The debate surrounding newly implemented recreation user fees on federal lands: an examination of those actively opposed

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The Debate Surrounding Newly Implemented Recreation User Fees on Federal Lands:
An Examination of Those Actively Opposed

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Science in Recreation Management

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ABSTRACT

Anderson, Kristin H., February, 2000

The Debate Surrounding Newly Implemented Recreation User Fees on Federal Lands:
An Examination of Those Actively Opposed

Committee Chair: Wayne A. Freimund

This study examines the debate surrounding newly implemented recreation user fees from the perspective of those actively opposed to those fees. These newly implemented fees are a result of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (RFDP) which was authorized by Congress in 1996. The legislation mandates the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service to implement and test new fees at recreational sites of different types and locations.

While research and agency evaluations reveal there is a portion of the public opposed to fees, this opposition has not been directly investigated. From the perspective of those actively opposed to fees, this study sought to answer the following questions: What are the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees? What is the context of the opposition, and how is the opposition being framed? How is this opposition being expressed, and what are the objectives of the actions taken?

In-depth interviews of 29 active fee opposers allowed me to attain the perspective and depth needed to describe this unfamiliar viewpoint. The analysis included three overlapping stages: data organization, data interpretation, and concept building and theme identification.

A valuable outcome of this exploratory study was an increased understanding of the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees by those most actively opposed to fees. The participants in this study based their opposition on ideology, the political process and program administration. I also learned that the context of this opposition is somewhat based on trust and confidence in the agency administering the fees and the activity for which the fee is charged.

The study also produced information about how active opposers are expressing their opposition to fee implementation. Ultimately, the purpose of action is to prevent the RFDP from becoming permanent fee policy, or at the very least, to influence a revision of the legislation. To do this, publicity is being generated to create an awareness of the RFDP and to make known the opposition to it. The participants in this study have taken action in the following ways: organizational development, outreach activities, acts of non-compliance, protests, and letter writing.

The results consisted of two dimensions. The first presents a conceptual framework describing the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees. The second is a description of the primary actions taken in opposition to recreation user fees and their objectives.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people I would like to thank for their contributions to the completion of this project. I would like to start by acknowledging the 29 individuals who agreed to participate in this study. Their willingness to speak to me about their opinions and experiences made this research possible. In addition to hours spent on the phone and in-person, participants took the time to send me voluminous amounts of information on recreation user fees.

I would also like to recognize the efforts of my committee chair, Wayne Freimund. Dr. Freimund provided the necessary and timely feedback to help guide this project through its development and eventual completion. Stated simply, I am indebted to him for keeping me focused. The contributions of my other committee members, James Burchfield and Rebecca Richards, are also greatly appreciated. Their efforts and respective viewpoints fully complimented all stages of this project.

I would also like to thank Mike Patterson and various fellow recreation management graduate students for including me in their discussions of similar research methods. Their willingness to provide feedback specific to my research and share ideas in general, was another important aspect of the entire process. Finally, I would like to say thank you to my office mate Layne McIntosh who sometimes distracted me and always supported me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee Debate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Organization</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical fee research</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic fee research</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic arguments for fee systems</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pricing related concepts</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discriminatory impacts of fees</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological fee research</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward fees</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral effects of fees</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The acceptability of fees</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated responses to fees</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A review of studies evaluating the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Approach</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Participant Selection</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the sample</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interviewing and the interviewer role</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interview process</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Organization</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Interpretation</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Development and Theme identification</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR – THE RESULTS</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Active Fee Opposition</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Opposition</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity concerns</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental right</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common good</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double taxation</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: The Fee Debate................................................................. 5
Table 2: Participants' home state and affiliation............................... 29

Figure 1: Interview Guide.......................................................... 33
Figure 2: Foundations of Active Fee Opposition............................... 41
CHAPTER ONE—INTRODUCTION

Background

In 1996, Congress authorized the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (RFDP) mandating the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service to implement and test new fees at recreational sites of different types and locations. Prior to 1996 and the RFDP, the major related statutes for recreation user fee programs on Forest Service lands were the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Act of 1958 (P.L. 85-470) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-578). The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) was "established in 1958 by Public Law 85-470 to study the outdoor recreation resources of the public land and water areas of the United States" (U.S. Library of Congress, 1992, p. 1). One of the many recreation proposals to come out of the ORRRC was a recommendation to Congress to adopt a system of recreation user fees on all federal lands.

Congress did not act on this fee recommendation until the 88th Congress authorized the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF) in 1964. Revenues for the fund would be generated from entrance and user fees at federal recreation areas, surplus property sales, motorboat fuel tax and oil and gas leases on the Outer Continental Shelf. Federal agencies initially included in the LWCF were the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Congress intended that the revenues be used to help finance acquisition of outdoor recreation areas by federal and state agencies, and to meet the present and future outdoor recreation demands of the public.
If the RFDP becomes permanent legislation it will replace LWCF regulations. Under fee policy of the LWCF, fee revenues were returned to the general treasury. The RFDP allows the participating agencies to retain all of the demonstration project revenues with at least 80 percent of the revenues retained at the sites where they are collected. The other approximately 20 percent is returned to the agency at the regional level. In general, under LWCF, fees could only be charged for more highly developed areas or facilities requiring the continuous presence of personnel. The RFDP represents a change in the pattern of where and for what services and opportunities fees can be charged by including trailhead, parking and new access fees.

Need for Research

Survey results and agency reports indicate “general support for fees.” However, a percentage of the population is also opposed to or at least unsure about recreation user fees. In a study conducted by Trainor and Norgaard (1999), visitor reactions to recreation user fees showed 66 percent in support while 19 percent were unsure and 15 percent opposed the fees. The percentage of those unsure or opposed to fees was somewhat higher in a USDA Forest Service survey (Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: Progress Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1998, 1999). McCarville, Reiling and White (1996) also acknowledged that there is “a substantial group of day-users who oppose paying for the services they receive” (p. 74) at public recreation sites. Although the numbers only represent a minority, the studies evaluating the RFDP do indicate that there are people opposed to fees.

Some of the philosophical papers regarding recreation user fees discuss many of the common arguments against fee systems. And while this information is important, it is
from the perspective of managers and academics and is not empirical in nature.

Traditional fee research is focused on economic arguments for fees and pricing related concepts. Besides a section of the research that addresses the discriminatory impacts of fees, there is little mention of any negative aspects of fees. A substantial part of fee research addresses the psychology of paying fees -- attitudes, acceptability, behavioral effects and anticipated responses to fees. Thus, research is being conducted on recreation user fees; however, little is known about the minority who oppose or are unsure about fees.

In their review of the literature, Watson and Herath (1999), identify a concern for, "understanding the minority who oppose the fee and how greater understanding of their opposition might affect future policy decisions" (p.330). Their suggestion is that additional research is needed to understand how the public and sub-populations of the public are responding to the fee program.

Since the implementation of RFDP, fee opposition has been manifested as action taken by individuals and groups to oppose new recreation user fees on federal lands. Some of this opposition to recreation user fees has been demonstrated when people purposefully do not comply with fee regulations and/or join existing groups or form new groups in opposition to RFDP. And although there is very little scientific information on this or other recreation user fee opposition, Congress has still repeatedly amended legislation authorizing the extension of RFDP to extend its existence from September 30, 1998 to its current ending date of September 30, 2002. By authorizing the RFDP as a demonstration project, Congress has implied that its intent is to formally evaluate the
program before making it permanent legislation. Therefore, a more complete understanding of those opposed to fees is needed before making the program permanent.

This exploratory study will focus on those most actively opposed to fees, as one subset of the opposition to recreation user fees. For the purposes of this study, “active fee opposers” include individuals who are staff or active members of fee opposition groups who have thereby demonstrated some leadership on this issue. Active fee opposers also include those who have participated in letter writing campaigns, protests, or some form of non-compliance, such as purposefully not paying a required fee. Many active fee opposers have exerted some leadership on this issue and demonstrated a willingness to talk about the subject. Additionally, as fee opposition is a relatively unexplored phenomenon, it is important to identify a visible subsection of this public.

Guiding Questions

The primary objective of this study is to examine why and in what context people object to fees for use on public lands. The following questions have guided this project:

- What are the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees?
- What is the context of the opposition, and how is the opposition being framed?
- How is this opposition being expressed, and what are the objectives of the actions taken?

The Fee Debate

Public sentiment of recreation user fees on federal lands has been documented in numerous places including Congressional records, existing visitor survey data, newspaper articles, letters to the editor of newspapers, scholarly and popular publications and a multi-agency progress report to Congress. Debate in this literature focuses on equity issues,
changes in the recreational experience upon paying fees, and fee system management administration. Reactions, anti-fee and pro-fee, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
THE FEE DEBATE:
Arguments for and against recreation user fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANTI-FEE REACTIONS</th>
<th>PRO-FEE REACTIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EQUITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>EQUITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Higher impacts to certain socioeconomic and ethnic groups and locals</td>
<td>• Users should pay part of the cost of their experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Double standard is created when there are recreation fees, but resource extractive activities are subsidized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Double-taxation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
<td><strong>QUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Infringes on freedom/experience</td>
<td>• Reduces crowding by sorting out those willing to pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Displaces visitors</td>
<td>• Improves recreation services/facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change people’s relationship with the land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A step toward privatizing public lands</td>
<td>• Fees stay at recreation site to help maintain and improve opportunities, facilities and services (80% of fees collected stay on-site)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increases expectations of facilities, that in turn increases development</td>
<td>• Recovers costs of providing recreational facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Management decisions will become based on profit, not policy goals</td>
<td>• Protects resource and infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will replace appropriations</td>
<td>• Increases safety, reduces vandalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who oppose recreation user fees, are concerned with questions of whether the recreation user fees have higher impacts on certain socioeconomic and ethnic groups (More, 1999; Martin, 1999). User fees are seen as double taxation – some users believe they have already paid for recreation opportunities on federal lands through taxes (Free Our Forests, 1999; Harris & Driver, 1987; Martin, 1999). The equity of using federal lands for recreation is compromised as resource extractors (mining, grazing and logging interests) are subsidized

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but low impact recreation users (hikers, picnickers, etc.) are not (Gerson, 1997; Hinchman, 1997).

The other side of the equity argument is that it is appropriate for those who use public recreation facilities/areas to share in the cost of the management and maintenance of those areas (McCarville, 1995; Anderson, 1997).

Those opposed to user fees perceive that the quality of the recreation experience is negatively impacted by user fees. Charging user fees may displace visitors to non-fee areas (Schneider and Budruk, 1999) and change visitors’ relationships with the land (Christensen, Borrie and Williams, 1998). There is concern that the commercialized act of paying a recreation user fee will damage a sense of stewardship for public lands (Marshall, 1994). Fees are also perceived as negatively impacting the freedom and autonomy associated with wildland experiences (McCarville, et al., 1996; Andersen, 1997).

Those who support user fees see an enhanced experience as a result of fees and are willing to pay when the fees are directed back into the area where they were collected (Miles and Fedler, 1989). Additionally, user behavior and use patterns are not drastically altered by the implementation of fees (Leuschner, Cook, Roggenbuck and Oderwald, 1987). Revenue generated from the RFDP is used to “increase the quality of the visitor experience and enhance the protection of resources” (PL 104-134). Successfully implemented, fees can improve recreation facilities and services (Stewart, 1999). Fee proponents perceive an improved sense of proprietorship, which they believe is important in reducing vandalism at public recreation areas (Regula, 1999).

Those who oppose fees see them as an unacceptable shift in management of federal lands. Fee systems might encourage managers to make decisions based on profit rather than
policy goals (More, 1999). Fee opposers are concerned that with fees users will be increase their expectations of facilities and in turn create an overall increase in development (Martin, 1999). They are also concerned that as fees increase, visitor expectations of the number of facilities and amenities will also increase (McDonald, Noe and Hammitt, 1987).

Concern has also been expressed that as recreation user fees increasingly generate revenue, Congressional appropriations for recreation on federal lands will decrease (Hinchman, 1997; Lime et al., 1998). Lastly, there are those who believe that recreation user fees are the just the first step towards the slippery slope of privatization of Federal lands (Christensen, Borrie and Williams, 1998, Wild Wilderness, 1999). These last two concerns express distrust that the RFDP will function as proposed.

For those who favor user fees, fee systems are as beneficial as a necessary and appropriate revenue generator (Crompton & Lamb, 1986; McCarville, 1995). Under RFDP, at least 80% of the fees collected stay on-site to help maintain and improve opportunities, facilities, and services (PL 104-134). User fee revenues provide resource and infrastructure protection and increase visitor safety.

Legislation mandating the RFDP was attached to the 1996 appropriations act as a rider. The fact that this piece of legislation was a rider has generated some of the controversy surrounding the fee issue. As legitimate pieces of legislation, riders are often attached to appropriations bills. Some would argue that riders are used to pass legislation because the process does not include extensive public debate. Others claim that committee deliberation and agency consultation are appropriate processes of public debate.

The "fee debate" and the literature review provided the conceptual background for developing the specific research questions that guide data collection and analysis.
Thesis Organization

The following chapter presents the background that guides the research questions, data collection and analysis. As well as illustrating the complex nature of the fee issue, the review of the literature reveals a distinct gap in our understanding of this issue. This gap is the lack of a rigorous and in-depth study of the fundamental reasons for opposition to fees. The third chapter describes the details of the methodology chosen for such a study. The research approach, sampling frame, and data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews is described. The data analysis process describes the organization, interpretation, concept development and theme identification of the data collected. The fourth chapter presents the results of the analysis and includes a brief discussion of those results. Chapter five discusses the results in the context of existing research. Lastly, chapter six presents the implications for recreation user fee research and policy.
CHAPTER TWO—LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a conceptual framework that describes the evolution of user fee research as related to outdoor recreation use on public lands. The objectives of this study are to examine why and in what context people object to fees for use on public lands. None of the existing research related to recreation user fees focuses specifically on those opposed to fees. However, a review of recreation user fee research provides a useful framework for understanding the fee opposition issue. In this chapter, I present three broad categories of user fee research: philosophical fee research, economic fee research and psychological fee research. I then present a more recent category of fee research – management studies specifically evaluating the RFDP.

Up until the early 1980s, public land recreation was primarily subsidized by governments (Crandall & Driver, 1984). Most of the research prior to, and around this period, consisted of discussion papers presenting the relative arguments for and against “free” or “subsidized” recreation (Cockrell & Wellman, 1985; Harris & Driver, 1987). Severe budget constraints at all government levels forced an increase in access and user fees to public recreation areas and services (Crandall & Driver, 1984). As fees became more a part of the public land recreation experience, fee research related to pricing concepts and impacts emerged (Christensen, Stewart & King, 1993; McCarville & Crompton, 1987; Reiling, Criner & Oltmanns, 1988). During this period, fees were also examined from a psychological perspective including impacts on expectations (McDonald, Noe & Hammitt, 1987) and behavior (More, Dustin & Knopf, 1996; Schneider and Budruk, 1999).
Research continues to emerge that addresses the complex nature of this issue. Currently, researchers are agreeing and making efforts to investigate the public response to fees from a variety of perspectives (Trainor & Norgaard, 1999; Williams & Watson, 1998; Winter, Palucki & Burkhardt, 1999).

PHILOSOPHICAL FEE RESEARCH

An important beginning to examining the controversy surrounding fees are the papers that present philosophical discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of fees. Harris and Driver (1987) present the arguments both for and against user fees. Their closing statements hint at inevitable fees in the future by pointing to the public recreation challenges of increased use and growing maintenance backlogs. Additionally, they reference studies indicating support of reasonable fees by recreationists.

Cockrell and Wellman (1985) oppose fees based on the notion of a public good. To support their argument, they outline the democratic ideals of Frederick Law Olmsted, an early advocate for national parks, who believed in the societal benefits of natural areas and promoted their support and protection by the government. Schultz, McAvoy and Dustin (1988) maintained that the top line for public services should not be profit but rather agency purposes, goals, and objectives. For this reason, they questioned the application of a profit-ruled mentality that might be associated with fees to the management of public recreation resources. More recently, More (1999) has argued that fees should not be considered a given management action, and decisions about fees should be made on more than simplistic economic assumptions. Instead, he has proposed that public purposes should determine the appropriateness of fees.
ECONOMIC FEE RESEARCH

Economic arguments for fees

Traditional approaches to fee policy evaluations have typically focused on economic values including visitor willingness to pay and other pricing related concepts. Some of the earliest support for fees emerged from economists. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) discussed the economic aspects of outdoor recreation and supported fees from an economic perspective. In recognition of growing visitation and greater budget needs, they alluded to an increase in fee systems in future resource-based outdoor recreation. They argued that some of the costs of resource-based public recreation should be paid by the users and they suggested the principles for implementation of recreation user charges. One, charge fees only if they are administratively workable and profitable. Two, carefully define the purpose of fee collection and choose a method of implementation that is appropriate for that purpose. For example, if the purpose is to raise revenue, then the appropriate price is that which is "the maximum revenue fee as estimated from the demand curve" (p. 284). Visitors should be informed as to why and for what use a fee is being levied. Lastly, consider the equity issues and any side effects of the fee system and try to alleviate them.

Crompton and Lamb (1986) put forth three main arguments in support of fees for government services. First, they address equity in terms of who benefits and who pays. Second, they claim that pricing can be used to improve efficiency. They define efficiency as an indicator of demand, a way to mitigate congestion, a promotion of agency accountability, the possibility of more responsible use by the clients, and the
possible provision of competitive services by the private sector. Lastly, fees are an important source of revenue for government programs.

Rosenthal, Loomis and Peterson (1984) also used the efficiency argument specifically to advocate for fees in public recreation areas. They described fees as an economically efficient way of limiting recreation use, redistributing recreation use over space and time, and building more self-supporting public recreation programs. They suggested that by introducing fees into the same realm as other market commodities such as timber, resource allocation decisions will be made easier.

For what they believe to be an inevitable future of fee programs because of increased use at and reduced budgets for public recreation areas, Walsh, Peterson and McKean (1989) considered alternative pricing methods for public recreation funding. They recommended is that managers in the future consider some combination of entrance fees, annual passes, travel taxes and general fund revenues in conjunction with subsidies.

Pricing Related Concepts

A body of economic fee literature also explores specific pricing related concepts for resource-based public recreation. These studies include measurements of willingness to pay, impacts of fee systems, and fee acceptability. Research seems to suggest that acceptance of fee increases is based on past experiences with fees and the justification of the need for the fees. McCarville and Crompton (1987) examined the relationship between attitudes towards fees and the amount of cost of service information. They found that presenting information to the public about the cost of the service might increase what the user expects to pay. Reiling, et al. (1988) also found that providing
information to campers about the service costs had a positive effect on their willingness to pay higher fees and on attitudes about those fees.

Christensen, et al. (1993) examined the relationship between a variety of attributes and user willingness-to-pay-more-per-trip. Overall, their results demonstrated that users are willing to pay more for resource-based public recreation facilities. This willingness-to-pay more was positively related to length of stay, number of trips to and level of development at the given campground, whether the given campground was the only destination, and household income.

Kyle, Kerstetter and Guadagnolo (1999), sought to find ways in which expected prices of fees might be altered. A random sample of participants in a 10-kilometer race organized by Pittsburgh CitiParks (a public recreation agency) was used to investigate what affected participant’s expected price for public leisure or recreation services. Their results indicated that information on the cost of service significantly increased price expectations. At the same time, price expectations decreased as past participation in the event increased.

