

Truth and Some Consequences #4

by Jon Spunaugle

Last month (September) I finally found time to visit some forest areas near my home outside of Portland, Oregon. The weather was really great and the scenery spectacular and I needed a break. I stopped at a point of interest that I had always wanted to visit. As I started to park my car I noticed a sign that informed me that the parking area was a "Day Use Fee Parking Area" with a modest \$5.00 parking fee. There was a supply of envelopes for putting the fee in a secured collection box with the envelope receipt to be put on my dash board. I was a little surprised about the fee, but noticed that all the many other cars in the parking area were in compliance. I got my wallet out and found I didn't have anything smaller than a \$20.00 bill. Nor did any of my companions on the trip have anything smaller, just a little pocket change. The road to the area was narrow and did not have room for parking on the side of the road, so we started to fill out the envelope to sacrifice the \$20.00. It was over 20 miles back to the nearest bit of civilization. As we were finishing the envelope someone noticed that a Golden Age Pass or Golden Eagle Pass would suffice for the \$ 5.00 Fee. No one else in the party had one, but I had a Golden Age Pass with me. So the afternoon was saved as was my \$20.00 bill, by my Golden Age Passport which is good for life and cost me only \$10.00. I recovered my cost of the pass back when I visited the "Arch" in St Louis while attending the AFMS Convention in August.

Later in the month I stopped at a State area and was able to use my pass again to avoid paying another required use fee.

The lessons to be learned are several.

1. Fees for use of certain public owned areas are a reality, already.
2. Beware, access to certain National Forest Areas may require you to have exact change for any fees required.
3. A Golden Age or Golden Eagle Pass is a good investment if you are going to be visiting Federal and, perhaps, State land. If you don't have one you might want to get one and keep in your wallet or purse.

This little story brings me to the subject of the "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL PASS" (or "ATB Pass" as it is being termed).

On June 10, 2005. the Department of Interior, National Park Service published the following: "FEDERAL LANDS RECREATION ENHANCEMENT ACT (REA) SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS". In this document it stated (and I quote)

"Work is underway to initiate data collection efforts to assist in pricing the ATB pass. A notice of intent to collect information has been prepared and is in the internal clearance process. The notice will be published in the Federal Register. After the required 60-day period has elapsed, an information collection package will be submitted to OMB for clearance".

This "intent to collect" notice was published in the Federal Register on June 21st which puts the 60 day holding period ending on September 21, 2005. As of October 3, 2005 the information collection package has not been published, but I would expect to see this happen very soon. When published in the Federal Register it will have a public comment period which will be our first real opportunity to voice our opinions. So "stay tuned".

If you are on the Internet an easy way to follow the implementation of the recreation fee program is simply go to your preferred Internet search engine (I prefer Google.com) and type in "ATB Pass". Then select the latest FLREA (Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act) subjects. Among the choices is a BLM Slide Presentation you can access if you have power point software or view it as an html file. This slide program suggests that the first expected availability of this pass is not expected until December, 2007, so there should be several opportunities for public input in the meantime. As of this date the terms and cost of this ABT Pass has not yet been determined.

FOSSIL BILL

The U.S. Senate passed and sent to the U.S. House of Representatives, Senate Bill S-263 last July. The U.S House has referred the Bill to several House Committees for review and possible revision, including the House Natural Resources Committee, and some of its subcommittees, as well as the House Agriculture Committee. As of this writing, no House Bill number has been introduced or assigned this fossil bill. A Congressional contact has suggested to us that we need to send comments and any concerns to our own members of the U.S. House of Representatives and to the members of these Committees as soon as possible. This can be done by mail, phone call or by e-mail. To get the mailing and e-mail address of your elected representatives you may go to the Internet address <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/> and type in your location information or for information on your U.S Representative go to internet address <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>.

Remember, they don't know what you think, until you tell them. I will try to provide a review of this bill in my next article.

ROAD CLOSURES continue on Federal and State lands according to reports I get, but at a reduced rate, I believe. The 2006 Budgets for the Forest Service and the BLM do have increased amounts for roads and road maintenance .

Note I have new contact information. You can reach me by e-mail at jonspe@juno.com. Or, write me at 4841 Doctor Eldridge Dr. Washougal, WA 98671. My phone number is (360) 835-9313, but I'm away from the phone a lot so leave a message if you can.

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