

RECREATION FEES: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF REGION 6 FOREST SERVICE EMPLOYEES IN RECREATION POSITIONS AND NON-RECREATION POSITIONS

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Abstract.—This study explored the attitudes and perceptions of U.S. Forest Service employees concerning the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program (RFDP) in the Pacific Northwest Region (Region 6, Oregon and Washington), and their perceptions of how recreation fees should be used once the money is collected. Employees who reported that they were in a recreation-related position accounted for 23 percent of the sample, while the remaining 77 percent of respondents reported that they were in non-recreation positions. The results of this study showed that there were significant differences in the perceptions of Forest Service employees in recreation positions as compared to those in non-recreation positions. Further study in this area looking at the standards of what constitutes an improvement to facility and services as well as how the Recreation Fee Program affects the non-recreation employees may give us a better understanding of the effects of the RFDP on non-recreation employees and recreation employees.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Congress authorized the implementation of the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program (RFDP) for U.S. Federal land agencies such as the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. This program came about due to the increasing use of these federal lands and the lack of resources to meet visitor needs while protecting the integrity of the natural environment. As part of the RFDP, the U.S. federal land agencies were

required to evaluate the effectiveness of this program on visitor and management operations (Luloff et al. 2000).

Researchers from West Virginia University and the Pennsylvania State University conducted a study that focused on internal stakeholders to complement studies that they conducted with external stakeholders (Burns et al. 2003, Burns et al. 2002a, Burns et al. 2002b). The present study examined the attitudes and perceptions of Forest Service employees concerning the RFDP in Region 6. Among the objectives of this study, this paper focuses on understanding the differences in opinions and attitudes of Forest Service employees in recreation positions compared to Forest Service employees in non-recreation positions.

2.0 METHODS

In January 2002, approximately 7000 blank surveys were mailed to all employees in the Forest Service units in Region 6. Employees were asked to fill out the surveys and mail them back, anonymously, to a central Forest Service address. A total of 2,240 surveys were returned; of those, 2,215 usable, completed surveys were included in this analysis, yielding a 32 percent response rate. Variables used to compare the perceptions of Forest Service employees in a recreation position and Forest Service employees in a non-recreation position are: rate of support for fee program, information or actions that would make them more supportive of the fee program, managers' opinions on aspects of the Fee Program, adequate amount of information on the fee program provided to explain it to the public, and improvement in recreation facilities and services due to fee revenue.

Analysis of variance was used to examine group differences in job duties and support for the fee program. The Chi-square test was used to look at what information or actions would help improve support for the fee program across all job duties. One-way analysis of variance was used to observe differences in managers' opinions on aspects of the fee program. With respect to

whether all job duties the information was adequate to explain the Fee Program to visitors, chi-square analysis was used to determine the differences within the groups. Changes in services and facilities due to recreation fees were tested with chi-squares to see the differences within the groups' proportions.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Job Duties Represented and Support of Fee Program

A wide range of job duties was represented in the sample, with a sufficient number of respondents in each category. Those employees in land stewardship (30%) and administration (27%) positions were among the highest employees in fire (9%) positions represented the lowest percentage of the sample (Table 1). Respondents in recreation and visitor center (mean = 3.42) and administration (mean=3.38) positions expressed the strongest support for the Fee Program. This would seem to be normal in that the recreation employees as well as the administration employees recognize the need for the Fee Program and the positive influence that the Fee Program has on their facilities and services. Non-recreation positions (e.g., resource protection [mean = 2.84], land stewardship [mean = 2.77], fire [mean = 2.68], respectively) expressed the lowest support for the Fee Program (Table 2). These results portray a need to explore more about what knowledge the non-recreation employees have and how their positions are affected by fee revenue.

3.2 Information or Actions to Make Forest Service Employees More Supportive

Forest Service employees were asked to choose which statements regarding information or actions would make them more supportive of the Fee Program. A Chi-Square test was used to determine which information or action items would make employees more supportive of the Fee Program (Table 3). Overall, none of the information and action items would make employees, across all job duties, more supportive of the Fee Program. The three statements that were significant across the different job duties were: *nothing, I am already supportive* ($X^2 = 40.916^{***}$), *nothing, I cannot support the program* ($X^2 = 29.328^{***}$) and *more opportunity to ask questions and get answers about the program* ($X^2 = 15.530^{**}$).

