



Fees could increase on public lands

Posted: May 17, 2010 7:19 PM MDT

Updated: May 17, 2010 7:19 PM MDT



DREW WILKINS
DWILKINS@KJCT8.COM

GRAND JUNCTION (KJCT) -- Your next venture into the great outdoors might cost you a little more.

Budget cuts have many federal recreation areas looking for other sources of funding.

Colorado's fourteeners, our 14,000 foot mountains, draw in half a million climbers each year, but proposed fees of up to 20-dollars to climb are getting a mixed reaction.

Although BLM lands like the Lunch Loop are completely separate from the proposed fees on the fourteeners. Mountain bikers we spoke with today have strong opinions as to whether those tolls are needed.

"I think that tolls are ridiculous," said Eric Esswein. He was climbing just last week, and feels hikers already do their part.

"Essentially we're already paying tolls for these in the form of taxes," he said.

But some people understand the need to make up for federal budget cuts.

"I know that Congress has not authorized adequate funds to keep the areas up," explained Dave Wolfe.

But the Forest Service isn't the only group talking about an increase in fees, passes, or permits. Small increases may be on the way for B.L.M. lands as well.

"Most Bureau of Land Management areas are in fact open to the public without a fee," said Katie Stevens of the B.L.M., "We do consider fees where we're providing an enhanced level of service to the public."

Those areas include the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater.

"We look at surrounding areas and try to keep our fees similar. So we looked at the Gunnison Gorge, we looked at some areas in Utah, and we try to be comparable to those areas with the fees that we're considering charging. And right now we're looking at the five to seven dollar range for overnight camping through Ruby/Horsethief," explained Stevens.

These fees have not been approved yet and the B.L.M. will hold an open house June 1st to take public questions.

As for Colorado National Monument, they have proposed a fee increase as well, from 7 to 10 dollars per car and from 4 to 5 dollars per person. Campground fees would double.

The public can comment on the proposal through June 30th.