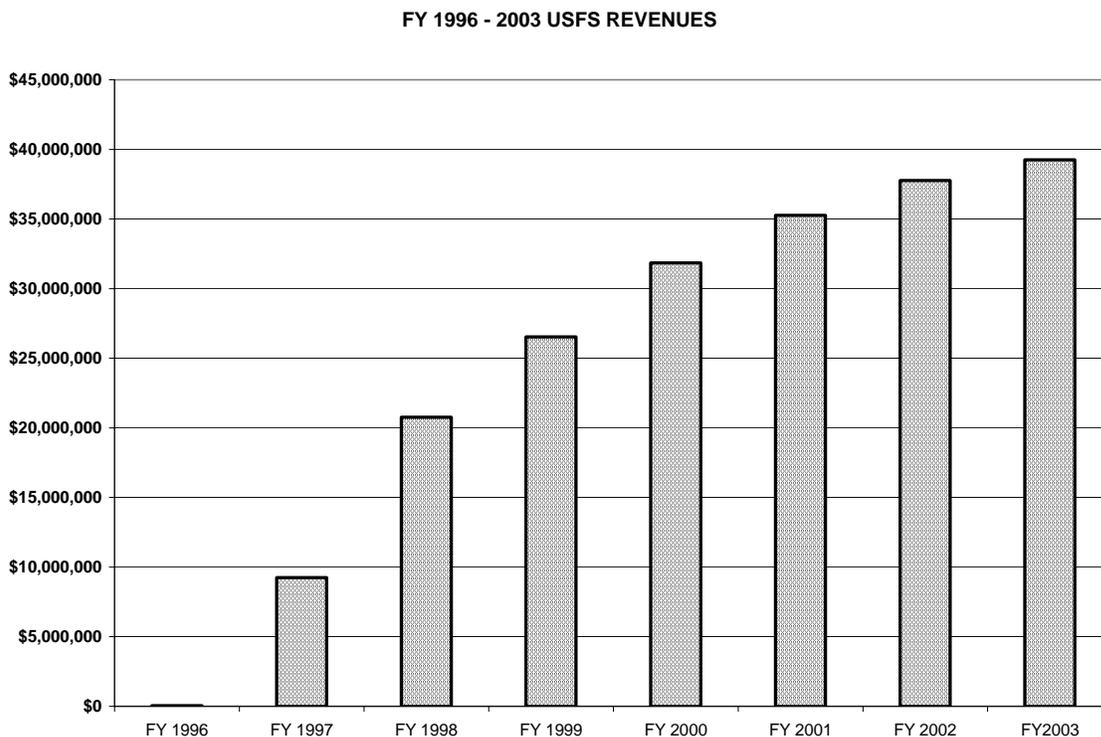


Figure 12

To address possible concerns about minority or low-income participation, the USDA FS requires that a civil rights impact assessment be completed and reviewed annually for each project. Most fees are set at minimal rates (\$3-\$5/vehicle/day; \$25/family/year) and many projects offer differential pricing to maximize visitor choices. Free days throughout the year encouraged people to visit fee areas at no charge, volunteers earned free passes, and passes were distributed through social service organizations at no charge.

REVENUE

Figure 12 shows USDA FS Fee Demo revenues from FY 1996–FY 2003. Since FY 1996, the USDA FS Fee Demo Program has generated over \$200 million in revenue. In 2003, collections of \$38.8 million represent an increase of \$1.5 million (2.8 percent) from the previous year. While Congressionally appropriated funds will always be an important component of National Forest recreation, Fee Demo funding is essential to meet growing visitor demands.

COLLECTION COSTS

The total cost to collect fees in FY 2003 under the Fee Demo Program was \$5.6 million, 14 percent of the revenues collected. To make payment as convenient as possible, the agency uses many different fee collection methods. These methods included self-pay machines that accept credit cards, conventional self-pay fee tubes, commercial vendors (such as gas stations and convenience stores), USDA FS offices and visitor centers, the World Wide Web, entrance stations, reservation services, and inter-agency passes. Highest costs were generally incurred where personal interaction between the agency and visitor was greatest, such as at visitor centers, and where such interactions usually

