

New Recreation Pass Program Will Help Public Enjoy Enhanced Sites on Public Lands

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Deputy Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett and Under Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey on Tuesday announced a new interagency recreation pass that will benefit visitors to national public lands. The new pass, authorized by the Congress in 2004, combines the benefits of existing recreation passes from five federal agencies into one comprehensive pass, the "America the Beautiful" National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass.

The new pass covers recreation opportunities on public lands managed by four Department of the Interior agencies " the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation, and by the Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service.

Access to most public lands remains free. The pass applies to those locations that currently have entrance or standard amenity fees.

The new program replaces the Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and the Golden Access Passports as well as the National Parks Pass. Existing passes will remain valid until expired, lost or stolen.

Sales of the new pass will begin in January 2007 and will be available at federal recreation sites that charge entrance and standard amenity fees, through government internet sites, and through select third-party vendors.

"Our federal lands boast scenic vistas, breathtaking landscapes, and unique historic and cultural sites. This new interagency pass offers a cost-effective and easy option for those who plan to visit multiple federal recreation sites," said Deputy Secretary Scarlett. "The family vacation to these destinations is an American tradition. Visitors can now travel from a site managed by the Department of the Interior to a site managed by the Department of Agriculture without getting a different pass.

“A sightseer in Utah, for instance, can view the majestic rock formations of Bryce and Zion National Parks and then explore Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area on the Ashley National Forest using only one pass.”

“The interagency pass is a great New Year’s gift both to the public lands and to their visitors,” said Mark Rey, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and the Environment, who oversees the Forest Service. “Annual interagency pass revenue will benefit public lands by providing funds for maintenance, new visitor services, and programs.”

The officials noted that 100 percent of the revenue derived from passes sold at federal recreation sites will directly benefit the selling agency and no less than 80 percent of the revenue will remain at the site where the pass was sold.

The new pass program was created by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, which Congress authorized in December 2004.

The four different passes in the new interagency program are:

- 1) a new annual interagency pass costing \$80--For visitors to multiple federal sites, the pass offers unlimited coverage of entrance and standard amenity recreation fees for a specific period of time, typically a year, beginning from the date of first use.

2) a \$10 lifetime senior pass for U.S. citizens 62 or over;

3) a free lifetime access pass for citizens with permanent disabilities; and

4) a new, free annual volunteer pass for volunteers acquiring 500 hours of service on a cumulative basis.

The new interagency pass is good at vehicle-based entry sites for all occupants in a single, non-commercial vehicle. At walk-up sites, the pass is good for the pass holder and three adults (total of four adults). There is no charge for children under 16. This represents a particularly cost-effective opportunity for families traveling to federal recreation sites. For comparison purposes, Parks Canada offers a family/group annual pass for about \$140.

Some specific examples of projects funded with fee revenues include: rehabilitating the Yellowstone National Park Canyon Visitor Center and creating new exhibits at Yellowstone National Park, enhancing boat launch facilities on the Tonto National Forest in Arizona, building an accessible boardwalk at Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest in Wyoming, and improving the museum at Desoto National Wildlife Refuge in Iowa.

The new passes -â€“ which feature award-winning landscape photographs of federal lands -â€“ are part of a new interagency â€œShare the Experienceâ€• Annual Federal Lands Photo Contest. The contest, sponsored by the National Park Service, the National Park Foundation, and Casio, encourages visitors to submit photos of federal lands for a chance to have their image chosen for the next yearâ€™s annual pass.

The passes will be durable, plasticized, and designed with technology that will enable future improvements to the program.

For more information, please contact DOI's U.S. Geological Survey at <http://store.usgs.gov/pass> or phone 1-888-275-8747 Option 1. The annual pass will be available for sale through the USGS store and through the government's federal lands recreation web portal at www.recreation.gov in January 2007.

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