Richer and Christensen (1999) examined whether the maximum fee amount that visitors were willing to pay was consistent with the amounts they identified as appropriate for a given public recreational experience. An appropriate fee for use of public lands is defined by Richer and Christensen (1999) as “one that strikes a balance between the need for fee revenues, the desire to maintain access and four related concerns – fairness, equity, other users’ ability to pay, and congestion” (p. 269). Results from their survey of Desolation Wilderness users showed that for 62 percent of the respondents, the maximum willingness to pay amount is greater than the amount indicated as appropriate.
The authors noted that such research was valuable to managers responsible for implementing fee programs in helping them balance the dual objectives of generating revenue and providing public access. At the same time, they acknowledge that the results of this study of a particular wilderness area may not apply to other settings.

Using actual price and visitation data from three national parks in Costa Rica, Lindberg and Aylward (1999), examined the effects of fee policies on tourism in developing countries. Results indicated that fees within the $1 to $20 range had relatively little effect on visitation levels.

Using a portion of the 1995 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, Bowker, Cordell and Johnson (1999) examined the national sentiment toward recreation user fees on public lands. Respondents were asked to indicate if they thought the cost of a service should be paid for by user fees, by taxes, by a combination of both, or should the service not be provided (respondents could only select one alternative). The question was applied to the following ten services: visitor centers, special exhibits and presentations, trails, picnic areas, campgrounds, rest rooms, boat ramps, parking areas, historical sites, and other facilities. They concluded that the public did not want to bear the full cost of public recreation, but in general were supportive of fees and particularly for specific services such as boat ramps, campgrounds and special exhibits.

**Discriminatory impacts of fees**

The potential for fees to have a discriminatory impact on low-income users has been suggested by some researchers (Fargo & Nakata, 1984; Harris & Driver, 1987; More, 1998). On the other hand, Cordell (1985) has suggested that fees may not have a discriminatory impact on low-income users since fees represent a small portion of the
resource-based recreation experience. In other words, travel and equipment costs already exclude low-income individual and family participation (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966). Using Maine state parks as their study sites, Reiling, Cheng and Trott (1992) made one of the first attempts to empirically examine this issue. They ascertained that increased camping fees at Maine state parks would have a larger impact on low-income campers than high-income campers.

Based on data from a mail survey of Vermont and New Hampshire households, More and Stevens (2000) estimated that a $5 daily fee for use of public recreation resources would negatively impact 49 percent of low-income people. Additionally 23 percent of low-income study participants responded that they either reduced use or went elsewhere as a result of a fee increase. Low-income respondents were also far more likely to believe that all taxpayers should be responsible for financing public lands.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FEE RESEARCH

Increasingly, researchers began to address the impacts of fees and how they might be implemented in the least intrusive, most acceptable manner. These studies began to explore the attitudes toward fees, behavioral effects of fees, acceptability of fees, and anticipated responses to fees.

Attitudes toward fees

The psychological fee literature provides empirical data to both support and oppose fee programs. Psychological studies have revealed broad-based attitudinal support for fees (Christensen, 1993), particularly instead of a reduction in services (More & Stevens, 2000) and when fees are collected and used for improvements on-site (Leuschner, Cook, Roggenbuck & Oderwald, 1987). In contrast, McCarville, Reiling and
White (1996), acknowledged that there is "a substantial group of day-users who oppose paying for the services they receive" (p. 74) at public recreation sites.

The psychological literature also addresses the potential consequence of fee program implementation, namely of altered visitor expectations. The argument has been that as fees increase, visitor expectations of the number of facilities and amenities will increase and become a potential disadvantage of fee programs. In a study conducted at the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, McDonald, et al., 1987 tested the hypothesis that there is positive relationship between willingness to pay and preferences for development. Their results confirmed the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between preferences for development and those willing to pay $5 or more, but not those not willing to pay $5. They conclude that public recreation area managers may be able to institute a low or even moderate fee without visitor anticipation of additional services or development. More, et al. (1996) extended this research by examining the relationship between campground fees and visitor expectations of development and services. The data from interviews with campers from three differently priced California federal campgrounds implied that as camping fees increased so did users' expectations of amenities.

Behavioral effects of fees

Additional research has been conducted to examine behavioral changes as a result of fees. Some of the specific topics include predicting impacts on users, understanding how different segments of the public react to pricing decisions, and the determining if fees displace visitors to other sites. In a sample including both a fee-site and a non-fee site, Leuschner, et al. (1987) found that almost three-fourths of respondents indicated fees
did not influence their choice of site. While people would rather not pay fees than pay them, behavior and use patterns would not be significantly altered if fees were charged.

In the same study, More, et al. (1996) hypothesized that price would influence or alter perceptions of appropriate behavior. Again, using the data from three differently priced California federal campgrounds, they found that perceptions of appropriate behavior did not change as the amount of the camping fee increased.

Recreation research has found displacement to be one of the potential visitor responses due to an adverse change in the social, managerial, or resource conditions of the recreation environment (Anderson & Brown, 1984; McCarville et al., 1996; Shelby, Bregenzer & Johnson, 1988). One of the criticisms of recreation user fees is that they displace visitors to non-fee areas. Schneider and Budruk (1999) surveyed visitors at a non-fee National Forest beach area. Data from the surveys showed one-half of the respondents chose the site because it was free. Additionally, one-third said they had altered their visitation as a result of the fee program. In a mail survey they conducted of visitors to six Army Corps of Engineer recreation sites, McCarville et al. (1996) found that many respondents indicated that their preference would be to stop visiting all Corps areas than pay a fee.

The acceptability of fees

For the Forest Service, RFDP projects “often involve charging fees for the first time; at sites that traditionally have been free of charge” (Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: Progress Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1998, 1999, p. 10). “Historic precedent” is mentioned by Harris and Driver (1987) as one of the arguments against fees programs. In their words, “[t]radition is a major deterrent to increasing recreation fee programs” (p. 27).
This notion is also reflected in the news media. People have long visited sites free of charge and now resent having to pay a fee just to set foot on public owned lands (Anderson 1999; Bossi, 1984).

There is also empirical evidence of this resistance. McCarville, et al. (1996) sampled visitors at six Army Corps of Engineers day-use areas around the United States. Respondents were divided into two groups: those who reported paying a fee in the last 12 months and those who did not. Results indicated that the first group (those who had paid) were more accepting of fees and fee increases. Fees were found to be most offensive to visitors who had not paid a fee in the past. The users who expressed the most resentment were also most familiar with and lived closest to the site.

Kerr and Manfredo (1991) used an attitude-behavior model to explain backcountry hut users’ reactions to fees. Their results indicated that a history of paying fees positively affected user attitudes as well as their paying intentions. They suggested that their model might also be useful in making pricing predictions. Leuschner et al. (1987) had also found that user fees were more strongly supported by visitors who had experience paying fees.

Fedler and Miles (1989) examined the acceptability of user fees and the factors that determined acceptability, among backcountry users in three areas in North Carolina. The results of their questionnaire demonstrated that fee acceptability changed according to the method of collection (voluntary contributions were preferred, but annual permits and per-day or per-trip fees were also acceptable) and the eventual destination of the revenue collected (reallocated on-site as opposed to being deposited in the Federal Treasury).
Anticipated responses to fees

I have already reviewed the pricing literature that investigated factors that might increase the acceptance of fee programs. Two of the factors I have mentioned include past experiences with fees and the justification (cost of service information) for the need for the fees (Kerr & Manfredo, 1991; Kyle et al., 1999; McCarville & Crompton, 1987; Reiling, et al., 1988). The researchers have suggested that these studies might be used to anticipate visitor reactions to fees, and how to make fee programs more palatable to the public.

Schroeder and Louviere (1999) have proposed that recreation site choice modeling might also be used to anticipate the impacts of fees on people’s choices of public recreation sites. Camping opportunities and trails, as well as fee amounts were included as attributes within two models. Both models showed an inverse relationship between fees and choice. They suggested that by comparing fees to other attributes within a model, managers could anticipate what attributes (i.e., improved trail or restroom maintenance) might compensate for the impacts of fees for particular visitors. The authors also noted that this type of modeling would be most accurate for evaluating changes in fee amounts where fees already existed, not for anticipating public reaction to new fees at sites where previously fees were not charged.

Anticipated public response to fees has also been examined from the perspective of environmental risk management, which identifies social trust as an important element in the perception and acceptance of agency actions. Using RFDP as an agency action, Winter, et al., (1999) studied the Enterprise Forest Project in Southern California to understand anticipated public reaction to fees prior to implementing the fee program.
Using focus groups and self-administered questionnaires, they found that trust was the most significant indicator of support for daily and annual fee amounts as well as anticipated impacts and general attitudes towards fee programs.

A REVIEW OF STUDIES EVALUATING THE RECREATION FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

The authorization of the RFDP in 1996 prompted the debate over recreation user fees. The following studies represent a mix of evaluation and visitor reactions to RFDP, as well as more innovative methods of examining the controversy surrounding fees. In 1997, during the first year of implementation of RFDP, Lundgren and Lime (1997) systematically surveyed 11 National Park Service (NPS) units to monitor and assess visitor reactions to the new fees. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed at nine of the park units and focus group discussions were held at 5 of the units. Participants were asked about the appropriateness of the new fees. Of the total participants, 83 percent indicated that the new fees paid were either “about right” or “too low.” The remaining 17 percent felt the new fees were “too high.” Overall, there was strong support for the new fees, provided that all or most fees collected remain in the park or that the NPS improved and protected park services and resources. Specifically, 96 percent preferred to keep all or most of the fee money in the park where it was collected and not returned to the United States General Treasury. An added concern relayed by the participants was that new fees might lead to a reduction in NPS appropriations.

Gable, Burkhardt and Winter (1997a) used focus groups to assess community perception of the RFDP in four urban National Forests in Southern California, known as the Enterprise Zone (Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, San Bernardino). Focus groups
were assembled based on a community of interest (ethnically or recreationally oriented), or community of place, both proximate to or from the larger area surrounding the National Forest lands (geographically oriented). The majority of focus group participants were opposed to the pilot fee program as proposed for this area. Some of the disapproval was based on rights to public land and double-taxation. The opposition was not so much against a reasonable fee for public land use, but rather a lack of trust and confidence in a government agency to fairly implement this program as proposed.

Prior to the implementation of RFDP in the Enterprise Zone, forest visitors had also been surveyed to evaluate potential impacts of the new fee program. Gable, Chavez and Short (1997b) reported that of those visitors surveyed, 39 percent said the RFDP would not affect their amount of use while 16 percent said it would.

Krannich, Eisenhauer, Field, Pratt and Luloff (1999) examined the effects of RFDP on management and operations of participating units from the perspective of 109 National Park Service (NPS) managers from units participating in the program in 1997. Results of the mail survey indicated a generally favorable view of RFDP, particularly regarding units' budgetary situations. From the perspective of NPS managers, the visiting and local public were generally supportive of RFDP and only a very few observed that the program had a negative effect on visitation.

The success of RFDP has also been measured from the perspective of Forest Service managers. Absher (1999) compiled data from surveys completed by 60 managers from 55 fee demonstration project areas. The following information only includes basic tabulations of the data collected from the surveys. On a scale from “1” (not at all successful) to “5” (very successful), the average rating of success of the RFDP
was 4.11. Managers were also asked to consider a list of potential problems in implementing the RFDP. Those factors receiving the highest ratings as a big or a moderate problem included fee collection cost, public acceptance, and user compliance.

Using the same data from these surveys of Forest Service managers, Absher, McCollum and Bowker (1999) reported that over one-half of the managers surveyed did not have or use formal studies or research information when implementing the fee projects. Additionally, 75 percent of those managers said they had not used or collected any data to assess the RFDP since its implementation.

A Progress Report submitted to Congress, by the four agencies reports on the public acceptance of RFDP. In 1997, over 80 percent of survey respondents at NPS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management thought the fee they paid was “about right.” In 1999, those percentages increased to 89, 92 and 90 percent respectively. In 1997, 60 percent and in 1999, 77 percent of the respondents in a Forest Service survey indicated high to neutral acceptance of recreation fees on public lands (Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: Progress Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1998, 1999; Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: Progress Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1999, 2000).

Bengston and Fan (2000) completed an analysis of public attitudes towards RFDP on the National Forests as expressed in news media stories. In their analysis, beliefs supporting a favorable attitude towards fees were based on fairness, utilitarianism, pragmatism and economics. The beliefs supporting an unfavorable attitude towards fees were based on rights, fairness, economics, “wildness” (changing experiences) and pragmatism. Their results indicated that “expressions of favorable beliefs about the RFDP outweighed expressions of unfavorable beliefs by a factor of about 2 to 1” (p. 3).
The exception to this was during the third quarter of 1999, when there were a number of organized protests to RFDP throughout the country.

Martin (1999) completed a policy analysis of the RFDP by examining the relationship among the principles guiding fee programs, the objectives of fee programs, and public sentiment towards fees. One important component of this examination was the identification of 20 distinct concerns regarding recreation user fees. Martin examined agency fee programs and found that of those 20 concerns, 12 were within control of the agency, however, only four of those were being adequately addressed. Of the remaining eight concerns, five of those were beyond control of the agencies and "need to be addressed through the political process" (p. 22). The other three concerns were characterized as "research questions." Like More (1999), Martin (1999) argues that the implementation of fee programs have implications beyond just economic considerations. Therefore, he suggests that the agencies make stronger efforts to reflect broader agency philosophy in implementing fee programs.

In addition to evaluations of support for the RFDP, there has been an attempt to explore the complex attitudes towards fee programs and varied ways in which resource-based recreation areas are valued. I have mentioned some of these studies earlier (Richer & Christensen, 1999; Schneider & Budruk, 1999; Winter et al., 1999). Watson and Vogt (1998) have also addressed the possibility that response to fees is at least somewhat related to trust, confidence and perceptions that the public has of the agency administering the fee program.

Additionally, research considered the effect of emotional, spiritual, and symbolic values on visitor reactions to newly instituted fees for recreation on Federal lands.
Trainor and Norgaard (1999) interviewed Desolation Wilderness users to examine the relationship between willingness to pay fees for wilderness use and spiritual wilderness values. Their results showed that an overall support for wilderness use fees indicates a willingness to support the wilderness economically; however, it does not necessarily indicate support for the commodification of wilderness. Narrative responses from the interviews were coded and analyzed. The categories of visitor reactions to fees showed that 66 percent supported, while 19 percent were unsure of, and 15 percent opposed fees.

Williams, Vogt and Vitterso (1999) examined public response to fees from a non-economic perspective by examining the relationship of residential proximity and past experience in wilderness to wilderness user fees. Survey results of overnight users to the Desolation Wilderness in California indicated that while wilderness users’ generally support fees, support levels for wilderness fees were generally lower than for other types of resource-based recreation. The results also demonstrated that those with more wilderness experience and, specifically, history in the Desolation Wilderness, are less supportive of user fees, and less likely to see the positive benefits of fee programs.

Additional research has focused on the effect of “place” on visitor reactions to recreation user fees. Williams and Watson (1998) hypothesized that those users with stronger attachments to the Desolation Wilderness would be less supportive of the fee policy. The questionnaire sent to Desolation visitors was designed to measure four “place attachment” indicators: wilderness involvement (involvement and commitment to wilderness use), place dependence (the extent to which people feel they do not have a substitute site for Desolation use), place centrality (the extent to which people feel their lifestyle revolves around the use of Desolation), and place identity (the extent to which
people define their sense of self in relation to Desolation use). Preliminary findings implied that place centrality, wilderness involvement and, to a lesser extent, place identity were generally associated with negative views of user fees.

SUMMARY

Existing research indicates an overall support for recreation user fees, particularly when the need for the fee is justified, and if the revenue collected is reallocated on-site. Additional research demonstrates that past experience paying fees and perceptions of the agency administering the fee influence visitor reactions to newly implemented fees. Research has also confirmed a positive relationship between fee support and expectations for development. At the same time, a recent study determined that while overall support for wilderness use fees indicates a willingness to support the wilderness economically, it does not necessarily indicate support for the commodification of wilderness. Two studies demonstrated that trust in the administering agency is a factor when there is a resistance to fees.

In conclusion, a review of the literature confirms that most user fee research has examined the perspective of the fee user. There have been attempts to investigate reactions of the general population, managers, and those displaced by fee systems. Another sub-population of interest are those opposed to fees. Since it is important to understand the perceptions of appropriateness and acceptability of fee systems, it is therefore also important to understand what might be considered inappropriate or offensive about such systems.
CHAPTER THREE—METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH APPROACH

The primary objective of this study is to examine why and in what context people object to fees for recreational use on public lands. As the opposition to fees is mostly unexplored, I chose to examine this issue by employing the qualitative research method of in-depth interviewing. Coupled with a grounded theory approach, in-depth interviews can generate the perspective and depth needed to generate concepts that describe an unfamiliar phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Perspective

As evidenced in chapter two, most research measures the support of fees and specifically the RFDP. However, the opposition to recreational user fees is a relatively unexplored perspective. An understanding of the fundamental reasons for opposition to fees requires seeking qualitative information from participants since a quantitative questionnaire can only provide closed-ended questions that force participants to select from a limited number of pre-selected responses. The open nature of an interview allows participants to express sentiments about fees in their own words and from their own perspectives (Maxwell, 1996). The data contain meaning, “from the frame of reference of the subjects” (Howe, 1988, p.321).

Depth

User fee research re-emerged as a topic of concern with the implementation of the RFDP in 1996. Existing research has provided some information on the percentage of people who oppose fees, and in some cases potential factors related to fee opposition. However, fee opposition remains a relatively unexplored phenomenon. The information...
that does exist provides insufficient detail for understanding the basis of fee opposition. Given the lack of our understanding of fee opposition, a qualitative method which allows for in-depth responses (Howe, 1988) and details, such as feelings about a particular issue (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), was employed in this study.

SAMPLING

Study Participant Selection

The population of interest are those defined as "active fee opposers". To develop an in-depth understanding of opposers to fees, it is appropriate to examine the perspective of those most concerned with the imposition of fees. Active fee opposers include individuals who are staff or active members of fee opposition groups, and those who have demonstrated some leadership on this issue. Active fee opposers may also have participated in letter writing campaigns, protests, or some form of non-compliance by purposefully not paying the fee.

Participants were selected through a combination of purposive (Babbie, 1998) and snowball sampling techniques to identify individuals of interest from people who know of information-rich cases (Babbie, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Many active fee opposers were identifiable through sources such as the internet and news media. Some initial participants were identified by their connection to a particular "anti-fee demonstration" group or website. Since, reports of protests, non-compliance, and other anti-fee events were represented in the media, I could identify additional participants. Beginning with the first interview, participants were asked to suggest others who fit the criteria of active fee opposers. In many cases, these suggestions overlapped with individuals already identified.
An important consideration in qualitative interviewing is completeness as (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For this reason, I continued interviewing until each additional interview failed to add new information to what I had already learned. This is referred to as the “saturation point” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The goal is to contact a sufficient number of respondents to reach saturation on key meanings and themes.

**Description of the sample**

The total sample size was twenty-nine individuals. Five (17 %) of the participants were female and 24 (83 %) were men. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 74. Fifteen of the 29 participants were from the states of California, Oregon and Washington. It might be expected that these three states are home to a large portion of the active fee opposers since the RFDP has been most heavily implemented in these states. The other 14 participants were from Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Vermont and New Hampshire.

