

Testimony of Honorable Wally Herger
before the
House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Concerning H.R. 4084
October 27, 2005

(572 words · 4 minutes 30 seconds)

Chairman Walden, thank you very much for holding today's hearing on H.R. 4084, a bill that I introduced to restore the authority of the Forest Service to retain marina fee revenue at the forest level for use on recreation improvement projects.

Through the authority provided in the 1996 "Recreation Fee Demonstration Program," the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, in my Northern California congressional district, developed a very successful recreation enhancement program at Shasta and Trinity lakes, both of which are located on a subunit of the forest. Under this "Fee Demo" law, local forest officials kept the vast majority of the revenue generated by issuing houseboat marina permits under their existing special use authority for recreation enhancement and safety improvement projects at the lakes. Such projects included dock repair, better access for the disabled, more restrooms and trashcans, boating safety markers, and campground construction and maintenance.

Marina owners at Shasta and Trinity lakes were thrilled with this program, as they were able to see the fees they paid to the government go to work in substantial, on-the-ground improvement projects. More importantly, the recreating public - estimated to be over 1.5 million visitors per year - enjoyed the success of this program. Over \$4 million has been invested in recreation and safety enhancement projects at Shasta and Trinity lakes since its inception in 1996. As a direct result of this program, money that would have otherwise remained in Washington D.C. was instead invested locally, and recreators are now enjoying a safer, cleaner, and more enjoyable outdoor experience at the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

Regrettably, however, the authority that allowed this program to operate was inadvertently repealed last year with the passage of the "Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act." H.R. 4084 corrects this unintended consequence by amending the Forest Service's Special Use Permit program to return the recreation and safety project authority to the agency. Though the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in my district is the unit that is most affected by this legislation, other forests, such as the Tonto, the Ashley, and the Willamette, would also receive a boost in their recreation infrastructure budget with its enactment.

Nationally, this legislation would retain just over one million dollars at the local forest level for safety and recreation improvements. Some may argue that this bill "costs" the government money, or that it "scores" against the deficit. I would simply ask you to consider the policy at question here.

The Forest Service partners with local small business owners to enhance the recreation experience on federal lands by allowing them to operate businesses - in this case houseboat marinas - in exchange for an occupancy fee. H.R. 4084 restores the authority of the Forest Service to keep these fee proceeds at the local level - where their impact on the National Forest is the most direct and apparent - rather than letting this money remain in Washington D.C. for general agency uses.

Viewed in this light, there is no "cost" to the government. What's more, there is no cost to the public or to marina operators. There are no new fees involved with this legislation, only a restoration of authority to allow fees already being paid to remain at the local level for new projects that stand to make recreation on the National Forest system safer and more enjoyable.

Thank you again for including my legislation in today's hearing. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.