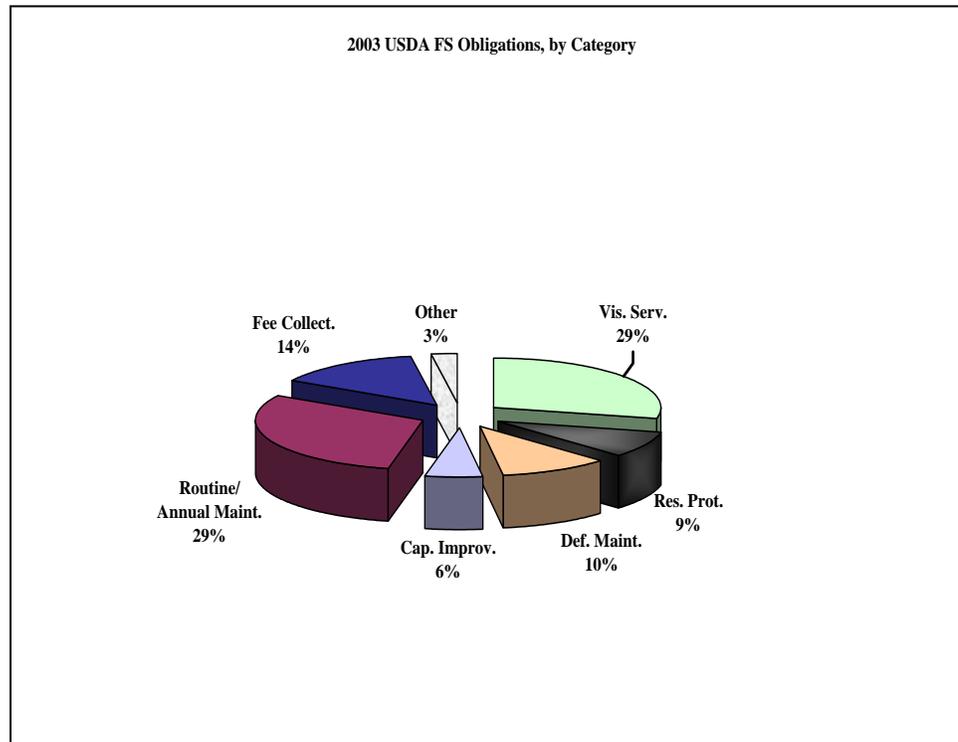
also included dissemination of information, such as directions, lodging or eating referrals.

OBLIGATIONS

The USDA FS uses Fee Demo funds to improve the quality of recreation settings, reduce deferred maintenance, enhance visitor services and provide resource protection. By the end of FY 2003, the USDA FS had spent \$163 million to meet these objectives (81

percent of all revenue collected since the program began). Of the funds collected in FY 2003, a year-end balance of \$4.1 million (11 percent) remained, most of which is expected to be obligated in FY 2004.

Figure 13



Fee Demo revenue paid for new signs.



Figure 13 shows FY 2003 USDA FS obligations in the seven standard expenditure categories used by the agencies participating in the Fee Demo Program: visitor services, resource protection, deferred maintenance, capital improvements, routine/annual maintenance, cost of fee collection, and other.



Fee Demo revenues funded trail work, Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Superior NF, MN: before, during, and after.



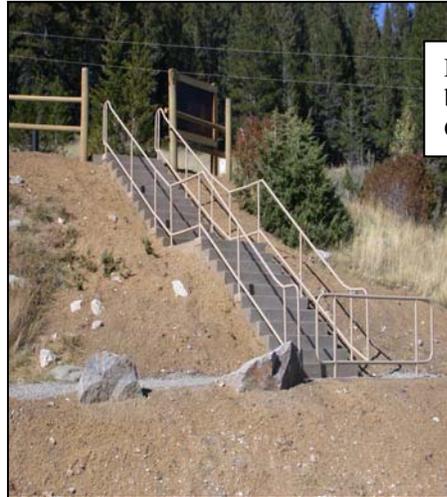
Overall, FY 2003 spending patterns mirrored those of the past seven years, during which more than half of all expenses were spent on direct visitor services (29 percent) and maintenance (39 percent). The balance was spent on capital improvements (6 percent), deferred maintenance (10 percent), and resource protection (9 percent).