The participant’s home states and affiliations are represented in Table 2. Anti-fee organizations include those organizations whose primary mission is to oppose the RFDP. Within the study sample, all of those affiliated with an anti-fee organization did so on a volunteer basis, regardless of their position in the organization. The five participants associated with “other organizations” are all paid staff members of environmental and activist organizations. Although they are familiar with and opposed to the RFDP, fee opposition is not the main organizational goal for these individuals or this latter group. Finally, 10 of the participants were not affiliated with a advocacy group. Five of those 10 were involved in this issue as citizen activists, and five were personally or professionally affiliated with either the Forest Service or the NPS.
Table 2
Participants’ home state and affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-fee Group Affiliation</th>
<th>Other Group</th>
<th>Not Affiliated with an Advocacy Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer staff</td>
<td>Committee Chair</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three “test” interviews were conducted to refine the effectiveness of the interview guide. Since these interviews revealed information about the guiding questions of the this study, data from these interviews was analyzed and included in the results. Two small changes were made to the interview guide. One, a hypothetical question was rephrased as a direct question. Two, I discontinued asking about income as a demographic question.

DATA COLLECTION

In-depth interviewing and the interviewer role

Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on the particular phenomena and at the same time deviate as other related topics emerged (Howe, 1988). Kvale (1983) notes the importance of researcher “fore-knowledge” (p. 178). To facilitate
and partially guide the discussion as the researcher I had to demonstrate some knowledge about the topic of interest, active fee opposition (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). At the same time, I had to remain open to new and unexpected phenomena, or remain "presuppositionless" (p. 176) by Kvale (1983). This balance between insight and openness, was at times difficult to convey. For example, during one interview, I asked the participant why he had become involved in fee opposition and he said, "You seem to kind of be confused as to why I would think this way [in opposition to fees]". My response was to explain that while I am particularly interested in opposition to fees, I did not want to direct his or any other participant's responses. This balance of structure in the interview without leading the participant is also addressed in the following section on the interview process.

The interview process

Interviews were conducted over the phone and in-person. Since those people active in fee opposition are located throughout the United States, it was not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews with most participants. Conducting interviews by phone presented some limitations, such as the loss of non-verbal communication over the phone lines and may have affected responses. However, this was a worthwhile trade-off as phone interviews allowed me to contact people from diverse locations. With the permission of each participant, interviews were tape-recorded. Before each interview was transcribed, participants were given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

Interview questions were designed to elicit information about the nature of fee opposition and how that opposition has been expressed in terms of actions. The questions provided direction to the interview while allowing participant elaboration.
Probing and clarification questions were used when needed to obtain more details (See Figure 1 for an example of the interview guide used for this study).

Before asking any questions, I assured each participant that their participation in this study would be kept confidential. I then began the interview by asking the participant for their opinion of recreation user fees for use on public lands. This allowed the participant to describe his or her level or amount of concern in their own words. In some cases, with this single question, the conditions of and reasons for his or her objections to fees were articulated in detail. In other cases, probing was required. The next question asked the participant to discuss any actions he or she may have taken against fees. The follow-up inquiry was whether or not the participant had thought those actions had been successful. The next question asked participants to measure their feelings of importance about this issue in relation to other issues about which they might be concerned. The purpose of this question was to understand why these people have committed to this particular cause. At this point, participants were asked if they considered this a black and white issue. The purpose of asking this question was to discern their level of opposition. I then asked if there might be benefits of fees or conditions in which fees would be acceptable. Next, to understand if opposition was associated with a particular place, I asked participants if there was one place on earth where they absolutely wouldn’t want fees. The next question asked participants to describe how they would decide if their investment in this issue was successful. In other words, what was their measure of success? Following demographic questions on age, education and profession, I then asked participants to comment on anything else of
importance that had not been previously addressed. Finally, participants were asked to suggest additional individuals fitting the criteria of "active opposers" for inclusion in the study.

Interviews were conducted during May, July, August, September, and October of 2000. Five of the interviews were done in-person and 24 were conducted over the phone. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to two hours with the average interview being 37 minutes.
Interview Guide

1. What is your opinion of recreation user fees for use on public lands? (keep it general in beginning)
   (Why do you feel that way?)
   (Is it fees in general or specifically the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program?)
   (Is your opposition particular to Forest Service lands? What about National Parks or State Parks?)
   (What do you think the impacts of fees are to the visitors/users?)

2. What specific actions have you taken regarding this issue?
   a. Have those actions worked?
   b. In light of other issues you might feel strongly about, how important is this particular issue of fees?

3. Do you see this as a black and white issue?
   (Do you see any benefits of fees?)
   (Are there any conditions/situations in which you would accept fees?)
   (Or, are you attempting to influence an all out ban on fees?)
   (Is there a hazard to a compromise?)

4. Is there one place on earth where you absolutely wouldn't want fees? Where is it?
   (Personally and professionally and why?)

5. How will you decide if your investment in fees will be successful?

6. Demographics
   a. age
   b. gender
   c. education
   d. profession

7. Is there anything else that I have not covered that is important to address?

8. I am trying to ensure that represent all those whom I should in this study. Is there anyone you might suggest I talk to?

Note: Probes often used in each question are identified as those questions in parenthesis.
DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of the data occurred in three overlapping phases: data organization, data interpretation, and conceptual development and theme identification. The project data were based on over 18 hours of taped interviews that translated into nearly 285 pages of interview transcripts. Before such voluminous amounts of data could be analyzed for common themes, the data had to be organized into manageable units.

Data organization

Data analysis began with a thorough reading of individual interview transcriptions. During this initial reading, I played each tape to ensure that the transcription was accurate. Referring to the tape also allowed me to capture nuances in the spoken words that might have been lost in their translation to paper (e.g. a tone of sarcasm that would not be apparent in the transcription alone).

I found Tesch’s (1990) development of organizing systems and Strauss & Corbin’s (1998) open coding procedures helpful in organizing the data. Both references presented a clear process for segmenting data and then examining that data for similarities and differences. This preliminary analysis began with identifying meaning units within the transcripts. Meaning units are typically groups of sentences that are comprehensible on their own (Tesch, 1990). I then gave each meaning unit a label or code. For example, I identified an excerpt describing concerns with the negative impacts of fees to low-income individuals and families as a meaning unit. This and other similar statements were coded as “low-income concerns.” The data also revealed statements against fees because the study participants generally perceived access to public lands as a fundamental right. These excerpts were labeled “fundamental right.” As I reduced the
data into concept groups (e.g. "low-income concerns"), I also looked for relationships across those groups. This comparison began the interpretation phase of analysis.

The software QSR NUD*IST was used for categorizing and managing the data. NUD*IST allows the user to identify and categorize meaning units. From there, the user can produce reports consisting of all excerpts relevant to a particular category. The theory-building function of NUD*IST was not used in this study. As it is a relatively unexplored topic, I did not want to assume that any theories about the opposition to fees would fit into the hierarchical structure of the theory-building function of NUD*IST.

Data Interpretation

The next step was to examine the initial codes or labels (i.e. concepts) for common themes. For example, the above concepts (i.e. "low-income concerns" and "fundamental right") were compared for their similarities and differences. By asking myself the question, "what do these concepts have in common?", I found that both concepts were based on concerns of fairness or equity. Therefore, I categorized them both as "equity concerns." In short, the process of "open coding" (Strauss & Corbin) provided a guide as I identified distinct concepts within the data and examined those concepts for similarities and differences.

It was at this point that I needed to reassemble the data that had been divided during open coding. This process of linking categories is referred to as "axial coding" by Strauss and Corbin (1998). As I continued to analyze the data, additional concepts emerged which I categorized as "rear of privatization." These categories will be explained in detail in Chapter Four. Participant statements similar to "equity concerns" were labeled as "fear of privatization" since they reflected an opposition to fees based on
belief systems and opinions about the importance of public lands and what those lands should provide. Beliefs and opinions are dimensions of a person’s ideology. Therefore, I identified the broad category, “ideological opposition.” The categories “equity concerns” and “fear of privatization” then became the subcategories of the broader category of “ideological opposition.” The process of constantly comparing and reassembling the data allowed me to understand the fundamental reasons why people are opposed to fees for use on public lands.

Concept Development and Theme Identification

The purpose of this study was to acquire insights into the nature and context of fee opposition and to understand how this opposition is being expressed. The process of developing and relating categories described above was the beginning of this understanding. What emerged from the data were three fundamental reasons people are opposed to fees. By linking them together, I developed a conceptual framework that explained the fundamental reasons for opposition to fees. The three main categories provide the primary rational for fee opposition. The sub-categories of the three broader categories provide the details that explain those rationales and answer some of the following questions: Why are people opposed to fees? What is the context of this opposition? Is the acceptance or resistance of recreation user fees dependent on which agency is administering the fees? Is the resistance in reaction to RFDP or is it part of some larger issue? Analysis of the data also provided further details on the context of the opposition and a more descriptive understanding of the forms or expressions of opposition.
Patterson, Watson, Williams and Roggenbuck (1998) provided a useful guide for strengthening the acceptability and legitimacy of my research. The criteria they use in evaluating qualitative research are persuasiveness, insightfulness, and practical utility. To support interpretations of the data ("persuasiveness"), they, first document evidence of common themes with excerpts from the interviews and then define "appropriate boundaries within which results should be extrapolated." (p. 431). The next chapter presents the results of my analysis using participant statements to support my claims. A goal of this research was to develop insights about recreational user fee opposition. To that end, the sample was selected to represent a broad range of perspectives on active fee opposition. The range coupled with in-depth interviews offers a wide perspective of active fee opposers. This in-depth understanding was sought at the expense of being able extrapolate the findings to the public at large.

In relation to my research, insightfulness, as described by Patterson et al. (1998), will be achieved if the reader finds the data results clear, and if he or she arrives at a more complete understanding of active fee opposition.

Practical utility, the final criterion, refers to the usefulness of the research in future research. In the case of my research, I will consider some of the following questions to assess the practical utility of my research: Will my results provide an understanding of the minority opposed to fees? Will the developed conceptual framework provide a useful roadmap for further research on this topic? Will the study results be useful in the evaluation of the RFDP and it’s future design?

The next chapter presents the results of the analysis and includes brief discussions of those results. The chapter is organized into three parts. The first section presents
excerpts in support of the conceptual framework explaining the fundamental reasons for opposition to fees. Common themes further depicting the context of the opposition are discussed within this section. Lastly, common themes describing the expressions of opposition are illustrated. In all three sections, the results of the analysis are supported by a series of participant narratives.
CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and is organized into two sections. The first section presents a conceptual framework explaining the fundamental reasons for active opposition to recreation user fees. These foundations of opposition are broadly defined as ideological opposition, opposition to the political process and program administration opposition (See figure 2 on page 40). For each of these three categories I present sub-categories that explain the particular rationale or basis for the opposition and to further clarify the context of this opposition to recreation user fees.

The second section presents the primary actions taken against recreation user fees. These expressions of oppositions include organization development, outreach activities, non-compliance acts, protests, and letter writing. The overall objective of these actions is to publicize the RFDP in two ways: to create an awareness of the RFDP and to make known the opposition to the RFDP. Each action is explained and related to the objectives.

FOUNDATIONS OF ACTIVE FEE OPPOSITION

Ideological Opposition

Ideological opposition is expressed as a series of arguments based on the participants’ belief systems that reflect their opinions on the importance of public lands and what those lands should provide. Broadly speaking, two main themes emerged from the data to define this ideological opposition. They include concerns about equity and the fear of privatization.

Equity Concerns

Many of the participants were concerned with the inequities that have or might develop as a result of recreational user fees. These inequities were portrayed in a number
of ways. Participants characterized access to public lands as a fundamental right and a common or public good. Therefore, in their opinion, fees should not be charged for simple recreational use. Recreation user fees were described as unfair to low-income users and taxpayers. Additionally, participants were concerned that an unjust situation is created when an individual citizen is charged to access public lands while resource extractive activities such as logging, grazing and mining are being subsidized. The dimensions of equity concerns were: fundamental right, common good, low-income, double taxation, and double standard.

**Fundamental right**

Participants used words like “inviolable” and “inalienable” to illustrate their right to access public lands. For some, access to public lands is a central part of being an American citizen. Others mentioned the spiritual and health benefits associated with access to the natural environment and public lands. The sudden change in management of public lands seemed illogical to Jim:

> These are public lands, it's been citizens right to walk freely on the public land for ages and ages and now, supposedly, there’s some reason, it’s not even quite clear to me what this reason is, but this right is being curtailed.

Louis described public land access as being, “an integral part of the freedom of being an American.” Theo’s area of concern includes not only natural public areas, but those public landmarks that have historic or cultural significance:

> So I tend to feel that both the great natural areas and the great cultural areas are very socially important to the country and to it’s identity. There is another issue for you. Does this zap our national identity in some significant way, so I think that it would be appropriate if you inquired about some of the historic sites as well.
This basic right to access public lands was compared to spiritual or religious freedom by some interviewees. When asked if there was one place on earth he absolutely wouldn’t want fees and where it would be, Barney, after a long pause, responded,

Well, gosh, I wouldn’t want to be charged a fee to go to church. I’d hate to have somebody say I have to pay a fee to go out and sit in my backyard, and that’s kind of a parallel. Here we are, we got the national forests all around us and they are telling me I gotta, just to enjoy nature, that I’m going to have to pay a fee.

Throughout the interview, Jack also made repeated comparisons between nature and spirituality:

One of my key issues is being a minister. I’m under a lot of pressure, a lot of stress, I deal with a lot of death and injury, and my main focus for going to the public lands, the mountains and forest, is spiritual restoration and renewal. I do believe being a peaceful, productive American citizen, I’ve got a basic fundamental and inalienable to walk on my land and talk to my God without paying Michael Dombeck and the Forest Service.

The following excerpt also indicates a belief in the spiritual and health benefits of access to public lands. When asked about the importance of this issue, Jim expressed the value of public lands in non-market terms.

Oh, let’s see. Well, how to express that. How would one express something like that? I think it’s very important. I think it’s central to what citizenship is about and central to what public life is about. Central to what it means to be a citizen and public life. As an increasing effort across the board to privatize things, to... less and less public life, it’s not necessarily a healthy thing. And I think as pressures are greater and greater on people, there’s a lot of pressures in modern life in a lot of different ways and the solace that wilderness provide, that’s of inestimable value.

In general the conditions mentioned by participants as acceptable for fees were described as places that were “highly developed” or “requiring maintenance.” For example, Tom said, “If it’s improved property like boat launches, campgrounds, etc., I
fully expect to pay a fee because the maintenance for those properties would have to be paid.” Barney described fees as being acceptable for highly developed facilities.

Well, uh, I think there are some places where recreation user fees are appropriate. Where there is a high level of development, like a campground for RV which provides flush toilets and hook ups, and this sort of stuff. I think fees are appropriate there and maybe fees are appropriate for other kinds of activities that involve high levels of development.

Aaron did not doubt that there were certain situations on public lands in which the public was willing to pay a fee.

The couple minor things of fee demo that we, and I guess many of the other groups, don’t object to, one is that the public is happy to pay a reasonable fee for camping at a developed Forest Service campground where there are pit toilets and trash cans and picnic tables and fire pits that need maintaining.

On the other hand, participants were in general against charging fees for “simple access” or “low impact” activities, such as hiking or walking or appreciating the natural surroundings. Randy said, “I definitely don’t think we should be charging people to use a trail on public land. To me, that is a disgrace, that is a total… I think it’s wrong. It’s something we want to encourage.” For some participants, the idea of charging a fee to simply appreciate nature was appalling. Jared said,

I’m against all entrance fees to any public lands just to go be within nature. I’m not against fees for a facility or using some type of thing that takes some kind of upkeep, but to pay a fee just to enter to watch birds or to interact with nature is horrific to me. I’m particularly against the fees on the National Forest.

In discussing an anti-fee group he was involved with, Dennis echoed Jared’s concern:

We think it’s wrong to charge people a fee to take a walk in the forest, to observe wild life, to watch a sunset, to commune with nature, if I could use that expression, kind of like the spiritual or religious sense.

And while he agreed that it might be reasonable to charge a fee for a developed campground with amenities such as showers, Jim said,
With many people I would say that foot travel, simple foot travel, simple recreational use of public land on trails has got to be maintained as a free thing. It’s a fundamental right of a citizen, period. Inviable right. However, there has to be a choice. There has to be a clear choice so that someone can go to public land and recreate for very little or nothing, especially nothing in terms of just walking, parking your car and walking. There’s got to be the opportunity to simply go out and walk down to a stream, walk on a trail, walk on a mountainside without the intrusiveness of fees.

These comments all reflect a fairly clear distinction between the “highly developed” activities for which fees are acceptable, and the “simple foot travel” and “nature appreciation” activities for which fees are not acceptable.

*Common good*

You know, they are commons; they belong to all of us.

-Jacob

In addition to being exclusionary, fees for use of public lands imply a contradiction to the notion of a public or a common good. Nearly three quarters of those interviewed mentioned the notion of “the common good” in their arguments against recreation user fees. For some it was a simple statement, such as the one above by Jacob. Others expressed a belief that public lands are a benefit to society as whole, whether or not is directly used or visited by everyone. Additionally, some participants compared public land access to other public goods and services such as schools, libraries and even a general right to air and water. Participants expressed support for funding maintenance of public lands from taxes. Jared described these new fees associated with the RFDP as,

One of the biggest mistakes I think the government has ever made. It’s akin to charging a fee to go to the public library. I personally can’t imagine what the fabric of our society would be like if you would charge a fee every time somebody wanted to go to the library to learn something. Access to nature is the same thing, it applies the same way. It would be detrimental to people’s relationship to nature, as well as their physical and spiritual well-being as well.
Mitch acknowledged the fact that even simple travel on trails requires a certain amount of administrative upkeep and cost. However, he believed that simple access is a public good that deserves public funding and not something that should require a fee.

For example, I mentioned campgrounds. But under Fee Demo, if I am driving from here to a friend’s house in Reno, and I want to pull off the road and sit by the creek and have lunch with my daughter, I would have to pay the Fee Demo fee. There is just something basically wrong with that. I am not extracting anything from it. I’m not using any amenities. I’m just stopping there to picnic. People just want to go for a walk, even if it’s on a trail, I don’t think they should have to pay. But you even have to pay if you don’t want to use a trail. And, of course, some people will claim, but there’s still administrative costs, etc. Well, that’s the stuff that I firmly believe should be paid out of taxes because all our public lands are a resource that is available for all people. Okay? Whether you use them or not is not the question. That’s how our libraries are. That’s how our police department is. And I think you have to continue with that thinking.

Later in the interview Mitch said,

That [free access to public lands] is a resource for the country that should be preserved and it should be preserved... it should be paid for by everybody, just like everybody pays for national defense. I pay for, you know, welfare. Some of my taxes go to welfare. I’ll never need welfare. I doubt if my daughter does. My brother doesn’t. My mother doesn’t. But I believe welfare of certain types is an absolute necessity. Not only is it just because it is right morally, if you don’t have it, you will have an increase in crime. So it’s a benefit to everybody, even if it isn’t direct.

Many participant comments illustrated a belief in public funding for programs that provide overall societal benefits. In comparing public lands to education, Chad said, “I think as a society we should chip in and make sure that everyone has equal access.”

While Jim was not a direct user of all public services, he supported their public funding.

People say why should people pay who don’t go hiking? My answer would be to that, for the very same reason that I who don’t have children am perfectly happy to support the public schools. It’s totally good for the health of our culture and our civilization. It’s necessary, it’s healthy.
Some interviewees spoke of the value in the very existence of public areas for a person, even if that person never used or ever visited those places. Gary compared public lands to “air,” “water,” and “military defense” and said,

I have to believe that the people who are stuck in the cities, you know, somewhere, they don’t have ready access to public lands, that idea of having all of those free, open public lands out there that belong to them, they view it as a very profound benefit to being Americans, to living in this country. And when you don’t have that anymore, when it’s not viewed that way, then not only will it diminish their lives but I think will leave with true sense of public ownership and control of our lands.

