

Recreation rising The cost of that family lake cabin is going up

Forest Service eyes huge fee hike

Owners fear a 400 percent increase could make cabins 'a place for the wealthy'

By LEE JUILLERAT H&N Regional Editor

Families who own recreational cabins on Forest Service land at Lake of the Woods, Crescent Lake and Rocky Point say a proposed 400 percent increase in fees could force them to sell.

At Lake of the Woods, where an estimated one third of the 219 cabin owners are from the Klamath Basin, fees that now average about \$1,500 a year will climb to more than \$6,000.

Forest Service officials say the increases, scheduled to take effect in 2011 and be phased in over a three-year period, will be based on current land appraisals under the modified Cabin User Fee Fairness Act. Money collected from fees will go into the federal government's general fund.

Fee increases also would affect cabins at Union Creek and Odell and Diamond lakes as well.

Betty Anderson, a retiree from Keno, is among 37 cabin owners at Recreation Creek near Rocky Point. She said the fee increase could force her to sell.

"It really makes it prohibitive for family cabins, rather than just a place for the wealthy," she said.

People with cabins on Forest Service land — the land is not owned or leased and, except for the actual cabin, is not private property — cannot occupy cabins on a year-round basis. They must pay for road improvements and police and fire protection, and are not allowed to have garages or carports. Owners also must follow regulations on everything from the size of decks to the color of paint. Cabin owners pay property taxes.

"We don't disagree we should be paying a fair share, but this is going to result in people having to sell," said Brad Aspell, president of the Lake of the Woods Recreation Association and a Klamath Falls attorney. "What we fear is if the fees are allowed to increase we're going to have a situation where the cabins are bought by the wealthy and become a playground for the rich."

He said members of the Lake of the Woods group, in conjunction with regional and national cabin owner associations, are contacting lawmakers and requesting hearings.

Bill Kennedy, a Klamath Falls area rancher and Crescent Lake cabin owner, is president of the Oregon Forest Homeowners Association. He said he is receiving almost daily reports from owners who will probably have to sell.

"We cannot afford the new fee so we've got to figure out what we're going to do," said Kennedy, whose family has had its Crescent Lake cabin since 1992. "What if owning a cabin just becomes an elite privilege?"

Aspell said the intent of the cabin program was to "bring people of modest means to the national forests to enjoy the national forests and to provide recreational opportunities."

A Klamath Falls family that has owned a Lake of the Woods cabin since 1953 also may have to sell.

“If they raise the fees that much we’d have to seriously reconsider whether we can keep it,” said David Drew, a Klamath Falls businessman who shares cabin ownership with a brother and two sisters. He noted the cabin is accessible about four months a year.

“If it does go through,” Drew said, “then it will make those properties accessible only to people with a lot of money.”

Aspell agreed, and fears many people will be forced to sell.

“There will be some of us who can hang on, but the vast majority of people are not what you would call affluent,” he said.

“We don’t know what ultimately the right number is going to be, but the fee should not force people to lose their cabins,” he added.



H&N photo by Lee Juillerat **Some recreation cabins along Recreation Creek near Rocky Point offer easy access to fishing, canoeing and boating on Upper Klamath Lake.**