Strategy I. Reduce Use of the Entire Wilderness

TACTIC 5: CHARGE A FLAT VISITOR FEE

PURPOSE
By charging a fee, potential visitors who are unable or unwilling to pay the fee will not be able to enter the area. This will reduce use.

DESCRIPTION
Charge all visitors the same fee at all times. The fee could be per person or per group, and could be an entry fee, regardless of trip length, a daily fee, or even an annual fee.

CURRENT USAGE
Apparently untried for purposes of reducing use. Fees are charged on a few whitewater rivers, primarily to offset the costs of administering a permit and reservation system. Many National Parks charge an entrance fee, but this only indirectly affects use of wilderness/backcountry.

COSTS TO VISITORS
Low to moderate. Costliness would depend on the amount of the assessed fee. This technique could be costly to visitors who cannot afford the fee. Generally, however, fees would be low compared to other costs associated with the trip itself. Costs are incurred offsite. Negative effects can be reduced by making visitors aware of costs during the planning stages of their trip.

COSTS TO MANAGEMENT
Moderate to high. Costs are associated with administration of the permit system, fee collection, enforcement, and management of funds. The cost/benefit ratio for this technique would depend on the extent to which the programs of managing agencies would benefit from revenues generated. Fees usually would require a permit system, with its usual costs, to be enforceable. Annual fees—in effect a license—could operate without a permit system.

EFFECTIVENESS
To be effective, fees must be high enough to reduce use significantly. To be equitable, however, fees should not be so high that highly motivated but poor visitors could not afford to visit. Different types of fees would have different effects. A daily fee would tend to shorten visits; a per-trip fee would reduce numbers of visitors but not lengths of stay. An annual fee would probably reduce numbers of visitors but might result in more trips or longer trips as people try to “get their money’s worth.”

COMMENTS
A fee may be more useful as a source of revenue and a means of supporting management costs than as a management tool. As a management tool, differential user fees (tactics 15 and 24) are likely to be more efficient in dealing with specific problems than flat fees. Acceptability to visitors varies from low to high. Many visitors object to the principle of a use fee in wilderness; for others, acceptability depends on pricing. Visitors usually accept fees better if they know most funds will be used to manage and protect the area they are visiting. Authority to charge entrance fees to wilderness is not now available, although some places charge a fee for processing reservations.

SOURCES