Jim reflected on a time when he did not have the resources to travel to the mountains but knowing that those places existed were of importance to him.

But the point was that just knowing, just the knowledge, the simple knowledge, even if I didn’t go out of the city at all, I was stuck in the filthy, hot city all summer, just the knowledge that places existed that I partly owned, that I was the owner of and that if could actually get out of the city, if I were out of the city, I could go wandering up into these wonderful mountains that I was a part owner of, was a source of tremendous consolation to me, a source of tremendous inspiration.

Randy contemplated the importance of setting aside areas where the glories of nature might be held in public ownership to be enjoyed by all.

I really believe that the public land...I agree with Frederick Olmsted, the basic concept that public land is a really revolutionary idea here. It’s one of our best ideas. It started here in the United States and it was a reaction to the 18th century when people...number one, even if they had the time, they were working 12 hours a day 7 days a week so they didn’t have recreation. Even if they would’ve had it, everything was privately owned. So this concept of having some of the most beautiful land set aside for people free and forever, that was Olmsted’s wish, I mean, I think that’s an important concept. And Abraham Lincoln endorsed that. So it all started here in Yosemite. I think it was a revolutionary idea and I think it’s really important not to wander too far from that basic concept.

**Low-income**

Over three-quarters of the participants in this study expressed concern about the negative impacts that fees do and will have on certain socioeconomic and ethnic groups.
Fees were described as "discriminatory and exclusionary towards lower income Americans" by Adam. When asked about his opinion of recreation user fees for use on public lands, Theo said,

I think there are some good things about them and some bad, and I think that the bad outweigh the good. I think they undermine the social purpose of recreation on public lands.

When asked why he felt that way, his response was, "Because the fees are regressive. There's no doubt about that. They hit lower income people much harder than they hit upper income people." Barbara was also concerned that fees will affect the ability of those with lower incomes to use public lands.

Well, I think that it also makes the National Forest less egalitarian. It's been the one place that anybody regardless of income has been able to go since the institution of the National Forest and the more those fees increase, the less people will be able to go there, especially people with low income.

Sarah accepted fees in certain situations but maintained that those fees should be socially equitable.

If it's involving public lands, I think the fees should be only nominal so that everybody can afford it. That means sociably equitable. To charge $15 to climb Mount Whitney and then go into another forest area where they're going to charge you $5 a day is not sociably equitable. But I can see a $5 charge to enter a park. I can see a nominal charge to camp at a maintained campground with toilets and electricity and running water.

Likewise, Mitch thought that, "any fees above a minimal amount should not exist and any fees that do exist should be for amenities that are beyond just the lands." And while Steve was somewhat accepting of fees at National Parks, ideally he would have preferred that entrance fees were non-existent.

One of the nice things about free parks is they don't prejudice against people based on their ability to pay and this is becoming more and more an issue where people don't have access to the public land anymore, even in their state parks.
Some participants acknowledged that while fees were not a financial burden to themselves or their families, they were concerned about how fees would affect low-income individuals and families. Mitch said,

I can easily afford it. I mean that would never detour me, but there are people that it will. And that money shouldn’t be made a criteria for whether you have access to public lands or not.

Jack spoke from personal feelings of discrimination when he said, “And the idea that somebody would presume to be able to take that [access to National Forest lands] away from me because I was poor at the time, that really railed me.” Tom has noticed that the exclusionary nature of fees has changed the way Hispanics use an area close to his home.

Well, I think it’s discriminatory, for one thing, I’ve noticed this in Santa Barbara, especially up in an area that is called Upper Oso which is an area on the Santa Inez River you can only access through one road, Paradise Road. It used to be heavily populated on the weekend by Hispanics. They would go in there and spend the day there at the river because it was free, it didn’t cost them anything to get in there. I’ve noticed there are far less Hispanics up there using the area so that’s one impact.

Grant made a similar observation in Yosemite National Park.

Certainly in Yosemite what began to happen since we’ve had the fee demo place is that people that used to come for picnics, for the weekend, there had started to be a real strong user shift of Mexican American families coming for picnics, they taper off.

**Double Taxation**

Some participants alleged that user fees created under RFDP were an additional tax that was both unnecessary and unfair. Most of the statements in the following section reflect a strong belief that public lands should be funded through taxes, and subsequent appropriations by Congress. In her comment that, “we already pay taxes to sustain and support our public lands” Debra was echoed by others repeatedly. Mitch demonstrated agreement when he said, “But I see Fee Demo [RFDP] is really shifting fundings from
our taxes to another tax, and I think that’s wrong.” Jack was adamantly opposed any fees beyond the taxes he already paid to use public lands.

My basic feeling is that it’s a cruel and immoral double tax. As an American citizen, I pay my taxes yearly and I feel that after giving the federal government literally thousands and thousands of dollars of my hard earned funds, I should be able to park my car and walk on free, open public lands.

When I asked Tom for his opinion of recreation user fees for use on public lands, his immediate response was,

I’m adamantly opposed to the fee demo program that’s being applied to the national forest simply because they’re preserves, they’ve been set aside for the use of the public and we already pay taxes to maintain those properties and we pay taxes also for the use of those properties. So when somebody wants to charge me some more money, I look at that as additional taxes to pay for something I’ve already paid for.

In light of the taxes he was already paying, Jared expressed frustration over the number of different fees that were emerging from RFDL. Referring to the fee demo program, he said,

[T]he whole thing is a tremendous boondoggle, and especially since I pay exorbitant taxes every April 15th, I’m very bitter about it. Here in Santa Barbara, you have to pay to go to a private campground in the forest. No, let me state this correctly. You pay your income taxes, then you go up in the forest and they want you to have this Adventure Pass, but if you go to a campground you have to pay another fee on top of that. It’s multi-layered fees.

Double Standard

Participants also repeatedly mentioned the inequity of requiring public land recreation fees of tax-payers, when commercial interests and resource extractive activities were being subsidized by the government. Most of those who commented on this double standard made a distinction between the commercial industry’s damage to natural resources, but the minimal impacts on such resources by recreation. Frustration was expressed over new recreation fees, and the perceived lack of reform in resource
extractive subsidization policies. Dennis went into great detail about the double standard he claimed he had observed.

Now, we’re particularly opposed to fees, recreation fees, at the same time that Congress and the government agencies are providing subsidies with taxpayer money to extract the resources that are damaging the natural environment. We’re talking here about the logging industry with its construction of roads that damage the environment. The way they cut trees, often up to the stream sides, resulting oftentimes as significant erosion, damage to the fish habitat and so on. We’re talking about grazing, another commercial endeavor that results in oftentimes damage to the riparian habitat, damage to the range land... Okay, so we’ve got logging, we’ve got grazing and the third thing, of course, is mining. We all know that the royalties from mining are just atrociously low and that mines damage streams with acid run off. They damage the visual vistas. Mining roads damage the resource as well.

Louis could not understand the reasoning behind charging for “visiting” public lands while “more damaging” activities received subsidies.

Another big thing is that the Forest Service charges essentially nothing for grazing, very little for logging and mining and other extractive, destructive industries that are quite very destructive, not even all the recreation combined doesn’t even come close to what grazing does. But the Forest Service actually heavily subsidizes grazing and these other extractive industries. So why should the public be charged to harmlessly visit its own public land?

Jacob not only felt that recreation was less damaging to the resource than resource extractive industries but he believed public land recreation provided a societal benefit that deserved public funding.

And so it’s completely unfair to target recreation and the general public which are the recreators, while not at the same time addressing things such as timber subsidies, grazing subsidies, mining subsidies and the like, which to me the subsidies... well, not just to me but the subsidies... the fact is the subsidies are far greater for those types of resource extractive industries. And I also feel that the impacts are far greater. And that the value of subsidizing recreation is enormous given the number of people that benefit and relative low cost of doing it.

Sarah reiterated that fees for general citizens and extractive industries were imbalanced.

Well, they want to charge fees, sometimes up to $15 a person. Land managers
are charging $1... I think 35 cents for a cow and a calf to graze for a month on federal lands. I have a real problem with that. I have a real problem with taxpayers paying for extracted industry, mining, timber harvesting and then land managers turning... Congress turning around and saying, Well, you’re going to have to pay an additional fee now just to be able to use your land.

In their narratives, participants often challenged the equity of charging fees. Fees were perceived to be an "erosion of a fundamental freedom" and the rights of all citizens to use public lands. They perceived that public lands were better managed as a common good in public ownership. Participants were also concerned about what the fees would do to the ability of certain socioeconomic groups to use public lands. When asked if there is one place on earth where he absolutely wouldn’t want fees, Don’s response was "public lands in general". He went on to say,

I seriously and totally believe that public land has value in and of itself because no one’s there. Every piece is just as important as any other piece. Some have greater scenic value than others, you know, but they all are part of, you know, the landscape is kind of the only thing this whole country shares. We're all from different languages, different cultures. The one thing that we all share is the ground of this country. In my opinion that needs to be vigorously protected so that everybody in some way, shape or form, with ecological compliance being pretty much in the forefront of management decisions, able to enjoy some of that, regardless of their economic ability.

Fear of Privatization of Public Lands

I think it's all headed in a direction of creating a business model for the management of a public benefit and that's a bad thing.

-Grant, in reference to the RFDP

In addition to equity concerns, the other "ideological" theme that presented itself in the data was the fear of privatization of public lands associated with the RFDP. The fees associated with RFDP were commonly referred to as just a small part of a much larger attempt to privatize the management of public lands. These new fees were described as "the trojan horse", the "foot in the door" and the "very thin edge of a large wedge."
Interviewees repeatedly expressed concern that fees would lead to the commercial or corporate takeover of public lands and the loss of nature experiences. Steve related recreation user fees to the corporate takeover of everything.

I also talk about the corporate takeover of nature as one of the common themes I have. But that’s really only a part of the corporate takeover of everything. So where I have tried to differentiate the corporate takeover of nature is thinking that maybe that’s the line in the sand where people will be able to say differentiate. We can’t differentiate any other line in the continuum of our daily experience because, hell, it’s everywhere. From the moment I wake up I’m being bombarded with this corporate takeover commercialism, but there is still a clean break point when we get to public lands if people are willing to defend that line. And if people are not willing to defend that line then I think that that will be the loss.

Gary also saw fee demo as being part of the larger paradigm shift in the management of public lands.

Fee Demo...it’s part of that thin edge of shifting national forests management from, you know, sort of your traditional extractive industry approach to emphasizing recreation in the same way and sort of being industrial recreation. I think it’s part of this whole move that commercializes public lands and privatizes public lands, but not necessarily the ownership of private lands but the control of private lands shifts much more into private hands when we get into that.

Adam also feared that integrating “business” models on public lands would encourage activities and services with market value and sacrifice less intensive non-market values and activities.

I recognize this as a threat to public lands. If we start developing market models on this and if the only way we can pay for these things is through development, then we’re going to drive development. If the only way a forest can get dollars is by developing, we’re going to pick high intensive development type things. In other words, downhill skiing over cross country skiing, snowmobiling, ORV’s over hiking and horseback, this sort of thing, intensive type of uses that lose sight of open space, watershed wildlife and other values that the market can’t figure in.

Jim was disturbed by what he perceived to be the long-term and unknown effects of
recreation user fees and the RFDP. When I asked him about the importance of this issue (recreation user fees), Jim responded,

But I'm saying the reason that it's sort of hard to quantify or put an exact label on how important this is is that it's in the same realm as complexity theory, little things having big effects. And this is a little but crucial thing, which if it's introduced into American culture it can really have a deleterious affect in ways that are unpredictable and very hard to quantify or very hard to identify.

The primary fears or implications associated with the management shift perceived by participants included increased fees, over-development, decreased appropriations, a destruction of the natural environment, and changing relationships with public land. Additionally, accepting fees and a more business-like model of management for public lands was thought to open the door to a more commercial type of experience in these natural areas and change people’s relationships with the land and those who manage it.

*Increased Fees*

Some participants were concerned that there were no stated limits in the RFDP policy and what this might lead to in terms of the amounts of fees. Brian asked,

How far are we going with users fees? It's just another tax is all it is. And in the case of the recreational fee demonstration program, it clearly states in the legislation that we can be charged fair market evaluation. And I interpret that as meaning they can charge us whatever they want.

Participants described the fee situation as “self-perpetuating” or “like a monster you can’t stop”. Interviewees anticipated that the agencies would become dependent upon and driven by fee revenues. This is illustrated in Randy’s comment.

So I think when we start talking...and then one of the great dangers of the user fee program, in my opinion, is that once it gets started, there's no end to...I have a very good friend who's in charge of an office in Yosemite called the Office of Special Park Uses. And their sole function is to come up with innovative ideas to increase fees.

Tom was troubled that fees would only continue to increase once the RFDP is made a
permanent fee policy.

What they’re counting on is the apathy of the American public to just sort of, “Oh, well, I don’t use the forest that much, what the heck,” and what the public’s not realizing is that this is a very thin edge of a very large wedge. Once they get this signed into law, the door is open. Then pretty soon instead of being $5 a day, it’ll be $10 a day, then it’ll be $10 a person.

Louis was convinced that the fees would increase and with that he saw public lands becoming more and more exclusionary.

And the fees are going to go up in the future, they’re not going to go down, so it’s going to become more and more of the wealthy… the wealthy can use public lands and the rest of us are out, you know. So it’s very important, I think.

Matt expressed concern regarding the perceived prohibitive atmosphere of increased fees.

What we’re concerned with more is the potential for these fees to become incrementally increased over time to the point where it’s only the elite that are allowed to use what are public lands, lands that already belong to us, they belong to the poorest people of the nation as well as the richest people.

Randy was alarmed by previous fee increases at concessionaire managed public recreation facilities.

But, like everything else, every year, it seems the contractors are coming in and asking for an increase in the fees. So what was $15 last year is $20 this year, what was $20 last year is $24 this year and there’s all these additional charges, $2 for a dog, $5 for second car. These are the type of creep in our fee schedules that are of concern to me.

Decreased Appropriations

Another commonly mentioned perceived implication of the RFDP was “dwindling appropriations.” The legislation mandating the RFDP states that fee revenues will be used to supplement, not replace existing budgets. Nevertheless, some participants feared that fees would have a negative effect on public land appropriations. Barbara
claimed that appropriations had already been reduced where fee revenues have been produced.

And I think the other thing is what we’ve seen over and over and over again is that Congressional appropriations are being reduced almost at an absolute equivalent rate of how much money is being earned from fee demonstration.

Barney inferred that once the agencies proved themselves able to generate revenue, Congress would be tempted to reduce their appropriations.

The problem is, that I think on the other side, is that Congress down the road is going to say, you know why do we give the Forest Service all this recreation money, look how much they are bringing in. We’ll take it even further. I think its going to lead to less and less appropriated money, not more and more.

From Kathy’s point of view, agency budgets had been reduced based on the revenues they had already generated under the RFDP.

But it’s my general impression that congress has cut back appropriations in proportion to what has come in through the fee demo projects and so I can see how a manager would be tempted to encourage recreation to continue to get those fees to do what they need to do in other areas.

While Randy believed in the Congressional funding of public lands, he thought the RFDP would give Congress a reason not to fulfill that obligation.

But I think the fee demonstration program has done a couple of things. One, it’s given congress an excuse not to fund agencies like the Forest Service to the levels that are needed. I really believe in adequate funding of land management agencies.

*Over-development*

Another perceived effect of the RFDP was the over-development of public natural areas. Some participants suggested that the RFDP would influence decisions made about development on public lands. The concern was that decisions about development would be based on what generated the most revenue as opposed to what was best for the natural
environment. Chad’s perspective was that RFDP would encourage agencies to develop
more amenities so they might bring in more revenues.

Well, you know I think the problem, when you start charging fees, all of a
sudden there’s this revenue being generated and it’s sort of to perpetuate itself,
there’s this mentality that, you know, if we provide something, we can charge
for it, so let’s provide more. And I think what happens, and the real danger of
this fee, is that you know development is going to get out of hand. I mean,
instead of just having these nice quiet National Forest campgrounds, we’re
going to have KOA-type campgrounds with electricity, computer hook-ups,
RVs, all that kind of stuff.

Similarly Adam was worried that agencies would be forced to increase development in
order to generate revenue.

I recognize this as a threat to public lands. If we start developing market models
on this and if the only way we can pay for these things is through development,
then we’re going to drive development. If the only way a forest can get dollars
is by developing, we’re going to pick high intensive development type things.

Jacob was convinced that fees would drive intensive development.

If fees are made permanent and if they have the accompanying impacts that I first
see, which is basically encouraging higher impact forms of resort development
and recreational and vehicle use, and that sort of thing. The reason that is, is the
agencies will be able to charge more money for facilities that are more developed
and so it will be a bigger cost incentive for them.

In Mitch’s view, fee demo was just a small part of a larger effort to commercialize public
lands, which would eventually lead to over-development.

Fee Demo is really the start of a new paradigm for management of our national
forests. And that is pay for use which means commercialize. Commercialize
most likely means more structures, more hotels, more motorized use, less
opportunities for people that just want to use the land.

Because of the consumer orientation of society, Don believed in maintaining parts of the
natural environments free of additional amenities was important.

You know, in my opinion, treating recreation as an industry on public land will
lead towards, you know, tamer wilderness. More amenities to attract people
there, when, in my opinion, the landscape is the beautiful thing there. Amenities, those are, you know, secondary at best. And it's great, especially in a country that's becoming, you know, very consumer-oriented and more, kind of more is better oriented, I think it's vital to have a space where less is better, to where you can get back to some of the things that most of us are missing these days.

*DeSTRUCTION OF THE NATURAL INTEGRITY*

Participants also expressed was that the recreational interests driving the RFPD would lead to “environmentally destructive” activities and “quickly destroy public lands.” Don said,

Recreation, industrial strength recreation on public lands, you know, corporate management maintaining of access and decision-making and development will destroy our public lands. It might take 10 years. It might take 70 years but we see what these other industries can do and if it’s business as usual, you know, that to me is the greatest threat is, you know, I have a 4 by 4 and stuff, you know. And the reason I have it is to go on some of those roads. I'm not going to go on those roads. That’s fine. I don’t have a problem with that. I think for the health of the landscape this needs to be done. I think for the health of the nation, you know, this could be a great place to finally say, Okay, enough is enough. We don’t need anymore. We don’t need more gadgets. We don’t need more sensors. We don’t need more amenities. Let’s just breathe and relax and enjoy these relatively untouched spaces for what they are.

Jim was of the opinion that the shift from public to private management of public lands would have disastrous implication for the environment.

I'm in agreement with those who see that as a very dangerous and really wrong headed direction. Turning over beautiful places to money making corporations who really want to move in and make a fortune. There’s a fortune to be made. There are billions to be made, inestimable amounts of money to be made from public lands and charging people, building resorts, building whatever, motorized things and so on. I think it would be just devastating environmentally.

Sarah believed that if business interests gained control of the management of public lands the condition of the environment would be in jeopardy.

I think when you bring in any kind of a partnership where there’s a commercial profit to be made, that partner has the strongest say on what happens on our lands. And, by nature, corporate America is not interested in ecological health. They’re interested in profits. That’s the nature of their game. There’s nothing wrong with profits but it should not be at the expense of our public lands.
Changing Relationships with Public Land

Participant narratives presented descriptions of how visitor relationships with public land had the potential to change as a result of recreation user fees. Participants described an alteration of the nature of their experiences. As a result of commercializing public lands, participants characterized a shift in the relationship between the people and public natural areas, the public and the local personnel of public lands, and the public and the government in general. Gary stated that he thought fees changed the nature of the outdoor experience.

