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Public Advisory Committees to Provide Recommendations on Federal Recreation Fees

WASHINGTON, September 22, 2006—The U. S. Departments of Agriculture and the Interior today announced the establishment of a new public advisory committee structure to provide recommendations concerning recreation fee proposals for public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

“We expect these advisory committees, when combined with our other public notification and communication efforts, will play a vital role in achieving a very high level of satisfaction with our recreation fee program,” said Agriculture Under Secretary Mark Rey.

“We especially need and value input from the public and local communities that are most affected by federal land management policies. We look forward to hearing their ideas and recommendations concerning federal recreation fees.” said Interior Deputy Secretary Lynn Scarlett.

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act requires the Secretaries to establish Recreation Resource Advisory Committees (Recreation RACs) in each state or region unless, in consultation with the governor of the state, it is determined insufficient interest exists to establish a Recreation RAC.

The public advisory committee structure agreed to by both departments provides a cost-effective and collaborative approach for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to receive recommendations on federal recreation

fee proposals. Through a new interagency agreement, both agencies will utilize existing BLM Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), where appropriate, or new Recreation RACs chartered by the Forest Service. These advisory committees and councils will make recommendations to both agencies on implementing, eliminating and changing recreation fees. The agreement details the duties of each agency and the procedures to be followed.

After 11 public listening sessions, work with congressional staff, internal agency analysis and legal review, the decision was made to utilize existing BLM RACs in the states of Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North and South Dakota, and Utah. In addition to these councils, the Forest Service will establish five new Recreation RACs across the nation. They will be in four Forest Service regions -- the Eastern, Southern, Pacific Northwest and Pacific Southwest (including BLM states of California, Oregon and Washington) -- as well as in the state of Colorado. The Forest Service will also use the existing Black Hills National Forest Advisory Board for the Black Hills National Forest. Based on recommendations from the governors of Alaska, Nebraska and Wyoming, there will be no Recreation RACs in their states.

The committees may provide recommendations for recreation fees on both Forest Service and BLM managed lands in their respective areas and are expected to become operational as early as this winter. All advisory committee meetings will be open to the public.

The Forest Service is currently accepting nominations for membership on the five new Recreation RACs. People interested in serving on a committee may review the application criteria and obtain a nomination packet at www.fs.fed.us/passespermits/rrac. Nominations for these positions will be accepted up until October 23, 2006. The interagency agreement is also available on this website.

Although the existing BLM RACs already have members in place, they periodically solicit nominations for vacancies on the councils. Those interested in serving on a BLM RAC, can find local information on www.blm.gov/rac.

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