

News

Officials to work on lake fees

BLM, city to meet in hopes of setting reasonable rates

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The recent announcement of possible fees on Lake Havasu is drawing concern from many city and lake officials.

Bureau of Land Management representatives announced in June the organization is currently administering an environmental assessment on the Lake to determine Special Recreation Permit Regulations and possible fees for "nearly every boating activity on the Lake." The announcement sparked notions in many in the hospitality industry that the fees could hinder tourism greatly. In response, BLM representatives and city officials say they are working cooperatively to develop an education plan and possibly "minimize the impact of the fees on the Lake."

"If there are a large amount of fees for events such as the (International Jet Sports Boating Association) World Finals, Desert Storm or regattas, then that will do nothing but drive those events away from our town and that's just unacceptable," said Mayor Mark Nexsen Friday. "We've agreed to continue to meet with the BLM to find a way for that not to happen. ... The basic idea of the meetings is let's get out some information to these promoters of these events, assuring them that nothing is going to change from last year for now."

BLM representatives say the fee process is still undetermined but plans to use the same structure used nationwide. For further details on the possible fees about the Special Recreation Permits, residents are asked to visit BLM California's website at www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/prog/recreation/recpermit.html. BLM Lake Havasu Field Manager Ramone McCoy said she expects the same schedule and details will be available on the local website shortly.

"We're working on the environmental assessment for both the competitive and organized events and we will have public hearings before it is done for residents to comment," McCoy said. "We are cooperatively working with the city to help educate people on what's going on with the events and fees on the lake."

But city officials are saying fees shouldn't be imposed before the completion of the environmental assessment, which is expected as early as October.

"What we've discussed is that until we have the opportunity to meet again, the only thing the BLM is asking from event participants is that they apply for the permits," said City Manager Charlie Cassens. "But BLM folks have told us they'll hold off on establishing or collecting fees until we have time to develop a meaningful program and set fee rates that make sense and that it's not so onerous."

Cassens added that city officials don't want the fees "to affect our events on the Lake."

"If there is a common thread throughout this whole thing, it's that nobody wants to see these fees and bureaucratic processes chase anybody off the Lake because it could certainly have a detrimental effect on our economy," Cassens said. "I don't think (BLM representatives) want that to happen but obviously they're a government agency that has a charge to regulate these kinds of activities on the Lake."

Lands and waters at the 450-foot Lake elevation and below are Bureau of Reclamation withdrawn lands, said BLM Assistant Field Manager Mike Henderson. "These lands (and waters) are managed by the BLM under Secretarial Order No. 2915 that states, 'the purpose of this Order is to assign to the BLM full responsibility for the implementation of the Plan (Lower Colorado River Land Use Plan, 1964), including; negotiation, execution, and administration of leases; the administration of Reclamation lands used or to be used for recreation or wildlife activities; administration of the special permit program on the lands; and for coordination with plans, programs, or activities of bureaus and offices that relate to or affect the Plan.'"

BLM representatives previously indicated that enforcement began in July 2009 when city officials asked for assistance in the removal of shoreline and floating vendors from Rotary Park and London Bridge beaches. But Field Manager McCoy said those events only "sped up the process."

"(The BOR) regulations gave BLM the jurisdiction for managing recreational activities on BOR lands," she said. "That's what kind of set the stage for all of the things that happened from there. ... When the city asked the BLM to step in and deal with vendors on the Lake, that jumped the gun on getting the BLM involved on the Lake. So we had to step up and exert our jurisdictional authority."

Cassens said the process took many by surprise.

"Here we are for 40 years where these processes and fees were not in place," Cassens said. "And now we're looking at all of these systems and processes that are going to affect almost everything we do on the Lake. We don't want these processes to affect our special events because they do contribute to our local economy. In the wake of the downturn in our economy, tourism and special events have become a prime focus in our city, and if there's the potential to run off even one event, then we need to work to see that that doesn't happen."

A number of hospitality officials within the city agree the fees will hinder tourism.

"These new fees are definitely going to have some of our events reeling or folding altogether," Convention and Visitors Bureau President/CEO Doug Traub said in June. "Some of these regulations could effectively shut down our ability to market ourselves to film and other events in our city. I mean, damn it, that's our bread and butter here."

In terms of possible revenue for the city, Traub said he sees potential for an "astronomical increase in fees and detrimental effects to our revenue stream."

"We also estimate (the fees) would comprise about 25 percent of the estimated revenue of all of the events on the Lake," Traub told the Lake Havasu Marine Association members in June. "It certainly infringes on the revenues our city relies upon. ... For all of these reasons, it is definitely not a plus for tourism in our community."

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