And I also think that just fundamentally it changes our relationship to the places where we are, to those public places. When, right now, it’s our backyard. When you have to pay to go on it, it feels like somebody else’s backyard. It’s a different... it’s just a very different feeling that you have.

Steve believed the act of paying significantly altered the nature of the outdoor experience. He said,

In 1999 in Greenwires gave me one of the top ten quotes of the year, and this is nasty in the media. This is a quote from Greenwires, “It’s much like the difference between romantic love and paid sex. It changes the experience totally. It can’t be wild if it’s not free.” Once you start turning the enjoyment of the great outdoors into commodities it takes on a different meaning.

Theo told a story to exemplify his assertion that the implementation of fees had sanctioned an undesirable “police state” on public lands. When I asked him about his personal experiences with paying fees, Theo answered,

I certainly pay them if I want to go where they are. That’s the only way to get in, I’m not going to climb over the wall. At the same time I’m very definitely going to let people know. Let me give you an example. Last year when we were in Yellowstone, two Montana places, Yellowstone and the Little Big Horn, they asked us, we had our Golden Eagle and they asked to see some identification in addition to the Golden Eagle. We showed identification but that really offended my wife figuring that we were going into a park, not a police state. This year my wife says that she is absolutely not going to show identification,
that she is going to show a valid Golden Eagle and we’ll tell people we are who we are and we will go in and they can send the police after us.

During my interview with him, Theo also contemplated the possibility that fees would change the appreciation of nature to a quantitative measure.

The fees directly militate against that because you’re less inclined to try something if it’s going to cost you a lot of money to do it. You always have the question of is it going to be worth the money. There are more complicated effects too. Long-term it has to do with the commodification of recreation, and I think the general changeover or shift away from appreciative values of nature to commodity values of nature. Let me give you an example of this, sometimes if you are in the right mood, it’s nice to simply go out and stand in the rain. Would you do that if you were going to have to pay $2? If changes it from the appreciation of the thing itself to a quantitative kind of thing. Is there enough sunshine? Is there enough of this?

Some participants indicated that fees would inevitably transform natural resource-based experiences into commodities. By doing this, Americans would no longer feel like the “owners of,” but rather “customers on” public lands. Jim’s reaction to fees resulted from his belief that fees were just part of the push to privatize public land management. While the actual fee was not that significant to Jim, he was very concerned that it represented the shift from “owner” to “customer.”

The one thing... I agree with a lot of people who see the fees as sort of... many people argue, the fees themselves, the money collected from the actual fees, are not in themselves, in terms of dollar amounts, that significant. But they’re important as something to help shift the paradigm, to shift people’s perception away from the idea that we are owners of public land and that we pay land management agencies to take care of it for us. They’re shifted away from that toward the idea that someone else owns these things, they are providing you with an experience, and you will purchase this experience. So in that regard, I think they’re really insidious.

Without a sense of public ownership, Gary worried that public support for public lands would diminish.

The idea that the users have to pay or that the users will pay to manage the land changes the nature from a public good to sort of a product that those of us that use that are buying. And I think that really... what I really worry about is that
all Americans own the land and all Americans feel like they have a stake in it, and as soon as we start charging people to use them rather than rather than funding them out of the general treasury, it starts to change that relationship. And that really scares me because it’s the idea that these lands are everybody’s and that everybody has a stake in them, that will keep public lands public forever. When people no longer feel like that they are their lands, that they’re supporting them, that they enjoy all of the rights and privileges and everything else that goes along with that, on an equal basis with people that might live closer to them or use them more often, then I think our public lands will cease to be public eventually. And I think that’s really…the fundamental issue surrounding things like Fee Demo is whether or not these things are for the public good or whether they’re a product out there that we have to purchase when we use it.

Several participants correlated this shift in perception from “owner” to “customer with the potential to alter the expectations of the visiting public. Mark did not believe the agencies should “treat the American public like a gang of tourists waiting to be entertained.” Like other interviewees, he wondered if visitors expected more and did less for public lands if they had to pay a fee to use them. Jared described the potential of the act of paying a fee to alter visitor expectations.

[I]n my opinion is that it turns the whole thing into the strange relationship where people feel like it has a particular value to it. It’s almost like this, exactly what the Forest Service, for instance, is painting it up to be which is like a product or some kind of service. They expect once they pay for this just to drive up there and play in the snow, that someone is going to be cleaning up after them.

Debra argued that some of the paying public would develop certain expectations that would not be consistent with protection of the resource. Her concern was that people’s wants would eventually outweigh the needs of the resource.

They will fees and will develop the attitude of, Well, I paid for it. I am owed. I have every right to be here to do whatever I want. And I think one of the purposes of our public lands is for watershed protection and, you know, maintenance of maintaining, you know, good fisheries and bio-diversity and whatnot and you can’t do that if people start feeling like that they, you know, by god, I paid my fees and I can come in here and do whatever I want.
As a result of fee implementation, participants had also observed a change in how the public interacts with local agency personnel. Chad described the evolution of the ranger from "friend" to "law enforcer" with the implementation of fees.

Plus it turns a Forest Service into parking attendants and law enforcement officers and people look at those type of people very differently than they looked at the traditional park ranger who’s always been our friend. I think, there’s always been a good relation with the public with the Forest Service in the past and I think that’s changing and it’s certainly changing here.

According to Don, a former Forest Service employee himself, field personnel were also unhappy with this change in their job duties.

You know, my friends who work in the Forest Service, you know, on the ground level, they don’t want to go around harassing people to see if they have passes. That’s not what they’ve gone into the Forest Service to do. None of them got into their job to do that. You know, one step up the ladder, they’re all becoming economists. They don’t want to do that. They don’t have degrees to do that. We’re going to turn our public land into a police state. You know, that’s ridiculous.

Brian had noticed increasing animosity towards the Forest Service as a consequence of the negative reaction to fees.

Even a lot of the Rangers are upset because we used to have a warm and fuzzy feeling about the Forest Ranger, we had affection for them, but the way they are conducting this program, everybody hates the Forest right now and they are making bad jokes about them and really strongly dislike them because of the way they have been trying to promote this program through deception and intimidation.

Many participants expressed being particularly opposed to fees on Forest Service lands. In some cases, this was demonstrated as a direct statement, such as Jared’s comment, “I’m particularly against the fees on the National Forest” or when Leo said, “My opposition has been, basically, towards the national forests up here.” Tom’s rationale for rejecting Forest Service fees was based on his perception that the national forests were less developed than National Parks. He said, “So basically, if it’s
unimproved land, national forest property, I’m adamantly opposed to fees for use.” Steve has directed his efforts to stop fees on Forest Service lands because he believes they “are the leaders of the pack with respect to non-Park federal land.” Steve also said, “the Forest Service is the most important because as the Forest Service goes, so will go the Fish & Wildlife Service and BLM.” Aaron’s efforts had been focused on fighting fees on national forests. However, he indicated that other groups were attempting to eliminate the RFDP from all federal lands.

We have only been writing to congress asking them to scrap fee demo and put the budgets back so the Forest Service has the money to look after the facilities. I’m not familiar enough with BLM areas, I don’t know Fish & Wildlife Service areas in this area and I don’t visit national parks very much because there’s none close to me. So the forest issue is what bothers most people and just because I haven’t tracked the others doesn’t mean that people aren’t upset about them. I now that they are and some groups are wanting to kill all of fee demo.

For some of the participants, the opposition to National Park fees is minimal or non-existent because of the tradition of paying fees at National Parks. Louis said, “Oh, national parks are a whole different situation. They’ve had fees for many decades and they had fees when they were first established.” I asked Barbara if her opposition to fees differed depending on the agency. Her answer was less definitive than Louis’, but she tended towards exempting the National Park from the fee opposition based on its history of charging fees. She said, “I don’t know, my opposition would be, again, the Park Service has had fees in place for a really long time. We’re all used to paying our $10 to go into the parks.” The National Parks were also set apart from the other agencies because of a difference in the expected services and experiences. In general, participants described the experience at National Parks as “more developed.” Dennis described the acceptance of recreational user fees in two circumstances, one specifically directed at the
National Park Service, the other to services and facilities often associated with a National Park experience.

Well, the position of the Sierra Club and my position, are pretty much the same in that our official policy is that we do not object to a recreation use fee in two circumstances. One is in the national parks and other areas managed by the National Park Service. That would include national monuments and historic parks and so on. The rationale there is that they are set aside specifically for recreation and enjoyment and that that is their sole function. And we recognize there may be needs for fees to preserve the resource for that purpose. The second exception that we make is for developed facilities, such as campgrounds would be the best example or for special services like tours.

While he was adamantly opposed to the RFDP, Steve acknowledged that National Park Service needed to be addressed separately.

The only reason I don’t go after the Park service or have not gone after the Park Service besides the political reality is people are more accustomed to the idea that a park is a park, and a park you are going to expect to come across more developed infrastructure, expect mowed lawns, picnic tables, and it’s not wrong that they be expected to pay for those if they can’t be provided as amenities.

Ideally, Joe would like to see all public lands free to the recreating public, but he did recognize a difference between the agencies. His comment started by referencing National Park Service fees.

But, no, I mean, I’m not supportive of those either because I don’t think that they should discriminate against who should...who uses them. But I also understand that, you know, the parks are a lot more congestive and the parks, there is a need to manage people and get vehicles out of them and so, you know, I think there’s...yeah, in the parks I think it is a little bit of a different approach compared to certainly the national forest system or the BLM lands.

Summary of Ideological Opposition

What are the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees?

Evident in the data are two themes that further distinguish the ideological opposition to recreation user fees — equity concerns and the perceived effects and fears of privatization. This examination of ideological opposition describes in detail these two
themes and the concepts that define them. As demonstrated in the interview narratives, equity concerns are based on questions of fairness and justice. Participants declared that fees challenge the fundamental American right to access public lands, disregard the notion of the common good, and are discriminatory and exclusionary. Participants were further angered that while individual citizens are paying recreation fees, commercial extractive activities are being subsidized.

Participants also expressed overwhelming concern with what they perceived to be the consequences of the RFDP. Many participants believe that recreation fees are just the first step in the privatization of public lands. As described by the interviewees, the feared consequences of this profit driven model for management included increased fees, decreased appropriations, over-development, and a destruction of natural integrity. Changing relationships with public land, including changing outdoor experiences, was also mentioned as a more abstract consequence of fee systems.

*What is the context of the opposition?*

Participant reactions to agencies involved in fee collection varied. Participants generally indicated a difference in their reactions to fees depending on the administering agency; they generally separated the National Park Service from other federal agencies. This division was based mainly on differences in the history of fee collection and the amenities or experiences provided by the agency. The main opposition to recreational user fees and the RFDP was in its application to Forest Service lands. Participant narratives also reflected a willingness to accept recreation user fees for highly developed services as long as those fees were nominal.
Opposition to the Political Process

Opposition to the political process was based on concerns with how the RFDP was initiated. Participant narratives reflected a coupling of programmatic and ideological concerns (illustrated by the dotted line in figure 1). The arguments below relate to the development and implementation of the RFDP, and they are rooted in beliefs about how public land management decisions should be made. The reasons for opposition to the political process revolve around the following questions: Who has access to the discussion? Who has power in the decision-making? Who initiated the RFDP? How did the RFDP originate?

Who has access to the discussion?

This is a whole new thing that they just came up with in 1996 and the whole reason they came up with it is because a conglomeration of private commercial interests pushed this thing through on a rider, unbeknownst to the public.

- Louis

As mentioned in Chapter One, legislation mandating the RFDP was attached to the 1996 appropriations act as a rider. The fact that this piece of legislation was a rider had generated some of the controversy surrounding the RFDP. Nearly half of the people I interviewed referenced the apparent lack of public access into the dialogue regarding this policy. Feelings of concern and outrage were expressed by interviewees that such a major change in management of public lands would be passed though Congress as a rider without public debate. Louis said, “the general public was basically ignored in the formulation of the fee demonstration program.” Don believed that the RFDP was “something that’s being forced on the public as a whole without any informed debate or consent.” While riders are legitimate pieces of legislation often attached to appropriations bills, some would argue they are tacked onto majority supported
appropriation bills as a way to avoid the controversy of making the rider legislation.

Some of those involved in this study claimed that because the RFDP was a rider, it did not incorporate legitimate public discussion. Dennis was frustrated that the RFDP was initiated without public debate and that it continued to be extended outside of the authorization process.

But it appears there’s a good chance this program will be extended another year. Well, meanwhile there’s never been any public hearings on the matter because it never went through the authorization process. And, you know, it’s kind of like taxation without representation.

The following two excerpts indicate that participants believed that the RFDP legislation was purposefully attached as a rider to avoid controversy. Louis said,

It was created through a rider and then it was extended through a rider as well, and then extended again on another rider. They’re just secretly forcing this down the public’s throat. It’s really sad.

Tom commented that many people did not even know about the new fees because the RFDP “slipped through” on a rider.

And it may become law without ever having a hearing because they keep attaching these riders to the senate appropriations bill for funding for the Department of the Interior. That’s typically how they get these things through, you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. You let my rider go through, I’ll let yours go through. And that’s what’s happening. I’m constantly amazed at the number of people I talk to who have no idea that this was going on. They don’t have a clue that they’re trying to implement a fee program for the national forest.

In reflecting on the tradition of freedom to public lands, Louis was frustrated that a change in the nature of that access was made without public feedback.

Like I was saying, the national forest and BLM lands were originally established as public domain and they were established to be free and open to all Americans. They’ve always been that way, so that important aspect of the American freedom has been taken away without any public input, really. Essentially no public input. It shot right through on a rider that no
one heard of.

Leo also revealed a feeling of aggravation over the lack of public input regarding new fees for public land use.

And also I'm not in favor of a brand new tax and this was not voted on by the residents. This is a new tax. Normally when a tax comes around either our representatives vote on it or we get some sort of representation on a new tax. And we didn’t get that.

Gary believed that “the public never [got] to engage this debate with Fee Demo. It’s just something that sort of just starts getting hoisted on us.” Without the debate, Gary thought the appropriateness of the RFDP was not deliberated.

But it wasn’t the sort of issue that the public, that they held public meetings on and that they held public hearings on and that they went around the country and got input on. It was one of those things that came up before Congress. It was off everybody’s radar screen, and it just passed through, so the debate never occurred. All people know is they start seeing in different parts of the country, we don’t see it here much, but in other places they just start seeing these trailhead fees pop up, parking passes, pop up, all those kinds of things and never any discussion about whether Fee Demo was the right thing.

Who has power in the decision-making?

The group of interests with power in the decision-making process was referred to as an “iron triangle” by Debra. Participants perceived the power in this process to be held by the politicians (Congress), the agencies, and the recreation industry. Jacob said,

If it’s up to the politicians and the agency managers to come up with some kind of compromise, and I hope they will listen to everybody and do that but it seems like they’ve been ready to listen to the American Recreation Coalition than the recreation interests, than to have the public interest.

The power of this conglomeration excluded public concerns. As Mark said, “The problem is that the bureaucracy is so thoroughly entrenched that it just builds a wall around itself and refuses to accede to public concern.” Because of the inside political
support for the RFDP, Adam described those in opposition to be engaging in an "uphill battle." Tom echoed this sentiment.

Lobbyist, they have this huge lobbyist group in congress and they have in particular a couple of people in congress who are trying to push this through. One of them, his name is Ralph Regula and he's the head of the Appropriations Committee for the Department of the Interior. And he, in fact, he was just voted by the American Recreation Coalition headed by Disney as the Man of the Year for his efforts to implement the fee program. So they've got a couple of people like Regula back there who are pushing in congress to get this thing adopted as law.

As the opposition was outside of the realm of power, Sarah described a challenging fight against fees.

It's slow. Things like this are...any battle to save the environment is a slow uphill battle. Someone once told me that all battles are uphill. That's not so. If you were the victor, you're fighting the people that are down below you. So the politicians are in battle with us too, but they have the advantage, of course. It's a slow process.

The following two excerpts illustrate a concern about the exclusionary nature of the decision-making process regarding the RFDP. Tom said,

What's really happening is that the forests are being "business-fied" as I like to refer to it. By that I mean there is a huge lobbying force in Washington and I don't remember the exact name of it but it's the recreation coalition. It's a conglomeration of large corporations who deal in recreational products and at the top of the list is Disney and I emphasize that because they're the ones who really initiated this program, they're the ones who hold these secret meetings in Florida annually or more often, that are closed to the public and are closed to the press to figure out how they're going to get through congress this basically commercialization of the national forests so that the Forest Service can not only charge people to use the forests, charge them a fee to get in there, but so that Disney and other corporations can go in there and literally set up recreational facilities and charge people to use them on national forest property. I think that's wrong.

Jared was also upset that the general public was, in his view, being denied access to the decision-making process:

The key thing that keeps screaming in my head whenever I talk to someone
about this whole thing is the major deception that’s going on with the Forest Service and the public. I think it’s an absolute crime that the Forest Service is getting away with promoting this as a clean-up program or it’s a main issue of National Forest lands when, you should see, I don’t know how you’ve looked behind the scenes at the thing, but you should see what they are saying and writing back and forth to each other between meetings. Literally they have meetings down at Disneyworld in Florida between Dombeck and Lyons and our recreation CEO’s. That right there should be a major warning right there. And the sad part is the public is being duped for the most part, they are being fooled

Who initiated the RFDP?

Interviewees expressed concern that fees would lead to the commercial or corporate takeover of public lands. In addition to resenting the potential commercialization of public lands, many participants expressed disgust over the involvement of the recreation industry in the initiation of the RFDP. To some, it was more than just the fee, it was the deception and “who’s behind it.” More specifically, Aaron said, “...big business is behind it...” in his reference to the RFDP and the “onslaught of commercialization of America’s public lands.” Mitch believed, “that Fee Demo just ties into this corporate agenda.” Jared was explicit in his rejection of fees due to the involvement of the recreation industry.

I perhaps accept fees in certain areas for facilities as long as the recreation industry and Derek Crandall and his various crowd were not involved with developing partnerships with the government agencies. That might be condition for me to personally to stomach this whole thing.

Gary described the RFDP as the “brain child of the recreation industry... because they want to get us accustomed to spending money on public lands.” Like Gary, Louis believed that special interests were the impetus for the RFDP because they stood to gain from fees and a more commercialized recreation experience on public lands.

What’s really being downplayed is the participation in forming this program from the commercial interests. They’re really pushing this thing. If it wasn’t
for them, we probably wouldn’t have the fee demo program. They stand to gain from it and I don’t know how they’ve prevented the public from finding out what they’ve been up to but they sure have.

A primary reason Brian was opposed to the RFDP was, in his view, because of the involvement of Corporate America.

... in this particular case, the recreational fee demonstration program, it was designed and lobbied by Corporate America, namely the American Recreation Coalition, for the purpose of commercializing our public land. The reason the recreational fee on public land was also thought out legislation is to eliminate their biggest competition, which is free access to public lands.

Like Brian, Adam criticized the American Recreation Coalition for initiating a fee program as the first step towards commercial management control of public lands.

[W]hen you look at the influence of the American Recreational Association who have an interest in developing recreation in the land, the various motorized uses, people get money from motorized use and the various developments that are pushing this and, as you are probably aware, the ARC has taken credit for pushing this. It’s obvious where they’re going on this.

In addition to the commercialization of public lands, Steve described another reason the American Recreation Coalition was involved in the fee program. Paying a fee secured access for special interest uses.

