

**STATEMENT OF NINA ROSE HATFIELD
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**Bureau of Land Management
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
Recreation Fee Demonstration Program**

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The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) experience with the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. Overall the program has been positive for the Bureau and has been well-received by our publics.

The recreation fee projects under the Recreation Fee Pilot Demonstration program generated \$3.5 million in FY98. While this number may seem small compared to some of our sister agencies, it has been significant for the BLM and is allowing us to take on projects that address public health and safety and environmental protection. The BLM strongly supports the program and would support permanent authorization.

The BLM has taken to heart the Committee's direction to be innovative and flexible in our fee program. For example, at the South Fork of the Snake River the BLM participates with the Forest Service and the State of Idaho to have a single fee collection for lands managed by all three agencies. At this same site, we are using ATM-type machines to sell permits (something we are also experimenting with in California at the Imperial Sand Dunes.) On the Deschutes River in Oregon, a popular floating site, our local managers have established a fee schedule which is lower for weekday usage to encourage greater use when the area traditionally has fewer visitors. This has helped reduce crowds on the weekends. The Paria Canyon-Coyote Buttes site in Arizona is a popular wilderness canyon hiking area. An extensive web site has been developed, working with Northern Arizona University and the local interpretive association, which allows visitors to obtain information on the area, check on the availability of permits for future dates and even make reservations by credit card over the Internet.

In New Mexico the BLM has a site combining both cooperative intergovernmental agreements and a unique fee system. The BLM has formed a partnership with the Pueblo of Cochiti initiating a day-use fee of \$5.00 per vehicle at Tent Rocks ACEC/National Recreation Trail. Through a unique cooperative management agreement, the Pueblo and the BLM work collaboratively to enhance management and visitor services at the site. Visitors pick up and deposit their own fee envelopes on site (into a fee pipe). Random monitoring at Tent Rocks indicates a high level of compliance with this honor system of fee collections.

Because many of our users are local, we have instituted annual passes where possible. Aware that even a \$15-\$40 annual pass may be a burden on the budget for some working families, at many sites we allow individuals to provide volunteer service in lieu of cash. At our popular fishing and hiking location, the Gunnison Gorge on the Western Slope of Colorado, nearly 40

individuals took advantage of this option, providing four hours of service in return for their annual pass.

The BLM has taken a slightly different approach from some of our sister agencies on distribution of recreation fees received. We are keeping 100% of collected fees on site. Our publics tell us that they support the program, if we keep the funds where they are collected.

We have also worked hard to seek local public support for, and input into discussions about, our fee demonstration sites. We have created outreach materials, held public meetings and solicited local recommendations. Our Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) have participated in discussions on recreation fee sites and we have included local governments our efforts. While there will always be some opposition to any new fee, we have found that overall the response has been positive.

When you look at the overall visitation figures for the BLM at our fee sites, you will notice a decline from 15.5 million visitors in 1997 to approximately 14.2 million in 1998. While increased fees may have played some role in this decrease, we think the answer lies elsewhere. Unseasonable and/or extreme weather problems plagued some sites. For example, our Yakima Canyon site in Washington was hampered by landslides during the recreation season which resulted in a decrease in visitation from 195,000 visits in 1997 to 41,000 in 1998. Additionally, two of our visitor centers, Anasazi Heritage Center in Colorado and the Oregon Trail Center both saw decreases in visitation largely attributed to both a decrease in regional tourism in those areas and a wearing off of the novelty of these sites. On the other hand, our most visited site, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area just outside of Las Vegas saw an increase in visitation from 831,273 in 1997 to 1,010,496 visitors in 1998 following the imposition of a \$5 a car fee in November of 1997.

In summary, the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program has been a winner for the BLM. We are using the fees for much needed site enhancements that have won popular support among our users. While a "Sweet Smelling Toilet" (SST) may not sound exciting, when you're 50 miles from the nearest town, it is an invaluable asset to a remote site.

We strongly support the recommendations of the Department of the Interior as sent to Congress on January 31, 1999. We hope that this program will be made permanent so we can continue the type of innovation and creativity that has been so popular with our public.