The visitor services and maintenance categories include development and delivery of interpretation and environmental education programs, brochures, maps, interpretive/educational signs, kiosks, exhibits, guided walks, backcountry/wilderness rangers, visitor transportation systems, traffic counters, demonstrations and special events, visitor protection, and security. The maintenance category also includes routine or deferred maintenance of buildings and campgrounds, hazardous tree removal, mowing, pruning, general landscaping, maintenance of historic structures and other cultural resource facilities, and maintenance of roads, trails, bridges, waterways, utilities, and sanitation systems.

The resource protection and capital improvements categories include archaeological surveys, restoration of historic structures, natural resource inventories, site monitoring, vegetative treatments to create wildlife openings or restore wetlands, installation of erosion control devices,

fencing, trail relocation, site hardening, installation of devices to improve air and water quality, and control of invasive plants and animals.

In FY 2003, 14 percent of Fee Demo funds were spent to collect fees or enforce compliance. A capital expenditure is an investment of more than \$5,000. Examples include items such as the purchase and installation of



Fee Demo revenues paid for a new boat ramp and stairs, Lewis and Clark NF, MT.

automated fee machines or construction of new campground entrance stations. Annual operating expenses include salaries for employees that collect fees (most often in campgrounds or at visitor centers), purchase of fee envelopes and other printed materials, accounting and banking, fee collection training, and repair/maintenance of equipment, buildings, and vehicles used for fee collection.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The vast majority of FY 2003 accomplishments involved providing basic maintenance and visitor services. Fee Demo revenues allowed the USDA FS to stretch appropriated dollars to provide more frequent, higher-quality services and safer conditions than could be provided without Fee Demo revenues. Some typical examples of these activities include the following:

- Maintenance of 465 miles of trail on the Deschutes National Forest.
- Replacement of 8 picnic tables, 40 fire rings with grills, and 1 water tank on the Klamath National Forest.
- Removal of hazardous trees from Owl Creek horse trail on the National Forests of Alabama.
- Extinguishing over 8,000 abandoned campfires and provision of over 1,700 emergency assists to the public on the Enterprise Forests of Southern California (Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests).

REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY STATE

The examples below represent typical accomplishments funded by Fee Demo revenues. These examples represent only a small selection of the total accomplishments.

Alaska

Employees at **the Mendenhall Visitor Center (Tongass National Forest)** used Fee Demo revenues to purchase an automated electronic defibrillator (which was used shortly thereafter)

and to purchase a camera, which transmits live images from inside a nearby beaver lodge to a monitor located in a covered viewing area.

The **Pack Creek project (Tongass National Forest)**, a partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, used Fee Demo revenues to assist in managing a bear viewing area.

Arizona

The **Coconino National Forest Red Rock Pass Project** used Fee Demo revenues to erase 331 square feet of graffiti, remove 24 dumpsites, and locate and remove 13 camps used by transients.

The Prescott Basin/Mingus/OHV project on the **Prescott National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues to buy supplies for the local Youth Conservation Corps for various projects. These projects included reconditioning the vista platform at an Indian ruins, repairing fences, and removing hazardous vegetation from trailheads.

The Tonto National Forest used Fee Demo revenues to reconstruct 2,300 square feet of retaining wall built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. Native stones and hard labor returned the wall in the Seven Springs Recreation Area to near-perfect condition.