The way I see it is if you’re for motorized recreation you should understand that if you pay, you get to play. That’s the joy of it. That’s why the ARC is behind this. Money buys access.

Gary used a timber industry analogy to describe what he perceived to be an inevitable industry strangle on management control of public lands once the agencies became reliant on the fees of a particular special interest or use.

You know, it’s just not unlike what always happened with timber. The timber industry goes to their friends in Congress who assure that the agencies get a big enough budget to put out the timber, to keep the timber industry happy. So the timber industry will go to Congress, get the money, put out the timber and, of course, all this supports the Forest Service’s budget. It’s that triangle of the agency, the interest group and the Congress that work together. In Political
Science class they always used a military industrial sort of triangle in Congress, but it’s the same thing with... it was always the same thing with timber and it will become the same thing with recreation. When the agencies become dependent on recreation fees, the funded programs, they’ll be creating commercial recreation interests, just like they’ve created these other special interests in the past. It will get all sorts of special treatment at the public’s expense out there. And when they become reliant, you know, I sort of got off on the commercial side of things but it’s not any different with user fees. When they become reliant on user fees, they’ll become beholden to those activities for their funding and they won’t be able to restrict them. It’s sort of, you know, administrative suicide, I guess, to do that to reign in the things that are going to fund you.

How did the RFDP originate?

Overall, the participants in this study criticized the political process of the RFDP. In the interview narratives, accusations of a closed decision-making process and industry manipulation of the authorization of the RFDP were made. More than just Congress forcing the acceptance of the RFDP, participants were explicit that Congress manufactured a budget crisis in order to create a need for fee revenue. As Barbara said, “I think that from the research I’ve done there has been a manufactured crisis in recreation funding on federal lands, specifically the Forest Service.” Sarah repeated Barbara’s assertion.

What happened is certain members of Congress have in concert with certain members of corporate America struck a deal, and the federal budgets were cut so commercial recreation would be able to profit by being brought in as partners in the Fee Demo arena.

Louis described the conspiracy to create a need for fee demo.

That’s a whole big thing itself is that there’s been kind of a conspiracy between these special interests to actually reduce the money that comes from the federal government. It’s always come from the main financial source of the federal government...

Interviewer: The treasury?

Louis: Yeah, the treasury. They’ve been trying to get that reduced as an excuse
to bring in these commercial interests and as an excuse for this fee demonstration program which goes hand in hand with all these corporations, recreational corporations like Exxon and Coleman and Walt Disney Corporation and all those that are behind this thing. That’s what’s really going on that very few people know about what’s behind this whole thing.

Like the others, Mitch did not believe that it was a coincidence that budgets were cut and then the Forest Service began to “partner” with the recreation industry. Rather, he characterized the situation surrounding the RFDP as a conspiracy.

But I do believe that in a way it’s a conspiracy that we reduce the budget then we create this thing where people start paying fees simultaneously Gore tells the Forest Service to enter into agreement, a certain number of them, with private industry to provide services. And I think they were to test out the water. And it’s just too smooth. It’s too slick.

Grant said some of the other environmental activists he had worked with believed that the budgets of public land management agencies were intentionally decreased in order to create a need for recreation user fees.

Many people on... my colleagues think that really the public lands are intentionally starved, the managing agencies are intentionally starved of money back in the ‘80’s because, this goes back into the Reagan years, because those people that had the sway of power in the country really wanted to run the parks and public lands as businesses. And there were business interests that wanted it that way. I would say that the full history’s not been written but I think that there’s probably some good arguments to be made that that actually was an intentional process.

Dennis also accused Congress of conspiring with the American Recreation Coalition to reduce public recreation budgets.

This proposal was made back in 1979 when the Democrats controlled Congress to the Resources Committee, chaired at that time I believe by George Miller or his predecessor, proposed by the American Recreation Coalition... And it was not approved. The Congressional hearing said we do not like this kind of a program. Now when the Republicans took over Congress in January, 1995, they were looking for all kinds of ways to cut programs and cut the Federal budget and so on. And, of course, the Resources Committees in both the House and the Senate became chaired by Westerners who were pro-industry and they said, Well, if environmentalists want to walk around in the forest, let them pay for it. And they
kind of, you might say, bled the Forest Service’s recreation budget.

Jacob concluded that by decreasing agency budgets, Congress contrived a need for fees.

The agencies need funding. And Congress, I believe, systematically sort of been withholding funds and reducing those funds even though the economy has been strong. It could even been seen as a blink to the Fee Demo Program and forcing them to accept this. But if you’re, you know, you are a manager with the BLM or the Forest Service and you have no money available to do any of your projects and somebody comes along and says, Hey, if you just start charging a fee for some of your facilities, then you’ll be able to have that money. Then obviously they’re going to be left with little choice, whether they’d like the public charged or not.

Overall, the participants in this study criticized the political process of the RFDP for its lack of public involvement. As a rider, the legislation authorizing the RFDP was described as “sliding through” or “just passed through.” Participants objected to the closed nature of the decision-making process, and questioned the heavy involvement of the recreation industry. In some cases, participants made it clear that they were not objecting to financially supporting public lands. Rather, their objection was to the overall political process and how this program had been initiated. As Tom said,

But what’s disconcerting to me is the politics behind the whole thing, not necessarily the fee. I have no objection to paying $30 a year to help support the national forests. I object to the way they’re implementing it and the fact that they’re calling it the Adventure Pass. Well, the only adventure now is trying to figure out where to buy one of those passes, thanks to our efforts. So it sticks in everybody’s craw the way that they’ve tried to initiate this program for the benefit of the recreational corporations and not for the benefit of the American public.

Summary of Opposition to the Political Process

What are the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees?

This examination of the opposition to the political process illustrates that there are a number of overlapping concerns with how new recreation user fees came about. Some participants disagreed with the RFDP, not so much because of the actual fee, but because
of perceived involvement of the recreation industry and the exclusion of the general public in the development of the RFDP. Some participants also questioned the legitimacy of the RFDP since they believed that agency budgets were intentionally reduced in order to create the need for fee revenues.

Program Administration Opposition

The third fundamental reason for opposition to recreation user fees, opposition to the program administration, are based on concerns relating to some of the basic functions of the RFDP — implementation and management, and evaluation.

Implementation and Management

One dimension of the active fee opposers’ criticisms of the administration of the RFDP is focused on the implementation and management of this new fee system. I will start by presenting participant comments that focus on concerns related to agency mismanagement of fee revenue. Following that, I will present a series of participant narratives reflecting the perception that public land management decisions will be inappropriately influenced by RFDP because the legislation allows the managing agencies to keep fee revenues.

Mismanagement of fee revenues

The comments in this section reflect the perception that fee revenues have not been used in the way that they were supposed to be used. Some interviewees commented on the mismanagement of fee revenue according to the RFDP legislation. Others accuse the agencies of not using the fee revenue for what they claimed they would. Instead of applying the new funds to deferred maintenance projects, the perception was that the
money was being spent on implementation and enforcement of the RFDP. For example, in his interpretation of the legislation, Dennis said,

[T]he money is supposed to be spent on kind of like deferred maintenance...It's not supposed to be spent on new capital investment and we didn't think it was supposed to be spent on salaries. But what they've done in Southern California is they've hired what they call Forest protection Officers, FPOs, and I don't know what they're paid but they've hired these people and they have two or three job functions. One of them is to help in some of the rehab work but also help in terms of maintenance, like make sure the picnic areas are clean and things like that. And another area is to kind of enforce the program by giving what they call here, in Southern California, a notice of non-compliance.

Jared submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Forest Service to determine where fee revenue was being spent. When he asked the Forest Service where the money was going he was told, "that 85 percent of the funds gathered from the fee program go towards improvements of the forest." However, his FOIA request revealed otherwise.

They have a way of terming things to make it look like it goes toward the forest, but we have the FOIA report that show where all the money goes toward enforcement, or at least 71% goes toward contractors, implementation of program, administration, all that stuff.

Tom failed to see any benefits of a fee system when the money was not being used to directly benefit the users of public lands.

[T]hey're saying all these fees are going to do this thing and that thing and really all we see up there is more new rangers on the payroll up there and what they're doing is enforcing the fee demo program and they're all driving new vehicles. There's no more trail maintenance than there ever was before, they haven't improved any of the campgrounds, the roads are just as bad as they've always been, so where the hell is all this money going?

Jack recognized that the Forest Service was generating sufficient funds in the Mount Baker/Snoqualmie area to address a variety of deferred maintenance projects. However, in his perception, volunteer groups, not the Forest Service, were maintaining the trails.
Instead, the Forest Service was using the RFDP money to purchase vehicles for employees to enforce the RFDP.

I see trail maintenance that's done primarily by non-paid volunteers, particularly the Washington Trails Association. I see Adopt-A-Trail signs up like at Snow Lake. It's a formalized Adopt-A-Trail by Cascade Designs, an outdoor company, and the WTA. Yet the Forest Service is taking in hundreds of thousands of dollars on Snoqualmie Pass and trail work's not being done, bridges aren't being replaced, but I'm seeing luxurious brand new sport utility vehicles and crew cab Dodge power ram pickup trucks being driven by rangers that are paid by the hour to come up and ticket and harass citizens.

On the Forest Service district near his home, Brian also failed to see an adequate return (to the users) on the investment of fees.

Most of the money is being spent for administrative costs, signage, even though the Forest Service has claimed in some of their literature of citing all the things the money has gone for, we have checked up on some of these things and they are not true. And the improvements are at a no greater rate than they were before. Honestly, right now off the top of my head I can only think of three improvements in the National Forest in here I have seen. In one location in Icehouse Canyon near Mount Baldy they have put up a paved parking lot. They have also put in a pit toilet there. The only other place I have seen any other improvements is some bear-proof trash containers on the north side of the mountains. That is the only two places I've seen improvements. And that does not account for all the total of monies that have been collected for the last two years.

How are fee revenues being used? It is the perception of many of those I interviewed that fee dollars were not being used to address maintenance backlogs as is dictated in the legislation of the RFDP. Rather, many of the participants found fault with the RFDP because they believed the money was being applied to the implementation and enforcement of the program.

*Potential to Skew Management.*

As mentioned in Chapter One, the legislation authorizing the RFDP allows the participating agencies to retain all of the demonstration project revenues and to retain at least
80 percent of the revenues at the sites where they are collected. Some of those interviewed expressed a belief that fee revenues would lead to “abusive management decisions.” While Darrell did not take a firm position of user fees in general he was strongly opposed to a program that allowed the managing agency to keep fee revenue. Based on his experience as a Forest Service employee, he believed that allowing the local units to keep the funds they collected would corrupt management decisions.

I don’t have any kind of any philosophical objection to user fees... But I’m very, very much against the fee demo programs that allow the unit that collects the money to keep it... I’ve been there and done that. I know that profit motive begins to cloud decision making, that timber is sold in order to keep the staff on board, not because selling that timber or logging that area is in the best long term public interest. I’ve done it myself with recreation fees. At the time I was District Ranger in Colorado, we could keep 70% of our recreation fees. It’s a long story, but I was able to build a campground with non-appropriated funds and I did it solely for the reason I could keep the fees and finance some people that I couldn’t otherwise. That’s the wrong way to make a decision on public policy. The profit motive should never enter into policy on public lands. It’s inevitable, absolutely inevitable if you allow the units to keep the funds they collect.

Randy preferred a system of checks and balances when the money was returned to the general treasury for re-appropriation.

So turning the purse springs over to any of us, myself included, I’m just as human as the rest of them, is not necessarily the greatest idea in the world. At least with congressional control with all its faults, there’s checks and balances on how money is appropriated and where it’s spent.

Barbara saw the potential for fees to encourage activities that were detrimental to the natural integrity of public lands.

I think that most likely when you have, when you create a financial or economic incentive for an activity on public lands, 9 times out of 10 it turns into a perverse incentive because the only way to get the money you need to upkeep the lands is to do that activity, whatever that activity that is, and way too often that results in the degradation of the land. Even if you end up scaling your fees so that you have the most impacted users pay the most money, that’s an even more perverse incentive than the other way around, because then it behooves the Forest Service to promote the most high intensity use because that’s how they’ll get the most
money. And so it turns recreation into as much of an extractive resource as timber or as logging, mining or grazing.

Barney was adamantly opposed to allowing agencies to keep the money generated from fees because in his experience, fees skewed management towards special interest groups. He spoke from his experience as Forest Service employee in describing the problems associated with retaining timber profits.

...it doesn't take very long 'til a nice good sharp district ranger finds out that more, the more fees I collect, the more people I can put on, you know, I can spend it, it helps my budget, and what good red blooded district ranger wouldn't want to do, wouldn't want to have more money, put on more staff, and makes his job more important, uh, and it tends to skew his management decisions toward activities that generate fees. And that's, uh, his management decisions should not be based on how much money he's gonna get from it. I think that is what led the forest service into the trouble over the timber... And so, there was tendency to up the cut. More timber you could sell, more money you had to spend, and more money you had to spend, the more timber you could sell. And so, uh, we did, basically the FS sold more timber than they should have sold. So, and I think that same thing will happen in the recreation business.

Barney also used the Fish and Game Departments to describe his perception that management became focused on that which brought in money when local units had control of fee receipts.

I think, uh, another example of what is bad about that is in our Fish and Game Departments. There is a prime example. They get their appropriations based on how many elk tags they sell. And, uh, I think when you look at their management program, you got fish and wildlife, but where do they spend most of their money? On elk and deer and bear and things you can shoot. And, the same thing with fish. You know, they are spending their money on the fish that you can catch. There are thousands of species of wildlife out there that maybe they’re not paying enough attention to.

Similarly, Mitch and Jacob, expressed concern about the future of areas in need of protection and financial support, that did not generate sufficient fee dollars. Mitch said,
There's also a big question of the... what will happen there will be the rich forest and the poor forest. For example, Desolation Wilderness, they're going to get tons of fees, okay? It's close to the San Francisco area, it's right in Lake Tahoe Basin almost and they're going to collect tons of fees. Then you get a forest out in some remote area, they're going to get almost nothing. So, that's a little disconcerting. It doesn't seem like our lands will really be protected on a need basis.

Jacob echoed Mitch's concern.

I think the money is being spread on to other areas. Whether that's appropriate or not, I'm not really sure. I think, you know, I don't think we can only focus resources on areas that get a certain amount of use. But then there's other areas that don't get used but need some attention and we can't just neglect those because they don't get as high of a use.

Interviewees made numerous comments about their observations and expectations of the mismanagement of fee revenues. Some participants focused their comments on the perceived problems of a fee program that allowed the managing agencies, especially local units, to keep the fee revenues.

Evaluation

As mentioned in Chapter One, by authorizing the RFDP as a demonstration project, Congress implied that its intent was to formally evaluate the program before making it permanent legislation. The participants in this study commented on what they saw as faulty measures of evaluation that in turn produced inaccurate results of support for the RFDP. Some of the interviewees stated that paying the fee in a demonstration program should be optional. Barbara said,

But I think that there have to be unbiased analyses. A lot of people don't understand that it's only a demonstration and they don't necessarily have to pay. So it's pretty easy to show that the fee demonstration works if all this revenue is being collected and people don't even realize that it's a demonstration and that it might be worth their while to not pay.
By not making the fees optional, Tom believed the public had been stripped of the right to make opinions known about the demonstration program. In his interpretation, the only way someone can currently make clear their lack of support is by not visiting the area.

Well, if it’s a demo program and they’re judging the success of the demo program on compliance, as they like to publicize, what option do they give you to vote against the program? They don’t. So people either have the choice of staying out of the forest or buying the pass and voting for the program. So, faced with that a lot of people simply won’t go into the forest.

Mitch disagreed with mandatory fees at demonstration sites, particularly when visitation numbers and associated fee payments were used as a measure of endorsement for the RFDP. He said,

I mean, I think that’s what’s really wrong. They are using statistics saying, Well, there hasn’t been a drop in the use of our forests because of this, okay, or you know not a big drop. And the answer is because people want to go there. Okay? And the only way you’re allowing them to go is to pay the fee. You can’t use that as a measure of the acceptance by the public. So I believe that’s what’s really wrong with this, it’s not a demonstration of whether I’m willing, in favor of this program.

Louis was upset by his belief that the Forest Service was misrepresenting the program as a voluntary test program, while imposing severe consequences upon those refusing to pay the fee.

So whoever buys a permit, they consider supporting the program and those who don’t they consider not supporting. But then they threaten the people that don’t with $5,000 fine and six months in jail like they do with us. So how can they consider that a voluntary test pilot program which is what they say it is. They can’t have it both ways, you know.

Several participants remarked that they thought the “opposition” to fees and the RFDP was not being recognized and in some cases was being purposefully ignored. For example, Sarah said,
The Forest Service continues to believe that if you pay the fee that you are supporting it, and refuses to acknowledge that there is a huge section of the population that is opposed to it, and that’s their problem. They just are not acknowledging it. I know for a fact that many, many letters have been written and many cards have been sent in.

Aaron believed that agency reports on the RFDP were biased and failed to mention any of the opposition to the “test” fees.

When you see the Forest Service progress reports to congress, you see that it’s a whitewash job, they never mention any of the protests, they don’t mention that several congresswomen have introduced legislation to repeal the fees, it’s kind of as if that doesn’t happen. So when you see such a one sided report coming from a federal agency, you realize, okay, this is an agenda that’s being pushed at all costs, it’s not a demonstration to see if it works and then it could be dropped.

Barbara implied that the evaluation of the program had been biased simply by not including certain areas of the country in the demonstration.

I think Montana has this notorious anti-government attitude among a lot of it’s populous and I think that there’s a reason potentially that Montana has not been a big part of this experiment, and that’s probably because it would have failed here faster than anywhere else. And once it’s not a demonstration anymore, how does it fail? It just gets implemented. It’s a demonstration in X number of states. Once they approve it nationally, then all these people who might have fought it, especially where there are so many public lands (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, I’m not sure how much fee demo there is in those states) are they going to have any recourse to fight back? Probably not.

And while the Forest Service was claiming support for the RFDP, Aaron noted that a congresswoman from California announced that she had received more letters in regards to the RFDP than any other issue.

Local congresswoman Lois Capps from Santa Barbara, a liberal democrat, who’s had legislation in congress for the last couple of years to repeal the forest fee programs and she says she’s received more letters on that topic than any other federal issue since she’s been in office. That’s been very useful to us because the Forest Service claims in all their literature that people love the fees and acceptance is high, etc. so we’ve had to use congressional support like that to show that that’s not really the case, that people really don’t like it.
Summary of the Program Administration Opposition

What are the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees?

The common themes of the program administration opposition to recreation user fees represented in the interview narratives focused on the implementation, management and evaluation of the RFDP. These comments reflect an opposition to the RFDP legislation as it is currently written. There is the perception that by allowing local agency units to retain fee revenue, decisions will be based on profit motives, rather than what is in the best interests of the public and the land. Pragmatic arguments against fees were also based on the way the RFDP had been implemented and managed. From the perspective of many of the opposers, as fee demonstration projects have been implemented, fee revenues have been mismanaged. Many participants in this study also believed evaluation measures were inaccurate and had lead to erroneous claims of support for the RFDP.

EXPRESSIONS OF OPPOSITION

One of the purposes of this study was to discover how and why opposition to recreation user fees is being expressed. During the interviews, participants were asked about the actions they took in opposition to fees, and if they thought those actions had been successful. Participant narratives provided volumes of descriptions about their experiences opposing the RFDP: what they did, why they did it, what happened, and who else was involved. From the elaborations of the fee opposers in this study, I identified the primary actions taken, and the goals that drove those actions.

