

Proposal requires state parks reservation fees paid in advance

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

April 23 Session in Bend will be Held at the Holiday Inn, 7-9 p.m.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) may require future reservation customers to pay all booking and rental fees at the time they reserve state park campsites and picnic areas. Reservations Northwest, OPRD's central reservations service, now charges a \$6 reservation fee, per booking, plus a first night's deposit on a campsite. A customer reserving a \$22 full hookup site for three nights pays \$28. Under the new policy, the same customer would pay \$72 in advance—the \$6 reservation fee plus \$66 for the three nights. The public will have a chance to comment on the proposed full payment change at administrative rulemaking hearings April 16 at Champoeg State Heritage Area, April 21 in Newport and April 23 in Bend. People also can respond, starting immediately, through OPRD's website or by e-mail, or by writing to OPRD at 725 Summer St NE Ste C, Salem 97301 (attn: Richard Walkoski). The department will accept comments until April 24. The proposed rule change is online along with answers to frequently asked questions at www.oregonstateparks.org (see "Frequently asked questions" under "Let's Go Camping.") OPRD is proposing the full fee payment to counteract an overbooking problem. "Some people reserve sites for the maximum 14 days that you're allowed to rent the same site," said OPRD Recreation Programs Manager Richard Walkoski. "When their arrival date at the park gets closer, they cancel all but the final dates of the 14-day period that they intended to camp." The overbooking tactic can give its practitioners a 12-day head start over customers who try, nine months in advance, to reserve a site for only the dates they intend to use it. An Oregon state park campsite cannot be reserved more than nine months before an arrival date. Walkoski says that only seven percent of the customers who reserve a site for 14 days stay the entire time. As a result, many campsites are unavailable to reserve until as little as two days before the reservation holder's false arrival date. "That's unfair to people who use the reservations systems as it is intended to be used, and it's costly to us," said Walkoski. "Some of those sites go unoccupied, costing parks potential revenue." Requiring full payment up front could dramatically reduce the practice, said Walkoski. "It could present a cash flow hardship for some people, but almost half our customers already are making full payments when they reserve their sites so that they can take advantage of our express check-in option." Campers who arrive at a park having paid in advance for every night of their stay can bypass its registration booth and head directly to their reserved sites. The overbooking problem is not exclusive to Oregon. "It's a nationwide issue for state park systems that offer reservation services," said Walkoski. "Most of those states have adopted full payment policies to try to resolve the problem." The first public hearing on Oregon's proposed rule change will take place April 16 from 7-9 p.m. in the Champoeg State Heritage Area visitor center meeting room near the park entrance, 7670 Champoeg Rd NE. The April 21 hearing in Newport will be at the Central Lincoln Public Utility Meeting Room, 2129 N. Coast Highway. The April 23 session in Bend will be at the Holiday Inn, 20615 Grandview Drive. The hearings in Newport and Bend also will be from 7-9 p.m.

Proposal requires state parks reservation fees paid in advance by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources