

[From Winter 2005-2006]

## **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act**

Given that it is a new fiscal year, now is an ideal time to update folks on the Recreation Fee Program. In December 2004, Congress passed the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act which authorizes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to implement a 10 year recreation fee program modeled after the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. The new law is similar to the Demonstration Program, but contains language that addresses public participation and requires public notice of new fee areas, new recreation fees, changes to existing fees, and use of fee revenues for improvements.

For example, to add a new site or a price change to the recreation fee program, the Service is required to post the new area and price in the Federal Register for a 6 month review period prior to implementation.

Under the new law, eighty percent of fee revenues can be retained at the refuge and can be used for:

- Repair, maintenance, and facility enhancement related directly to visitor enjoyment, visitor access, and health and safety;
- Interpretation, visitor information, visitor service, visitor assessment needs, and signs;
- Habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependent recreation that is limited to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation;
- Law enforcement related to public use and recreation;
- Direct operation or capital costs associated with the recreation fee program;
- Fee Management agreements or visitor reservation services.

No recreation fees may be expended for biological monitoring under the Endangered Species Act or for employee bonuses-.

The balance of recreation fees will be used in the region for projects to improve and maintain visitor services, address health and safety within the region, and pay for overhead costs associated with the recreation fee program.

The National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass also known as "America the Beautiful" will replace the Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and Golden Access Passports and the National Park Pass. However, these passes will continue to be issued until the new passes are made available in 2007. Each year, an image contest with the new pass designs will be printed to increase public awareness about federal recreation lands.

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