



Fees for parking, hiking ended on road to Lemmon

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The U.S. Forest Service has stopped collecting hiking and parking fees at its station on the road to Mount Lemmon.

It also has stopped citing people who park and hike in nondeveloped campground areas who formerly had to pay the fees.

The service's actions stem from a 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling Feb. 9 that the Coronado National Forest's system of collecting fees for Mount Lemmon violates federal law. That sent the case back to a lower federal court for further consideration.

Fees are no longer being charged at parking areas except for those at developed campgrounds or other developed areas. The fee station, near Milepost 5 on the Catalina Highway, is no longer being staffed while the service reviews the fee program.

Signs at parking lots advising people they need to pay \$5 daily or \$20 annual fees will be taken down soon, Coronado National Forest Supervisor Jim Upchurch said Tuesday.

"We're just evaluating where the fees would be appropriate, determining which sites would be appropriate for fees ... based on our understanding of the law," he said.

Until now, the Forest Service had collected fees from all drivers who parked their vehicles along the 28-mile Catalina Highway.

The lawsuit against the fees was brought by four Tucson-area residents who were hoping not only to overturn the Mount Lemmon fees but to set a national precedent for other national forests.

Upchurch, however, said the Forest Service staff is currently reviewing its fee system only for Mount Lemmon - not for Sabino or Madera canyons where the fees are also charged in the Tucson area. He said he doesn't know if the fee stoppage is temporary or permanent, nor whether the service will appeal the court ruling.

Kitty Benzar, director of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, which had backed the lawsuit, said it's great the fees are no longer charged on Mount Lemmon, but added: "They're going to have to make this case a national precedent. There are 155 national forests. If they would like to fight this forest by forest, I think that is a colossal waste of taxpayer funding."

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