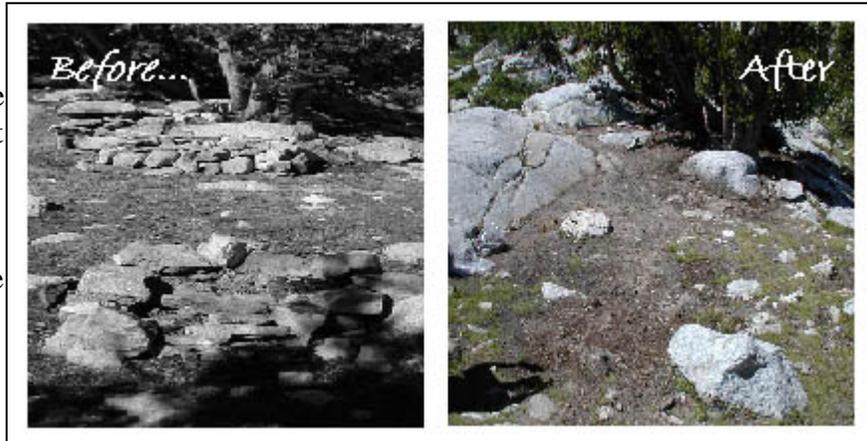
California

On the **Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests** in Southern California, Fee Demo revenues have been used to increase the frequency of restroom cleaning. Prior to the Fee Demo Program, the nearly 1,000 toilet facilities were cleaned only once every 7-14 days. Fee revenues now allow restrooms to be cleaned 4 to 15 times every week.

The Humphrey's Basin Restoration Project (Sierra National Forest) was accomplished through a partnership

with the Inyo National Forest, Bishop Pack Outfit, and college-age students of the Student Conservation Association. The common goal was to restore and rehabilitate campsites and trails. Accomplishments included naturalizing 530 fire rings,

installing numerous windbreaks, adding steps and waterbars to an eroding section of trail, and reducing the number of unauthorized trails. Recreation fees were used to purchase and install new signs and trail markers.



The Sequoia National Forest used Fee Demo revenues to provide a portion of the funds needed for the Three Forest Interpretive Association to conduct educational program throughout the area. FY 2003 Fee Demo revenues were also used to provide 20,000 pack-out bags to climbers in the **Shasta-Trinity Recreation Area** for the removal of human waste.

Colorado

Mt. Evans (Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest) used Fee Demo revenues to assist in completing construction of a new nature center in partnership with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Denver Botanic Gardens, and the Garden Club of Denver. The Forest also worked to expand and improve the quality of its interpretive programs, reaching over 27,000 visitors.

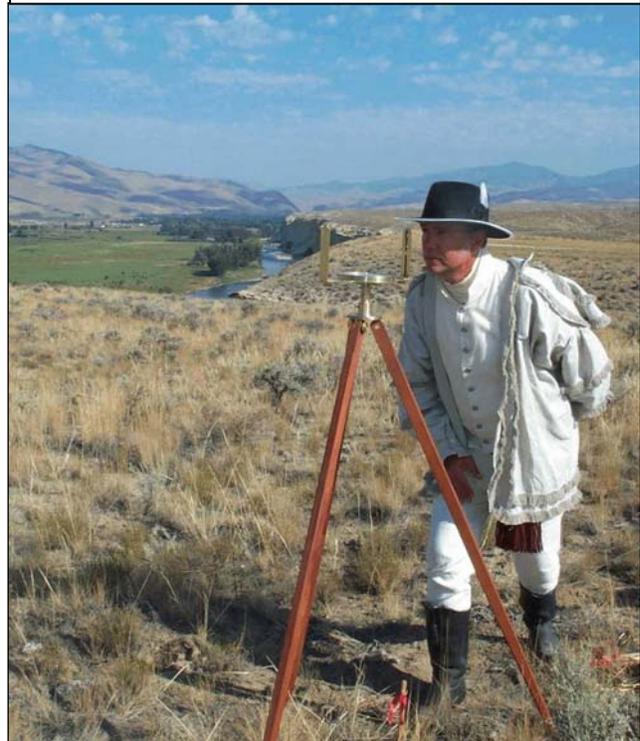
The White River National Forest used Fee Demo revenues to nearly double the size of the Silver Bell Campground, from 8 to 14 sites, and to install new campground furnishings. The Forest also continued to provide quality experiences for 18,000 winter visitors through separation of different types of uses and management of motorized and non-motorized traffic. Fee revenues assisted in covering the costs of grooming 31 miles of snowmobile trails, marking, maintaining, patrolling, and monitoring 50 miles of motorized and 52 miles of non-motorized trails; mapping existing trails; and managing parking for 3,500 cars and trailers.

Idaho

The Recreation Lodging Program on the **Nez Perce National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues to fund a pulley system to lift supplies to a visitor lookout tower and upgraded lightning protection at the tower.

Participants in the **Salmon-Challis Sextants to Satellites Heritage Expedition** used ancient and modern technology to track the Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery route across some of the most pristine portions of the National Historic Trail. Twelve people spent a week learning how to work with 19th and then, 21st century mapping techniques to locate portions of the trail and to gain an understanding of the history and use of mapping instruments. During the learning process, the attendees also re-inventoried 5 miles of trail.