It is the general perception of those involved in this study that the RFDP was initiated and decisions about it had been made in a process closed to the public. Some of those actively opposed to fees feel they have been put in the position of reacting to or
fighting to stop the RFDP, instead of more productive efforts regarding public land management and funding. Jacob said,

Something I wanted to put some time into thinking about and I really haven’t. How could you in some way implement some modest fees such that you wouldn’t have the accompanying impacts that I’m afraid would happen. And, frankly, all my energy has been into stopping the program. I view my role as an activist to fight...the fight that says this is a completely wrong way to go and should not be done.

Because the public was not involved in the development of the program, efforts are focused on just stopping the program. Nearly three-quarters of the participants in this study indicated that their investment in this issue would be considered successful if “RFDP is repealed.” Ultimately, the purpose of these actions is to prevent the RFDP from becoming permanent fee policy, or at the very least a revision of the legislation. Publicity is the primary way in which the participants in this study have attempted to prevent the RFDP from becoming permanent or to revise the RFDP. There are two dimensions to this publicity. One, to create an awareness of the RFDP. The other is to make known opposition to the RFDP. There are five primary actions taken in opposition to fees: organizational development, outreach activities, acts of non-compliance, protests, and letter writing.

This section is organized by action type. For each action, I will present a series of participant excerpts describing the actions the participants in this study have taken in opposition to recreation user fees, and how those actions are meeting the objectives of the active fees opposers in this study.

Jared, felt so strongly about the need to publicize this issue that he spent $4500 of his own money to put a full page ad in the newspaper that informed people about the program and encouraged them to oppose it. When I asked Steve about the success of his
work against the RFDP, he said, "The only way any of it will make a difference is if the message gets out broadly." Getting the message out is what the actions described below have attempted to do.

Organizational Development

The following excerpts described efforts, in the words of the participants, to form new groups and connect existing groups in opposition to the RFDP. Jared was the founder of two groups that promoted opposition to the RFDP. Don also started a group in anticipation of the RFDP being implemented on local forests.

I have started an unregistered volunteer community group to work on it. We started that in January. And so we have...we’ve, you know, technically we have had just...you know, have our third newsletter in print. We’ve been very active in terms of letter writing and petitions, gathering signatures.

When Jim became aware of the RFDP, he was eager to become active in protesting the new fees. He made attempts to locate and join a local organization addressing this issue, but found none. He described the situation surrounding his efforts to form a group to address concerns surrounding the RFDP.

When the fees first started, I thought they were a terrible thing... I was aware that tons of people in New Hampshire really hated the fees. You see articles about it and stuff. So I started making calls around to find one of these organizations to join, a local organization. It turned out there weren’t any. I was just dumbfounded. Out west there are some extremely well organized...Free Our Forests, Wild Wilderness and others. In fact, now there are over 150 national groups fighting fee demo, including the Sierra Club. But anyway, to my amazement there were really no organized groups here in New Hampshire. So about four or five friends and I got together and formed this group. We have a website and so on and so we had some protests. We helped publicize certain things like we went to court to listen to a couple of fee demo cases, in fact, participated in a couple of our own which have been dropped.

Debra is a member of an existing group that has taken a position against fees. Her contributions to organizational development included connecting people across groups.
When she received information on fees, she distributed it within her organization, "[a]nd other organizations, if they don’t know about it, I make sure they know about it, that they’re informed and they can put an alert out to their people."

This organizational development has attempted to generate additional support for fee opposition. In some cases, new organizations were established to address this issue. In other situations, existing groups joined the cause of opposition to the RFDP. Other efforts have included connecting all groups opposed to the RFDP and encouraging new groups to take a position of opposition. As more groups were involved, more individual members of the general public became aware of the RFDP and the growing opposition to it.

**Outreach Activities**

Another way to generate additional support for fee opposition was through outreach activities. Participants in this study talked about their efforts to connect with people and distribute information about the RFDP. Jack has spent time handing out information to users at a Forest Service trailhead. He said what he was “seeking to do was to empower the citizens with as much information as I could get for them, never telling them what to do.” Sarah too has also, “passed out cards and fact sheets at trailheads.” Louis has participated in efforts to distribute information to people at local public recreation sites. When I asked him to describe the literature he passed out, he said,

It basically just tells people the issues that I’ve outlined here pretty much, what’s behind it all, why it’s unfair, that you don’t really have to support it. Most of the people don’t know that if they don’t pay the fee probably nothing’s going to happen. They’re so intimidated by the federal government, “If I don’t pay the fee, I’m in big trouble, I’m going to do it.” They don’t understand like we did that if you don’t pay it, the chances of you actually getting found guilty of anything are actually very, very small.

Aaron has updated people throughout the nation through a newsletter.
We sent out mailings to our supporters on the Keep Sespe Wild mailing list which has grown from about having 1,200-1,500 people on the mailing list who were originally interested in Sespe watershed issues to about 2,500 now because we’ve been adding people from other parts of the state and other parts of the nation who have been interested in getting a quarterly newsletter that deals with a campaign against forest fees.

Chad believed that if more information is circulated about the RFDP, the numbers in opposition to the program will grow.

Mostly what we try to do is just get information out because I think a lot of people have just…it’s just so easy just to accept what the Forest Service is telling you, these fees are necessary. And when they start to realize what’s behind the fees and how everything works, they really do sort…they’re very much opposed to them. I mean nine times out of ten, if not more, I mean very few people, once you present them with the facts and the background, still support these fees.

Jacob believed if the public had the information to compare the cost and impacts of recreation compared to those for grazing, they would oppose the RFDP.

It’s an issue I feel like if the information is out there to the public, the right decision will be made down the line. It’s somewhat of a complex issue but the bottom line is, you know, people realize that it makes no sense for them to have to pay for these uses when there’s a cow up there in the same wilderness they are for a fraction of the cost and doing far greater damage than using far more resources from the agency as well as the land.

The participants in this study have used face-to-face contact and information distribution, newsletters contact, mailed newsletters and email alerts to create awareness about the RFDP and the opposition to it.

**Acts of non-compliance**

Acts of non-compliance are the refusal to pay the required fee, and in some cases, the associated citation of non-compliance. Over one-third of the participants declared that they had purposefully not paid the fees associated with the RFDP. Jack was extremely upset the first time he received a notice of non-compliance. His strong feelings
about the spiritual benefits of free public access to public lands have influenced him to consistently refuse acceptance of all notices of non-compliance.

I grabbed that ticket, opened it and read it and here they are telling me I have to pay to park my vehicle on my land, on public land, I have to pay to hike and cry and talk to God and the wind. I said, “Hell, no. I won’t go along with this.” What I did, I don’t know…it must’ve been the Spirit, I guess, I flashed back to a point of reference when the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus by the issue of taxes. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God, that which is God’s.” What I did, I took out a business card, wrote on the business card, “I refuse to pay this ticket. Dear Mr. Dombeck, Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s.” I think I might have signed off, “Consider these words.” I did the exact same thing with at least half a dozen tickets in 1997. I continued doing that in 1998 and then in 1999. Suffice to say I’ve probably turned in around 12-15 tickets. What I started doing too was not just mailing the tickets in. I would return the tickets to the rangers at the Forest Service disinformation center, pardon me, information center, on Snoqualmie Pass. I would walk in and peacefully hand the ticket to the ranger at the desk and never had harsh words with the rangers in the office. But I have had harsh words with rangers in the field. But I made the clear decision…I told rangers in several arguing sessions in the Snow Lake parking lot, look folks, you’re not taking me seriously. I’m a man of peace, I am ready to die for my right to pray and hike without paying the federal government. I will never pay these tickets. And I exhort you to get the U.S. attorney to come and arrest me in my church, drag me away and lock me up for refusing to pay to pray. They back right down.

Steve does not pay the required fees, but has not yet been taken to court for his acts on non-compliance. If he does have to go to court, he said he sees it as an opportunity to generate publicity for the cause of opposition to the RFDP.

I’ve already made up my mind that if I go to court and if I defend myself even with the argument, and if I lose I will go to jail because the publicity of me going to jail, not ME going to jail, will do far more harm to the program than anything else I can do. Send me to jail because you can’t give me a bigger media boost.

Brian does not believe that the fees should be required under a demonstration program. He has chosen to prove his point by refusing to pay the fee and taking his citation to court.
Well, I could tell you, I made a nationwide contribution, a major contribution in one respect, and that is as far as I know, I am the first person that challenged the recreational fee demonstration in court and I refused to pay the recreational fee here in Southern California which is called the Adventure Pass and is being conducted as a recreational parking permit on the National Forest. So I was so outraged that I refused to pay the fee and I did receive a real citation.

Brian also described the reasons why the Magistrate dropped the citations he received.

The first reason was that since this is a pilot program and not permanent law it was a discretionary program because basically this is a pilot program determined the willingness of the public to comply. So how can Congress turn the willingness of the public to comply if we are forced to comply?... And the second reason she dismissed the citations against me because I was on the National Forest exercising my First Amendment rights as a protestor, and nobody has to buy a permit to exercise their First Amendment rights. That’s the second reason she dismissed the charges against me. And so also she notified the Forest Service to stop writing these citations here locally on our Southern California National Forest, or at least in the Angeles Forest. So since I have been to court we only know of one citation that has been written since about January 5^th^, 1999. As soon as the Forest Service got the word from Magistrate then they stopped writing citations. That took a few days. So now we also understand the success of this program is being determined by compliancy so that when people by the Adventure Pass they are basically voting for it to become permanent law. And when they do not buy it then they are voting against it.

Many of the participants in this study have demonstrated a willingness to take a risk on behalf of the opposition to the RFDP. For some, the act of non-compliance is a result of personal conscience, but for others it is a deliberate attempt to gain attention for the cause. Either way, non-compliance have the potential to generate media attention and further inform the public.

Protests

Acts of non-compliance can be considered an act of protest. However, the protests described in this section are actual demonstrations or rallies by a group of people. The protests most often mentioned were two national days of action both organized by “Steve” to generate media attention. Media recognition of the event is
important because it publicizes the objections to the RFDP and fees, which may in turn generate more support for the opposition. In reference to these protest days, Steve said,

It's not that I like to do them, but it's the way in which one has access to the media have to make news, can't buy news, and that's one of the realities. I work on almost no budget. I can't buy news, but I can make it.

The first day of action was on August 14, 1999. Thirty-one protests were held in nine states on that day. The second day of action occurred on June 10, 2000 with 35 protests in 16 states. Participants in this study spoke of participating in these protests. Don said, "the protests on June 10th, we were one of the largest in the nation." Chad said, "There was a nation-wide day of protest that we participated in here, in New Hampshire, probably the busiest trailhead in the White Mountains." Dennis also participated in "a couple days of action here in Southern California." Steve measures the success of these protests by the amount of media attention they generate. In his opinion the second protest was less successful, because there was less media attention. In reference to the June 10, 2000 day of action, Steve said, "And many of the protests were good protests and the media never showed and if the media never showed, what did you have?"

Group action also impacted the willingness of businesses to sell the passes or fees associated with the RFDP. Jared organized a series of forums in communities in southern California to educate the public about the RFDP within the first six months of its implementation. He said,

In each of those communities they had about maybe 6 or 7 private businesses that were selling the Adventure Pass to the public, like Mom & Pop stores and whatever. After each public forum, within days all the pass vendors dropped out of the program out of various reasons. Either they were afraid because people were really angry or they heard about what was going on and they did it because they felt it was the right thing to do.
Steve was also instrumental in organizing a series of protests designed to force REI to sever its connections with those in support of the RFDP. The reasons for doing this are best described in Steve's own words.

1998 we did a total of 11 protests on the REI's stores, to force REI to resign from the recreation round table... So we selected REI because when we got REI out, as I explained to Wally Smith, the president of REI, when I visited him at his request and expense. When they are gone I had a clear shot at ARC with no chance of the issue being confused with 'how can you say this because REI is a part of this and we all know that REI is good?' So there's no one good associated with recreation round table or ARC and that was what we did in '98. We basically focused on getting REI out.

The recreation round table, headed by the American Recreation Coalition (ARC), was generally perceived by participants in this study to be the impetus behind the creation of the RFDP. Study participants were upset by the recreation industry's perceived involvement in the decision-making process. Not only had recreation interests been allowed to participate, but participants also believed the general public had been denied access into the decision-making process. These protests were a strategy to gain media attention to further inform the public about the RFDP, the fees, and who had initiated and promoted the program.

**Letter writing**

In their efforts to stop the RFDP from becoming permanent, active fee opposers have also written letters to those perceived to have decision-making authority (i.e. Congress, the agencies and recreation interests). Debra talked about writing letters and encouraging others to do the same. She said, "Well, I've written letters to elected officials. I've also been real active in trying to get other people to write letters and trying to educate and inform people." As part of his work on a committee to address fees, Jacob said, "we've always been writing letters to legislators and the President and the Forest
Service and all that.” Jacob also targeted recreation interests in his effort to stop the RFDP.

And I actually wrote a letter to the CEO at Disney, Michael Eisner, expressing my concern about his company’s involvement with the Fee Demonstration Program and the fact that it seems to me he’s...their company and the American Recreation Coalition over to their major member have exerted a lot of influence in getting the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program going. I feel it’s unfair that they should have those means at their hands while as a citizen I ought to be able to have the same voice.

Aaron and the group he has been associated with have been instrumental in the organization of letter writing campaigns to Congress on this issue. He said,

So whenever there’s a chance to write to congress, we send out a postcard alert to those people asking them to write and we also send out alerts by cards and by e-mail to around 150 different organizations to pass on to their supporters. So where [Steve] has taken on the job of what he does so excellently of networking with people and keeping people in touch with developments, we have taken on the job of trying to keep the pressure on congress. That’s when the job is way too big for us as a small watershed organization of part time activists. But we’ve been doing okay so far.

From the perspective of the participants, the exclusionary nature of the initiation and development of the RFDP has forced a reactionary dynamic between the public and the decision-makers. To stop the RFDP, participants spoke of their efforts to contact the decision-makers on this issue. Because they felt they could not access the decision-making process as whole, active fee opposers have made attempts to influence the individual decision-makers. This has involved contacting Congress, the agencies and the recreation industry. Participants expressed frustration that they have been forced to spend their time and energy on stopping the RFDP. Gary described his efforts that have been focused on influencing the votes of Congressional representatives.

Even now efforts to try to force that debate are sort of focused entirely on Congress because of these, you know, riders that keep popping up every year. And so people are forced...they’re trying to convince their Congressman...
to change their vote but still they never had really provided the opportunity for a real public debate about whether or not we should be charging these things.

Don too described efforts focused on stopping the RFDP, as opposed to what he believes as more productive dialogues about public lands funding.

And, you know, when we first started the public can work with the Forest Service to help them get more money through Congress. That’s an option. Instead of spending all of our time contacting our Congressional Representatives saying shoot down Fee Demo, you know, we could be contacting them and saying please, you know, restore $26 million to public land recreation. We don’t have that option. We’ve been robbed of that option by the Fee Demo, by the Forest Service’s insistence that it’s popular, by their insistence that it’s the way that they’re going to make money for the future. And so now instead...now we have to go out, you know, to trailheads and convince people to practice their First Amendment rights and not buy passes. That’s a stupid thing to have to do...You know. It’s not what I go out into the woods to do. I don’t want to be out there harassing people.

Summary of Expressions of Opposition

How is this opposition being expressed, and what are the objectives of the actions taken?

Individual correspondence, letter writing campaigns, and contact with congressional representatives are an attempt to make RFDP opposition known to those directly involved in the decision-making process. However, in general the majority of the actions described above only indirectly affect the decision-makers. At the same time, all the actions have attempted create public awareness about the RFDP and the opposition to it.

Success for Jacob would be if the public was both informed about the RFDP and integrated into the decision-making process. The way to make this happen in his view is publicity.

But, you know, the main thing is I just want to raise public awareness. I don’t claim to be in the right necessarily on this issue but I feel the public needs to be educated about what the real fundamental issues are and be allowed to make a decision on it. And I don’t think it should be made in a board room at Disney World at an American Recreation Coalition meeting or in a meeting at one of
their annual get-togethers where they invite the higher-ups of the BLM and the
Forest Service to come and talk to them but they don't include any environmental
interest, to discuss the Fee Demo Programs. So, the success of what I'm trying
to do can just be measured by how informed people are about it. If people, you
know, still decide that they'd rather pay a $2 fee and be ensured of better facilities
and services and not be concerned about other sorts of impacts, then I think that's
fine too. But I'd like them to make that choice consciously.
CHAPTER FIVE – FINDINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter includes a synthesis of the results of this study and a discussion of how my results correspond to the findings in the literature on recreation user fees. Some aspects of the results of this study are quite similar to those from previous studies. In other cases, this study has produced new findings.

Since the primary objective of this study was to examine why and in what context active fee opposers object to fees for use on public lands, the following questions guided this project:

• What are the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees?
• What is the context of the opposition, and how is the opposition being framed?
• How is this opposition being expressed, and what are the objectives of the actions taken?

The discussion is organized around answers to these questions which include, the foundations of opposition, context of opposition and expressions of opposition.

RESULTS SYNTHESIS

In brief, the results produced a conceptual framework that explains the fundamental reasons for opposing recreation user fees, further clarifying the context of this opposition, and characterizing the expressions of opposition and their desired results.

The fundamental reasons for opposition are broadly defined as ideological opposition, opposition to the political process, and program administration opposition. Two main themes defined the ideological opposition: equity concerns and the fear of privatization. Equity concerns are based on questions of fairness and justice. Participants described fees as discriminatory and exclusionary and a contradiction to the notion of a public good. Fees were perceived as denying the public their fundamental
right to access public land and were considered a double tax and a double standard in light of the subsidies that commercial extractive activities receive. Participants did not so much oppose individual fees but rather reflected an overall concern with the privatization and commodification of public lands. Study participants perceived that management of public land would increase fees, decrease appropriations to public lands, over-develop public lands, and destroy natural integrity. Relationships would also change between nature and visitors, outdoor experiences and public land management agencies as a result of fee programs.

Opposition to the political process was largely based on concerns with the perceived exclusionary and secretive nature of the initiation, development, and implementation of the RFDP. Participants objected to the involvement of the recreation industry, particularly when coupled with the perceived overall exclusion of the general public in the development of the RFDP.

The common themes of the program administration opposition focused on the implementation, management, and evaluation of the RFDP. Participants described what they believed to be a mismanagement of fee revenue by the agencies. They perceived that by allowing local units to retain fee revenue, management decisions were based on profit motives rather than on the public interest. Participants also objected to the methods by which the RFDP has been evaluated because reports do not mention any opposition to fees.

Participant narratives revealed that the context of fee opposition varies according to the agency administering the fees and the activity for which the fee is charged. The main opposition to recreational user fees and the RFDP applied to Forest Service lands.
In general, participants indicated that they accepted fees on the National Park Service lands. Participants rarely explicitly commented on their feelings about fees or the RFDP on Bureau of Land Management or Fish and Wildlife Service managed lands. Some participant narratives also reflected a willingness to accept recreation user fees for highly developed areas as long as those fees are nominal.

I tried to distinguish between opposition to recreation user fees in general and opposition particular to the RFDP. Ideological opposition appeared related to fees in general. Opposition to the political process and program administration were more directed at the RFDP. What was evident was that the RFDP and its new and increasing fees has triggered a reaction to fees in general.

