



Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions about the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests' Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System for the Mt. Jefferson, Mt Washington, and Three Sisters Wildernesses.

Permit Requirements

When are permits required?

Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required beginning on June 15th, through October 15th. No permits of any kind will be required before or after those dates. Previously, permits were required from the Friday of Memorial Day through the last Friday in September, and self-issue permits were required through the end of October.

Where are permits required?

Overnight Use

- Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required for all overnight stays in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.
- No Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required for overnight stays in the Waldo Lake and Diamond Peak Wilderness areas. Free self-issue permits are still required in these wilderness areas.

Day Use

- Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are required at 19 of 79 trailheads in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas (see maps). Free self-issue day use permits are required at the other 60 trailheads.

How to Get Permits

How do people get permits? All reservations for Central Cascades Wilderness Permits need to be made through Recreation.gov either on-line, via the Recreation.gov app, or by calling their call center at 1-877-444-6777 or TDD 877-833-6777. Search for "Central Cascades Wilderness." Permits are not available at Forest Service offices.

What is the cost? There is a \$1.00 processing charge for day-use permits per individual and a \$6.00 processing charge for overnight-use permits per group. An overnight group can be from 1 to 12 people. Processing fees are non-refundable unless the area is closed by the Forest Service.

Permit Reservations and Permit Availability

Changes to the overnight permit system in 2023: There were no changes to the permit system for the 2024 season; it is the same as 2023.

When are overnight permits available? Only overnight permits are available for advance reservation. On April 2, 2024, about 40% of overnight permits for each day of the season will be released at 7:00 am PDT. Once the permit season begins, the remaining 60% of overnight permits will be released on a 7-day rolling

window throughout the permit season.

When are day-use permits available? No full season advanced reservations for day use permits will be available. Instead, day-use permits will be released for reservations on a 10-day and 2-day rolling window, with 40% of the permit quota available 10 days prior to the day of the trip, and the remaining 60% released 2-days prior.

Example: For the first day of the season, June 15, the first batch of permits (approximately 40% of the total) will be released on June 5th at 7:00 am PDT; the remaining permits will be released June 13th at 7:00 am PDT.

This change was made to reduce the number of “no-shows” and increase the overall opportunity for people to get day-use permits. The advanced day-use permit was indicated as the primary cause of “no-shows” and reduced people’s opportunity for day use permits.

Is there a limit to the number of permits an individual can have? People only can have three overnight permits at a time reserved. People should only reserve permits they know they will use. Once the ending date of a permit has passed, an individual can make another overnight reservation. The reason for a limit on the number of permits anyone can have at one time is because many people have expressed concern about people hoarding permits and permits going unused.

What is the cancellation policy for the Central Cascades Wilderness Permits? If someone decides not to use their Central Cascades Wilderness Permit, we highly encourage them to cancel their permit to allow others the opportunity to reserve it and go on a trip. The processing charges for permits through Recreation.gov cannot be refunded unless the Forest Service has closed an area due to a wildfire or other public safety reason.

Previous changes to the overnight permit system:

The permit system for overnight use received a major overhaul in 2022. The quota is now based on date of entry only; this means that there is a daily entry quota for each trailhead, which will allow a certain number of groups to start their trip each day. The permit system no longer requires available quota for each night of a group’s trip. This change means that groups will not have to block out consecutive dates when they make their reservation, which should reduce confusion when making a reservation. Declaring your date to exit the wilderness is part of the finalization of the reservation process now.

This change also means that there is now only one page on recreation.gov for making overnight permit reservations, again making the system easier to use and understand. Quotas were also modified in 2022, in order to account for no-shows.

How to Use Your Permit

Do I have to stay near the trailhead listed on my permit? No, once you have entered the wilderness using the entry trailhead and on the starting date listed on your permit, you are free to travel anywhere within the wilderness. You may exit the wilderness from any trailhead.