Table 1.—Job duties represented in sample

| Job Duties | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Land Stewardship | 30% |
| Administration | 27% |
| Recreation and Visitor Center | 18% |
| Resource Protection | 16% |
| Fire | 9% |

Table 2.—Managers' support for the Fee Program

| Job Duties | Mean |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Recreation and Visitor Center | 3.42 |
| Administration | 3.38 |
| Resource Protection | 2.84 |
| Land Stewardship | 2.77 |
| Fire | 2.68 |

Response Scale: 1 = Strongly Oppose - 5 = Strongly Support

Employees in the administration (21%) and recreation/visitor center (18%), rated *nothing, I am already supportive of the Fee Program* highest compared to all other job duties. Employees in fire, land stewardship, and resource management (26%, 25%, and 23%, respectively) reported that nothing would help them become more supportive as they do not support the Fee Program, larger percentages for employees in recreation/visitor center and administration positions. Employees across all job duties (land stewardship 9%; recreation/visitor center 9%; resource protection 9%; administration 4%; and fire 9%), equally reported *more opportunity to ask questions and get answers about the program* as least likely to make them more supportive. Perhaps employees are less interested in general information about the Fee Program, and more interested in information that allows them to better understand program management and operational actions. Similarly, employees in all job duties (land stewardship 48%; recreation/visitor center 49%; resource protection 50%; administration 45%; and fire 50%) were uncertain as to whether *more/better information about what is being accomplished with the money on my forest* would make them more supportive of the program; however, this item was also rated the highest as to what would make employees more supportive. Surprisingly, employees in fire, resource protection and land stewardship were more likely to support the Fee Program if they had more knowledge regarding accomplishments using the fee revenue while

Table 3.—Information or actions to make more supportive

| Information or Actions | Land Stewardship | Recreation and Visitor Center | Resource Protection | Admin. | Fire | Test of Significance |
|---|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------|------|----------------------------|
| | ----- Percent Responding Yes ----- | | | | | |
| Nothing, I am already supportive | 9% | 18% | 12% | 21% | 9% | X ² = 40.916*** |
| Nothing, I cannot support the program | 25% | 13% | 23% | 16% | 26% | X ² = 29.328*** |
| More opportunity to ask questions and get answers about the program | 9% | 9% | 9% | 4% | 9% | X ² = 15.530** |
| A broader use of the funds generated from the recreation Fee Program | 15% | 16% | 13% | 11% | 14% | X ² = 4.965 |
| A better understanding of the law and Congress' intent in authorizing the Fee Program | 20% | 22% | 24% | 20% | 24% | X ² = 3.055 |
| More/better information about what is being accomplished with the money on my forest | 48% | 49% | 50% | 45% | 50% | X ² = 2.658 |
| A better understanding of how visitors feel about the Fee Program | 22% | 23% | 24% | 20% | 23% | X ² = 1.852 |

** = significant at the .01 level; *** = significant at the .001 level

these employees are least likely to see improvements in services and facilities. Further study needs to be done to explore what type of information would make a difference, as well as how fee revenue may indirectly affect their positions positively.

3.3 Managers' Opinions

A one-way analysis of variance examined 11 items related to manager opinions by job duties. Looking at different aspects of the Fee Program, job duties or positions held may be important in gaining a better understanding of attitudes and perceptions of the Fee Program. Significant differences were found in 10 of the 11 aspects of the Fee Program across the various job duties (Table 4). The top three managers' opinions employees agreed with the most, across all job duties, are the aspect that "*People should be able to recreate even if they can't afford the fee*" (overall mean = 4.26), "*Recreational fees are unfair to people with lower incomes*" (overall mean = 3.59), and "*I understand the reasons behind the Fee Program*" (overall mean = 3.58). The aspect of the Fee Program that employees in all job duties disagreed with the most was *corporate sponsorship with few or no restrictions* (overall mean = 2.02). Similarly, the top three aspects that non-recreation employees agreed with are "*people should be*

able to recreate even if they can't afford the fee" (mean = 4.27), "*recreational fees are unfair to people with lower incomes*" (3.65) and "*I understand the reasons behind the Fee Program*"+- (mean = 3.49). Employees in FS recreation and visitor centers reported the highest level of agreement for many of the items that showed the greatest level of differences, clearly demonstrating the degree of support for the fee program by these employees. Interestingly, employees in the administrative job positions were most similar to the recreation employees in their support for the fee program opinions. Also noted is the consistency in the non-support of these items by respondents who reported that their job duties were fire related. Those in fire-related positions showed the least support for six of the items. Respondents in land stewardship positions showed significantly lower levels of support for three of the items.