Another purpose of this study was to examine how fee opposition is being expressed, and what the objectives are for the actions being taken. The participants in this study indicated that the purpose of the actions was ultimately to prevent the RFDP from becoming permanent fee policy and to force a revision of the current legislation. Their primary actions were publicity attempts to create a general awareness of the RFDP and/or make known the opposition to the RFDP. The five primary actions taken in opposition to the RFDP were organizational development, outreach activities, acts of non-compliance, protests, and letter writing.

**FOUNDATIONS OF OPPOSITION**

Opposition to recreation user fees is a relatively unexplored perspective. Within the existing recreation user fee literature, there are no studies that specifically addressed active fee opposition. While the perspective of the opposition has not been addressed directly, concerns about recreation user fees are not completely absent in the literature.
In the following three sections, I will demonstrate what I have learned from my results in relation to what information already exists in the literature. In addition to noting commonalities, I will comment on where this study has made a contribution to the understanding of attitudes towards recreation user fees. An important product of this study was the development of a conceptual framework organizing the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees from the perspective of those actively opposed to fees.

**Ideological Opposition**

Within the existing research there are two studies that noted the range of public sentiment towards recreation user fees. Bengston and Fan (2000) completed an analysis of public attitudes towards the RFDP on the National Forests as expressed in news media stories. In an analysis of the implementation of the RFDP, Martin (1999) identified a list of 20 public concerns of recreation user fees.

Bengston and Fan analyzed both sides of the fee debate in their analysis of public attitudes towards the RFDP on the National Forests. In many ways, ideological opposition in my study is similar to Bengston and Fan’s interpretation of the beliefs supporting an unfavorable attitude towards fees. In both cases, the ideological opposition that I identified and the concerns revealed by Bengston and Fan address issues of rights, fairness, inequities, privatization and changing relationships. The difference is that Bengston and Fan arrived at their conclusions by analyzing a database of media news stories, as they said, “to quickly and efficiently take the pulse of the public” (p. 2) on this issue rather than studying participants in the debate directly.
Although they acknowledge the attitudes of those in opposition to recreation user fees, they too quickly dismiss that opposition. In their analysis, Bengston and Fan identified an increasing trend in unfavorable attitudes toward recreation user fees. However, they credit this to just two geographic regions: four southern California Forests and national forests of Washington and Oregon. They did not note any change in unfavorable attitudes over time in the rest of the nation. California, Washington and Oregon are three of the states where the Forest Service has heavily implemented the RFDP. Therefore, it is logical that there would be more media news stories in these areas. Since the RFDP is a demonstration program requiring evaluation before it becomes permanent, the identified increasing trend in unfavorable attitudes toward recreation user fees should not have been dismissed but rather further examined.

Bengston and Fan also stated that “expressions of favorable beliefs about the RFDP outweighed expressions of unfavorable beliefs by a factor of about 2 to 1” (p. 3). They mentioned that the exception to this was during the third quarter of 1999, when there were a number of organized protests toward the RFDP throughout the country. Again, the opposition is ignored in their conclusions. It appears that the protests in the third quarter of 1999 generated enough media attention to influence media news stories towards reporting unfavorable views on recreation user fees. Although Bengston and Fan’s was a Forest Service project and referenced in the Report to Congress for fiscal year 1999, no mention of these protests was given in the report.

In his analysis of the RFDP, Martin (1999) examined the relationship between the principles guiding fee programs, the objectives of fee programs, and public sentiment towards fees. Martin identified public sentiment regarding recreation user fees from
The participants in my study frequently commented that they were worried that fee programs and the associated privatization of public lands, would lead to a destruction of the natural environment. This concern was only implicitly addressed in Martin's study. In some of the public concerns he identified, fees were associated with reduced feelings of stewardship (by visitors), possible increased levels of development, and a shift in management decisions as they potentially become overly influenced by revenue considerations.

The similarities between my study, Bengston and Fan (2000), and Martin (1999) are important as they demonstrate a link between the concerns of the general public and the ideological opposition of the active fees opposers. To facilitate further comparison to existing research, I have examined the dimensions of the ideological opposition to
recreation user fees. The discussion below is organized in terms equity concerns and the fear of privatization.

**Equity concerns**

*Fundamental right and double taxation*

The active fee opposers in my study declared that fees challenge the fundamental American right to access public lands and are a form of double-taxation. Harris and Driver’s (1987) discussion paper also presented these arguments on behalf of the position of “free access.” As mentioned above, these arguments were also identified in the studies by Bengston and Fan, and Martin. Additionally, focus groups were conducted in Southern California to assess community perception of the RFDP. The majority of the participants were opposed to the RFDP as proposed, and some of this disapproval was based on rights to public lands and double-taxation (Gable, Burkhardt & Winter, 1997a).

*Common good*

Active fee opposers expressed the belief that access to public lands is a benefit not only to the individual user but also to society in general. This benefit was described as a “merit good” by Harris and Driver (1987) in their presentation of the arguments for “free access.” Additionally, Cockrell and Wellman (1985) opposed fees because they contradict the notion of a common good.

*Low-income*

As demonstrated in the interview narratives of the active fee opposers, there is concern that fees will discriminate against low-income individuals and families. This sentiment is evident throughout the existing fee literature, in discussion papers (Crandall & Driver, 1984; Fargo & Nakata, 1984; Harris & Driver, 1987; More, 1999), and
reflective of public concern (Bengston & Fan, 2000; Martin, 1999). Survey data also confirm that recreation user fees do have a greater impact on low-income visitors (More & Stevens 2000; Reiling, Cheng & Trott, 1992).

Fear of Privatization of Public Lands

Over-development

Participants in my study identified “over-development of public lands” as a negative consequence of the RFDP. This was also reflected as a concern of the general public (Martin, 1999).

Decreased appropriations

Some of the participants in my study expressed concern that rather than supplementing public land budgets, fee revenue will eventually replace Congressional appropriations to public lands. This has also been identified as a concern of both the public and the agency managers (Lundgren & Lime, 1987; Martin, 1999).

Changing relationships with public land

The active fee opposers in my study also characterized a concern for how and what relationships might change as a result of the RFDP and the associated privatization of public lands. They described potential changes in, connections between people and public lands, the nature of the outdoor experience, and visitor interactions with the agency personnel at those areas. Similarly, these concerns are identified and discussed in some of the existing literature (Bengston & Fan, 2000; Christensen, Borrie & Williams, 1998; Martin, 1999).

By confirming what I learned from my study, and comparing my findings to those in the knowledge of existing literature, I could connect the ideological concerns of the
active fee opposers in my study to the concerns of recreation users, the public and agency managers identified in the fee literature. The actions of the active fee opposers may distinguish them from the general public, but some of the fundamental reasons for opposition to recreation user fees is very much the same for active fee opposers, resource-based public recreation users, and the general public.

**Opposition to the Political Process**

This examination of the opposition to the political process characterizes overlapping concerns with how these new fees came about. For some participants in my study, their opposition was not so much to the actual fee but to the perceived recreation industrial domination of the process and the exclusion of the general public in the development of the RFDP. Some of the active opposers also questioned the legitimacy of the RFDP since they believe that agency budgets were intentionally reduced in order to create the need for fee revenues.

This opposition to the political process, as described by the active fee opposers in my study, is essentially absent in the existing fee literature. However, in this opposition to the political process underlies a lack of trust in the government and agencies to facilitate a fair decision-making process. Trust in, and perceptions of the agency administering the fee program have been identified as factors influencing visitor reactions to fees (Gable et al., 1997a; Watson & Vogt, 1998; Winter, et al., 1999).

**Program Administration Opposition**

The lack of trust is also a component of the opposition to the administration of the program made by the active fee opposers in my study. The common themes of the program administration opposition against recreation user fees in my study focused on
the implementation, management and evaluation of the RFDP. The active fee opposers complained that fee revenues have been mismanaged by the administering agencies. The concerns that fee revenues will not be managed efficiently has also been reflected in the existing research (Gable et al, 1997a; Martin, 1999).

Some of the active fee opposers in my study expressed the opinion that by allowing local units to retain fee revenue, decisions based on profit motives rather than what is in the best interest of the public and the land will be encouraged. The perception that fees may inappropriately influence management was also identified by Martin (1999). In contrast, most of the existing fee research on this topic demonstrates a visitor preference for retaining fee revenues at the site where they are collected (Fedler & Miles, 1989; Leuschner, Cook, Roggenbuck & Oderwald, 1987; Lundgren & Lime, 1997; McCarville, Reiling & White, 1996). This conflicting data indicate a difference in the willingness to trust the agencies to use fee revenue in the best interest of the public and the land.

Many of the participants in my study argued that the RFDP has not received an unbiased evaluation. In their perception, the opposition to the RFDP been ignored and the agencies have inappropriately used compliance rates as a measure of support for the RFDP. While the issue of trust is again implicit in these comments on faulty evaluation measures of the RFDP, they are essentially new to the fee literature.

In summary, two previous studies have identified the public concern that fee revenue might be mismanaged by the agencies. However, the underlying issue of trust, and the resulting opposition to the political process and the administration of the program in my study are for the most part, not mentioned in existing fee research.
CONTEXT OF THE OPPOSITION

Study participants varied in describing their opposition to the agency administering the fees and the activity for which the fee is being charged. Most of their opposition to recreational user fees and the RFDP is to application of fees on Forest Service lands. For the most part, participants seemed willing to accept fees on National Park Service lands. Similarly, evaluations of the RFDP indicate a difference in support levels for recreation user fees between the Forest Service and the National Park Service (Bensgston & Fan, 2000; Lundgren & Lime, 1997; Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: Progress Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1998, 1999).

Some participants have demonstrated a willingness to accept recreation user fees for highly developed fees as long as those fees are nominal. At the same time, participants in my study were almost universally against charging fees for “simple access” or “low impact” activities, such as hiking or walking, or appreciating the natural surroundings. The results are consistent with previous findings that have indicated a willingness to pay fees for highly developed facilities such as boat ramps and campgrounds (Bowker, Cordell & Johnson, 1999; Christensen et al., 1993; Fedler & Miles, 1989; Recreational Fee Demonstration Program: Progress Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1999, 2000). Additionally, Bowker, et al. (1999) found that fees are less acceptable for services such as trails, picnic areas and historic sites.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN RECREATIONS USER FEES AND THE RFDP

The distinction between opposition to fees in general, the RFDP or some larger issue is often only implicit in participant narratives. Therefore, to analyze this distinction required additional interpretation of the data. In the case of opposition to the political
process, the resistance of the participants in this study is aimed specifically at the RFDP and its initiation. Participants expressed anger over the involvement of the recreation industry and the exclusion of the general public in the development of the RFDP. Similarly, the section on program administration opposition clearly depicts opposition based on the particular legislation and implementation of the RFDP.

The ideological opposition described in the beginning of this chapter is more loosely associated with the RFDP than opposition to the political process and the administration of the program. Participant concerns with the privatization of public lands and the fears or perceived implications are in response to, but extend beyond the RFDP. The larger concern for participants is the potential privatization of public lands. The RFDP is a current fee program that represents that potential privatization. However, another fee program might also be perceived as part of the privatization of public lands. As equity concerns are based on rights and issues of fairness, the opposition to fees appears to be directed at fees in general. For example, regardless of the particular fee program, someone who believes that fees are double taxation or negatively impact those with lower incomes will likely oppose the fee. At the same time, the immediate opposition is focused on the RFDP as the current vehicle for fees. As Barbara said, "I think that the recreation fee demonstration program has triggered or acted as a catalyst to look at fees as a whole." So, while there is salient opposition to the RFDP, one should not make the assumption that another fee program would entirely resolve concerns of equity or privatization as a perceived implication of fee systems.
EXPRESSONS OF OPPOSITION

As stated by the participants in my study, the ultimate goal of their actions is to prevent the RFDP from becoming permanent fee policy, or at least to force a revision of the current legislation. In order to accomplish this, the primary actions that they have taken have attempted to publicize general information about the RFDP and/or to publicize the opposition to the RFDP. The five primary actions taken in opposition to the RFDP were organizational development, outreach activities, acts of non-compliance, protests, and letter writing.

Collective behavior by the participants is apparent in the descriptions of the nationwide protest days. The sharing of information by the individual and groups opposed to fees has been facilitated by the Internet. Participants have also made references to the sharing of responsibility and complimentary efforts between individuals and groups in opposition to recreation user fees.

The participants in my study did not believe that the public was adequately involved in the development of this new fee program. Furthermore, they were suspicious of why the recreation industry initiated the RFDP and perceived that involvement to have potentially dire consequences for public lands. Therefore their actions are focused on generating additional support for fee opposition, including attempting to influence the decision-makers, and Congress in particular. The actions taken by the active fee opposers are in reaction to the perceived exclusionary and secretive nature of the political process.
SUMMARY

This study is the first study to examine those actively opposed to recreation user fees. From that perspective, the findings of this study are original. However, there are some similar patterns in my results and the existing fee literature. The ideological opposition expressed by participants in my study builds on existing knowledge of concerns with recreation user fees. The perspective of the active fees opposers, namely their opposition to the political process and program administration opposition is new to the literature. In the next chapter, I will offer what I believe to be the implications of these findings.
CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I will suggest what I believe are some of the implications for recreation user fee research and policy, from what I learned from my study and its comparison to the existing literature.

SUGGESTED FUTURE RESEARCH

My study was the first in what I hope is a number of studies that will directly examine the opposition to recreation user fees. My results reflect the perspective of 29 active fee opposers. In their narratives, they described the collective behavior of nationwide protest days and a sharing of information facilitated by the Internet. Some participants also made references to the sharing of responsibility and complimentary efforts between individuals and groups in opposition to recreation user fees. This potentially “collective” commitment to fee opposition deserves further examination as opposition is continuing to grow and may likely influence permanent fee policy. Additionally, the recreation user fee issue has not yet been explored from a sociological perspective, and it may be worthwhile to examine fee opposition from the perspective of social movement strategies. By doing so, additional insight might be gained into the impacts of this growing opposition on future fee policy.

Although my results are drawn from the perspective of 29 active fee opposers, I found an overlap of ideological concerns in my study and the existing literature that has examined recreation users and the public. Research to date has not focused on fee opposers, although as demonstrated in agency evaluations and other research on the RFDP, there is a portion of the population that is opposed to recreation user fees. I would like to see some of the dimensions of the ideological opposition operationalized into
more generalized studies to provide greater understanding of the opposition to recreation user fees. By authorizing a demonstration program, Congress has implied that its intent is to formally evaluate the program before making it permanent legislation. By more thoroughly understanding the concerns and fears people have about recreation use fees, Congress and the agencies may be able to develop more acceptable fee programs.

Historically, public land recreation has been considered worthy of government subsidies. Fee programs represent a major shift in how public lands are managed, from subsidized to more self-supporting programs. In this and other studies, concern has been raised about the potential impact of fee programs (and associated privatization) in changing the publics' perception of themselves from owner to customer of public lands. And while this has been repeatedly expressed as a concern, little research has explored this issue. I would offer the following as future research questions: Do fee programs shift the publics' perceptions of themselves as owner to customer of public lands? If so, how does such a shift in perception alter users' expectations? Is there a sense of entitlement to certain services when one is a paying customer? One possibility would be to investigate the association between fee programs and the public's requests or demands for particular services over time. Without a sense of public ownership, there is the concern that support for public lands will diminish. Will fees (act of being a customer) decrease attitudes and behaviors of stewardship of these areas? What will these changing relationships do to the active constituency that speaks on behalf of our public lands? In addition to examining visitor responses to these questions, additional research should be conducted to measure actual behavior.
Much of the existing literature has examined methods for improving program acceptability and anticipating visitor reactions to fees. As mentioned, some of those strategies include justifying the need for fees and retaining fee revenue locally. However, these factors will have little impact on acceptance if there is a lack of trust in the administering agency to appropriately manage that fee revenue. Is trust an indicator of support for fee programs? Recent research indicates that it is. This study also demonstrated that trust is a component of participants’ opposition to the political process and to program administration. In their study, Winter, et al. (1999) quantified trust in terms of perceived shared values, direction, goals, views, actions and thoughts. However, their study was conducted in one area. I would like to see trust similarly operationalized in studies elsewhere. Trust as a predictor of acceptability is worthy of further research as is has proven itself as a factor in public reaction to public land management actions. A lack of public acceptance and trust may potentially lead to noncompliance and decreased public support for parks and forests. I agree with More and Stevens statement that, “[t]he obvious long-term solution is to establish an active constituency that will speak on behalf of public funding for parks and recreation programs” (2000, p.353).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Examining trust as an indicator of support has positive implications extending beyond just fee programs. Current survey data and polls indicate a significant decline in citizen trust in the American political system, agency scientists and professionals, and confidence ratings in industry (Barber, 1983; Cortner & Moote, 1999; Fukuyama, 1995; Govier, 1997). The participants in my study expressed a lack of trust in the recreation user fee policy decisions made behind closed doors by Congress, the agencies and the
recreation industry. I would offer that opposition to the fee program might have been minimized if the public had been more actively involved in the decision-making process. The government and agencies should reflect the interests of the public they are serving and involve the public in decision-making processes. Since the RFDP is not yet permanent, the agencies still have the opportunity to incorporate public sentiments in future fee policy. Reaching out to those affected by the RFDP will require more than on-site surveys and comment cards. There is evidence that fees displace some visitors to other non-fee sites (McCarville, 1996; Schneider et al., 1999). Therefore, to reach all those affected by fee programs, similar displacement studies need to be conducted in other parts of the country.

Such displacement studies should also be utilized to assess the discriminatory impact of recreation user on certain socioeconomic and ethnic groups. This is not a new issue, but my results support it as an ongoing concern and existing research indicates that fees do discriminate against low-income citizens. In a Progress Report to Congress (2000), the four agencies involved in the RFDP addressed the impacts to "non-traditional user groups." The report stated that each of the agencies is implementing at least one action to mitigate this impact. Some of those actions include: free days, donations to under-privileged youth, volunteer recognition with fee waivers, and keeping some places or activities free. The recognition of a potential problem is important, but the actions listed are not enough to mitigate the impact, particularly if only one is taken by each agency. These agencies exist to serve the public interest. Therefore, more research, including displacement studies, needs to be done by the agencies to insure that people are not being discriminated against. To adequately address this issue the agencies need to
conduct more research asking questions such as: Who is impacted by fee programs and why? What can be done to alleviate these impacts?

This and other studies have also illustrated that some are concerned that management decisions will become based on profit, rather than public interest, by allowing local units to keep the fee revenue collected. Of particular concern is the potential for managers to be driven to increase development or allow for highly impacting activities in order to increase fee revenue. Has or will this allowance influence the management decisions made by these local units? There is no shortage of samples from which to examine this question as the RFDP was implemented four years ago and now includes over 360 projects. Under the current RFDP legislation, the agencies are given wide discretion in their implementation and management of the fee program. With little guidance on how to manage the RFDP, the agencies should take it upon themselves to set objectives for fee projects that are consistent with agency purpose.

This exploratory study investigated the perspective of active fee opposition and was designed to elicit an understanding of the dimensions of opposition. A comparison of the results of this study, and existing research reveal a gap in the knowledge of fee opposition which is reflected in some of the above recommendations. My own thoughts on recreation user fees evolved as a result of what I learned from the participants in this study. The complex nature of this issue became clear to me as the various dimensions of fee opposition emerged in the participant narratives. The concerns reflected in the results of this study are not a superficial objection to individual fees but rather about deeply held beliefs in the values of public lands and how decisions about those lands should be made. If the RFDP does become permanent policy, it will represent a major shift in how federal
public lands are managed for recreation. Therefore, a more complete understanding of those affected and opposed is needed before making the program permanent.
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