When I make an overnight permit reservation, do I need to select where I’m camping each night? No, this permit system is designed to allow freedom of travel once you’ve entered the wilderness. When making your reservation, you select your entry date and your entry trailhead. You are free to travel and camp beyond that area once in the wilderness and you are free to exit from a different trailhead.

Can I start a day use trip at a trailhead that doesn’t require permits and then hike into an area accessed by a trailhead that requires day use permits? Yes, once you enter the wilderness, you are free to travel anywhere within the wilderness. If entering from a trailhead that doesn’t require the Central Cascades

Wilderness Permit for day use, make sure you fill out the free, self-issue permit, available at the trailhead and carry it with you.

What if I do not use a trailhead to access Wilderness? Visitors that don't use a trailhead to enter one of the wildernesses still need to have a permit associated with the trailhead closest to their point of entry into wilderness. For day-use this could be a permit from either a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit trailhead or a self-issued permit trailhead. For overnight use it must be a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit. Avoiding entry from a trailhead does not eliminate the requirement of a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit if one is required.

Can I get an overnight permit for three days and just go in and out of the wilderness for day trips for three days? No. An overnight permit is only valid to enter the wilderness on the entry day and entry trailhead that is on the permit.

Do I still need to pay a fee or show a Northwest Forest Pass or other recreation pass at some trailheads? Yes, if a trailhead has a day use fee, the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit DOES NOT cover that requirement. Visitors will still need to pay the day use fee or display a Northwest Forest Pass or other recreation pass in their vehicle.

Permit Exceptions and Where Permits Are Not Required

What about areas that don't require a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit? Where Central Cascades Wilderness Permits are not required - free, self-issue permits are required, as they have been for decades:

- Waldo Lake and Diamond Peak trailheads (overnight and day use).
- 60 of 79 trailheads for day use in the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters wildernesses without trail quotas.

Are there exceptions to the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit requirement? Yes, the following situations are exempted from getting a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit:

- Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) Long Distance permit, issued by the Pacific Crest Trail Association for long distance hikers and riders traveling more than 500 miles along the PCT.
 - Camping is restricted to the PCT Corridor and prohibited in certain high use areas. [Maps are available online.](#)
- Hunters with elk or deer hunting tags from ODFW:
 - Elk and deer tags can be used in lieu of Wilderness permits (overnight and/or day) during the hunting season established by ODFW;
 - Entry is allowed one day prior to the start of the hunting season and one day after;
 - Three additional support persons can accompany the licensed hunter, group size max of four per hunting tag;
 - Hunters must have their hunting implement with them, along with proof of their hunting tag.
- Volunteers, while volunteering in coordination with the Forest Service

What about volunteers who contribute so much to improving these wildernesses? Volunteers working under an approved Forest Service volunteer agreement who contribute 40 hours of labor in support of wildernesses on the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests will get a volunteer pass, which will exempt them from needing to get a Central Cascades Wilderness Permit. All volunteer hours must be accounted for through the two forests' official volunteer programs. Program participation may be capped.

What if I don't get a Central Cascade Wilderness Permit? What is the fine? We expect people to follow the rules of getting a permit to help maintain these special areas for everyone's enjoyment and use for the long-term. Just like you are expected to stop at a red light to protect everyone's safety without a

police officer watching you, we expect you to get a permit whether anyone catches you or not without a permit. Your decision to not get a permit may lead to continuing impacts to these wildernesses and additional requirements to protect them for the future, which will affect all of us. Wilderness rangers can write violation notices to anyone in these wilderness areas without the appropriate permit. Fines for violations start at \$200 plus processing costs, but can go higher and require a court appearance, depending on the individual's behavior and history of past incidences.

For More Information

What if I have more questions? There are a few ways to reach out with additional questions:

- You can contact any Willamette or Deschutes National Forest office
- Visit the [permit information website](#)
- Email sm.fs.ccwp@usda.gov

Updated: February 8, 2024