Participant in the Salmon-Challis Sextants to Satellites Heritage Expedition.



Kentucky

The **Daniel Boone National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues to install new solar lighting and docks at several boat ramps (see photographs below).

London RD Fee Demonstration Projects FY 2003



Indoor Solar Lighting at Boat Ramp Restroom



Marsh Branch Solar Light



Marsh Branch Sign



Laurel Bridge Courtesy Dock

Michigan

The **Ottawa National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues for emergency dredging of the Black River Harbor, which allowed boats to access docking facilities on the Lake Superior Harbor of Refuge.

Montana

The **Quake Lake Visitor Center (Gallatin National Forest)** purchased a new seismometer with a solar panel, seismic amplifier, and radio transmitter to allow clearer readings of the printout inside the visitor center seismograph exhibit. The center also installed a baby-changing table in a restroom.

Fee revenues were also used to purchase and install a specially designed toilet. The core of the building is a standard, fully-accessible, concrete Sweet-Smelling Toilet, but the exterior was covered with board and batten to look like the adjacent historic cabins. Because of the success of this prototype, it is now available through the Regional Toilet Supply Contract.



Fee Demo revenues purchased a new toilet, Gallatin NF, MT.

The **Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center (Lewis & Clark National Forest)** offered numerous free events such as seven different days of free admission, ten Friday evening lawn chair programs, free admission to the annual Anniversary Day Celebration (1,260 visitors), three free showings of *Voices in the Shadows*, with guided tours (230 attendees), free Native American storytelling in November, and free admission to the two-month Winter Film Festival (1,000 attendees). The Center also offered an array of special programs and classes – traditional storytelling inside a buffalo-hide tipi, an adult education class on the plants and foods of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, and a five-week lecture series. Child-sized period clothing, activity trunks, and other items were purchased for the Children’s Discovery Area.

Nebraska

The **Hudsen-Meng Bison Bonebed Visitor Center (Nebraska National Forest)** is the only public archaeology site on National Forest System lands. Fee Demo revenues were used to support a Youth Excavation Program called Archaeologist for a Day. More than 3,500 visitors were encouraged to talk with working archaeologists at the site. Children could take a tour, learn to use archaeological tools, and excavate in a mock dig area. At the end of a two-hour session, the children received a certificate of accomplishment.



Archeological activities at Hudsen-Meng Bison Bonebed Visitor Center.

Oregon and Washington

The **Deschutes National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues to maintaining 465 miles of trail; rehabilitate 86 trailheads; repair bridges; and clean culverts of debris. Much of the work was done by volunteers. A partnership with the Northwest Interpretive Association provided funding

for four additional staff at the Newberry National Volcanic Monument. Fee Demo revenues helped fund two conservation education interns for the Northwest Service Academy AmeriCorps Program, which supported projects for 3,379 students and 680 adults during 3,400 hours of service.

The **Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues to pay for materials and volunteer expenses throughout the Forest in FY 2003. An example of trail work includes building 300 feet of new puncheon on the Hidden Lakes Trail. This project was accomplished using USDA FS employees, Youth Corps, and volunteers.

The **Willamette National Forest** offered several Heritage Expeditions: *Honorary CCC Company 2003* enabled a group of local high school students to work on restoration of historic sites, with CCC alumni serving as advisors. The expedition concluded with an annual CCC Alumni Picnic. The *Coast to Crest* tour followed Native American trade routes from the Oregon Coast to the Cascade Crest. Partners included the Siuslaw National Forest, Oregon State Parks, Confederated Tribes of Siletz, and the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. *Trekking the Old Santiam Wagon Road* provided 32 visitors a chance to relive the 1859 Wiley Party expedition along an Indian trail that eventually became the Santiam Wagon Road.



Volunteers repairing a trail on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF. Fee Demo revenues paid for materials and expenses.

Pennsylvania

The **Allegheny National Forest** used Fee Demo revenues to construct a new shower and flush toilet building, connect sewage lines to a municipal sewer system, add ten new campsites, and provide 30-ampere electrical service to 25 additional campsites.