The employees in recreation positions rated the item *people should be able to recreate even if they can't afford the fee* (mean = 4.17), *I understand the reasons behind the fee program* (mean = 3.90) and *charging fees helps the FS to achieve their mission* (mean = 3.54) within the top three aspects that they agree upon most. Although recreation/visitor center employees rated *fees should be used to make*

Table 4.—Manager’s opinions by job duty

| | Land Stewardship | Recreation and Visitor Center | Resource Protection | Admin | Fire | Overall Mean | F |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------|------|--------------|-----------|
| I do not actively implement the fee program as I do not support the program | 2.50 | 1.95 | 2.55 | 2.06 | 2.82 | 2.34 | 16.296*** |
| Charging fees helps the FS to achieve their mission | 2.98 | 3.54 | 3.13 | 3.37 | 2.80 | 3.15 | 14.662*** |
| I understand the reasons behind the fee program | 3.59 | 3.90 | 3.52 | 3.73 | 3.13 | 3.58 | 14.150*** |
| I approve of the NFP program | 2.67 | 3.15 | 2.70 | 3.12 | 2.61 | 2.86 | 11.995*** |
| Fees are inappropriate as they may exclude some visitors | 3.54 | 3.07 | 3.51 | 3.15 | 3.61 | 3.38 | 11.263*** |
| Charging fees on NF will lead to over-commercialization | 2.80 | 2.40 | 2.82 | 2.36 | 2.68 | 2.61 | 10.486*** |
| People should be able to recreate even if they can't afford the fee | 4.43 | 4.17 | 4.26 | 4.12 | 4.26 | 4.26 | 6.853*** |
| Recreational fees are unfair to people with lower incomes | 3.67 | 3.39 | 3.68 | 3.46 | 3.78 | 3.59 | 5.122*** |
| Fees should be used to make up for declining agency budgets | 2.50 | 2.61 | 2.40 | 2.71 | 2.38 | 2.53 | 3.162* |
| Corporation sponsorship with few or no restrictions | 1.94 | 1.91 | 1.99 | 2.11 | 2.21 | 2.02 | 2.814* |
| Fees should only be charged where facilities are provided, such as picnic areas and trailheads | 3.32 | 3.30 | 3.31 | 3.24 | 3.20 | 3.28 | .361 |

* = significant at the .05 level; *** = significant at the .001 level
 Response scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree

up for declining budgets the highest, it also shows stronger disagreement than agreement. Those in recreation/visitor center positions clearly support the Fee Program, understand the reasons behind it and see improvements to their facilities and services due to the fee revenue. It would be beneficial to better understand their views on how their budget relates to the Fee Program or whether it is merely that they feel charging fees is not a sufficient reason.

3.4 Enough Information Provided to Explain the RFDP Program

Chi-square analysis was used to determine significant differences in whether or not employees have enough information to explain the Fee Program to visitors, across all job duties (Table 5). Employees within non-recreation positions felt they did not have enough information provided in order to explain the Fee Program to visitors. Conversely, the majority (70%) of recreation/visitor center employees felt they had enough information to explain the Fee Program to visitors and just under half (45%) of administration

employees felt that they had enough information to explain to visitors. A better understanding of the Fee Program and ability to explain the program to visitors is pertinent as they are most likely to come into contact with the visitors at ranger district offices. Significance was found at the .001 level when looking at if there was enough information to explain the Fee Program to visitors across all job duties ($X^2 = 103.906^{***}$). Once again recreation/visitor center employees responded positively to the Fee Program than the other job positions.

Table 5.—Enough information to explain the Fee Program

| | Yes | No | Test of Significance |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|
| Recreation and Visitor Center | 70% | 30% | |
| Administration | 45% | 55% | |
| Land Stewardship | 41% | 59% | |
| Resource Protection | 40% | 60% | |
| Fire | 27% | 73% | |
| Total | 46% | 54% | $X^2 = 103.906^{***}$ |

*** = significant at the .001 level

3.5 Improvement in Services and Facilities Due to Recreation Fees

In order to examine if there were any significant differences in improvement to services due to the Fee Program by the five job duties, a Chi-square test was executed. Almost half of the respondents in all non-recreation positions reported that they didn't know if there was improvement to their unit's services due to funding from recreation fees. Just over half (54%) of the respondents in recreation positions expressed that there was improvement to services due to recreation fees (Table 6). Significance was found at the .001 level when looking at if employees in all job duties felt that there was improvement to services on their forest due to recreation fees ($\chi^2 = 117.743^{***}$). Conversely, the distribution of responses to improvement of facilities on the respondent's unit is similar to those results presented in Table

6. Almost half of respondents in non-recreation positions reported that they didn't know if there was improvement in their unit's services due to funding from recreation fees. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents in recreation positions felt they saw an improvement in their unit's facilities due to funds from the recreation fee program; where the non-recreation employees reported that improvements to their facilities was unknown (Table 7). Significance was found at the .001 level when looking at if employees in all job duties felt that there was improvement to facilities on their forest due to recreation fees ($\chi^2 = 124.963^{***}$).

