

Additional Views of Doc Hastings (R-WA)
Ranking Republican, Committee on Natural Resources
H.R. 4888, the Cabin Fee Act of 2010

The Cabin Fee Act, H.R. 4888 is critically important to the 14,000 American families who own cabins on land in our National Forests. Unless Congress acts to bring about a course correction, many thousands of these people will be forced to abandon family heirloom cabins as the currently planned fee hikes go into effect. This bill provides a legislative solution that can head off that impending tragedy.

In drafting this bill, the goal was to create new fee schedule that will be balanced and fair to both the cabin owners and the Treasury. Work continues with the Congressional Budget Office to determine what adjustments may be needed to ensure that the bill is revenue neutral without imposing fees that are far beyond the reach of our constituents.

Many of the private cabins on Forest Service land are simple, rustic structures hand-built by the grandparents of the current owners early in the last century and passed down from generation to generation. And although there may be a few that are large and showy, the overwhelming majority of the cabins are modest family retreats. The purpose of this bill is to keep the fees affordable for people such as teachers, factory workers and retirees, not just millionaires – which is just what will happen if we don't address the problem.

The cabin owners affected by this bill are charged an annual fee for use of the land on which their cabin sits. They do not get any ownership rights to the land. They have only a temporary and highly restricted use permit for, basically, the footprint of their cabin.

Because a temporary, limited use-permit is not comparable to the rights acquired when someone owns property in fee simple, it has proven impossible under current law to establish a fair process for setting the fees charged the cabin owners.

The current system has resulted in unrealistic, arbitrary fee hikes that are completely unaffordable for average families. For example, the Seattle Times reported last year that cabin owners in Lake Wenatchee received notice that their fees will increase more than one thousand percent, from \$1,400 to more than \$17,000 by 2011.

Skyrocketing fees also make these part-time homes unmarketable, leaving families who are unable to pay the high fees also unable to sell their cabins. Unless we act to establish a realistic pricing structure, families across our nation may be forced to tear down their cabins because they can neither afford the fees themselves nor find a buyer for their cabin.

The Cabin Fee Act will establish a simple, predictable fee-setting system based on a tiered structure. And because future fee increases will be tied to inflation, it will eliminate the Forest Service's costly administrative burden of constant appraisals and appeals.

These family-owned cabins encourage wholesome outdoor recreation which is a very important use of our vast system of public land. Providing access to public lands is an important part of the mission of the Forest Service, and action is needed to make certain that recreational cabins aren't priced out of existence. By encouraging a broad and diverse range of activities in our National Forests, we foster the kind of sound stewardship that allows us more fully to obtain the many benefits these lands can contribute.

This legislation will provide a sensible, long-term solution that will keep these cabins affordable and accessible to Americans, while still providing fair compensation to the federal Treasury for the use of the land.