



NEWS RELEASE

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FOREST SERVICE TO MAKE ITS SPECIAL USE PROGRAM MORE BUSINESSLIKE AND CUSTOMER-SERVICE ORIENTED

New rule implements direction by Congress to enhance administration of special uses on national forests and grasslands

WASHINGTON, Feb. 21, 2006 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service today announced a new rule governing fees for new and existing special use permits on national forests and grasslands—to bring the program more in line with good business practices and provide a higher level of customer service to applicants and permit holders.

“The Forest Service receives about 6,000 applications each year requesting special use permits, which has resulted in a significant backlog of new applications as well as existing permits requiring renewal or modification,” said Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. “The framework established in this rule will provide the agency with additional resources to deliver more timely reviews and evaluations for applicants and holders.”

The Forest Service is modifying the fee structure for processing special use permits based on Congressional direction to develop a program to improve administration of the agency’s special use program. Under the new rule, the Forest Service will collect fees from some permit applicants to recover the costs of processing and administering special use authorizations consistent with recommendations made by the General Accountability Office.

Applications for routine recreation uses requiring 50 hours or less to process will not be charged a processing fee. More complex applications will be assessed a fee based on the estimated number of hours that agency personnel typically spend in conducting activities directly related to processing the application and monitoring compliance with the permit. All fees will remain with the local office where they are collected and can only be used for processing applications and monitoring authorizations.

The new rule calls for the agency to process all routine applications (50 hours or less to complete and monitor) within 60 days. It also requires the agency to provide applicants with a timeline for completing more complex applications.

There are currently approximately 74,000 special use permits in effect on national forests and grasslands allowing a variety of activities.

For more information on the new rule, visit www.fs.fed.us/recreation/permits.

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