4.0 DISCUSSION

The results in this study showed a common trend of non-recreation position employees had a lower degree of agreement and support for the Recreation Fee Program. Further more, recreation/visitor center and administration employees had the highest support and better understanding of the Fee Program and its benefits to their unit. Resource protection and fire position employees were continuously reporting the least support for the Fee Program as well as not knowing whether or not the Fee Program contributes positively to their

Table 6.—Improvement to services due to recreation fees

| | Yes | No | Don't Know | Test of Significance |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|------------|--------------------------|
| Recreation and Visitor Center | 54% | 20% | 26% | |
| Administration | 38% | 14% | 48% | |
| Land Stewardship | 27% | 25% | 48% | |
| Fire | 25% | 24% | 51% | |
| Resource Protection | 20% | 26% | | |
| Total | 33% | 21% | | $\chi^2 = 117.743^{***}$ |

*** = significant at the .001 level

Table 7.—Improvement to facilities due to recreation fees

| | Yes | No | Don't Know | Test of Significance |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|------------|--------------------------|
| Recreation and Visitor Center | 66% | 14% | 20% | |
| Administration | 46% | 10% | 44% | |
| Land Stewardship | 34% | 20% | 46% | |
| Resource Protection | 31% | 20% | 49% | |
| Fire | 31% | 20% | 49% | |
| Total | 42% | 16% | 42% | $\chi^2 = 124.963^{***}$ |

*** = significant at the .001 level

unit, yet they felt manager's opinion items regarding fees displacing visitors as a concern or negative affect of the program. This may be due to the fact that their everyday management is not affected by the program or they do not deal with the affects of the program. Recreation position employees had a higher degree of support as well as reporting that funding from recreation fees have contributed to improvement in facilities and services. Recreation position employees also felt that the Fee Program will positively affect the forest and they understood the reasons behind the Fee Program, where non-recreation employees are more concerned for visitors to be displaced.

Recreation employees and non-recreation employees were similar in that the highest rated manager's opinion item is people should be able to recreate even if they can't afford the fee; however, recreation employees felt that they understand the reasons behind the fee program and that charging fees helps the Forest Service to achieve their mission. The results showed that both recreation employees and non-recreation employees are concerned about displacing visitors due to fees. Yet, recreation and administration employees also felt strongly about the

significance of the fee program in regards to achieving their mission and fee revenue making a positive difference in their facilities and services.

Non-recreation employees also reported that they do not actively implement the fee program as they do not support the program. This also portrayed how the non-recreation employees are not affected by the program in a positive way as they did not seem to feel that there is any benefit to the program. Non-recreation employees felt that the Fee Program is more of an obstacle for the lower income visitors. This lends to the notion that they may not have a clear understanding of the Fee Program or the benefits of the program. Further more, non-recreation employees may not have access to social science studies and information regarding the benefits of the Fee Program and the opinions and attitudes of visitors as well as those who do not visit National Forests. Results also showed that the non-recreation employees do not have enough information to explain the Fee Program to visitors, thus, feeling as though the Fee Program has no value to their management area or to the visitors.

This study portrayed the need for further study into why the non-recreation employees feel differently and what factors play into the difference. Items that showed mutual opinions were items that dealt with displacing visitors due to paying a fee. This demonstrated that employees across all job duties were concerned about the visitors and how the Fee Program may affect them and their decisions to recreate on their forest. Further more, results also illustrated that the information and action items would not make them more supportive of the Fee Program. *More/better information about what is being accomplished with the money on my forest* portrayed a split as to whether it would make them more supportive of the Fee Program. This established a better understanding as to why the non-recreation employees reported their opinions of the Fee Program in the manner that they did and that further information may have a bearing on their support of the

Fee Program. In addition, it could assist their facilitation of explaining the Fee Program to visitors that they come into contact with in the field or office or for their own knowledge in management.

Further study in this area looking at the standards of what constitutes an improvement to facility and services as well as how the Recreation Fee Program affects the non-recreation employees may give us a better understanding of the effects of the Recreation Fee Program on Forest Service employees. This may also aid in a better understanding of how non-recreation employees view management of visitors to the forest. Further studies looking at the visitors' opinion will also facilitate a better understanding of how the visitors view the Fee Program and how the Fee Program affects them. Overall, this can allow managers to better market to the public as well as better education for the Forest Service employees.

5.0 CITATIONS

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