

Proposed Recreational Fee Plan
Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, Sherwood, OR
May 22, 2007

Executive Summary:

Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge in Sherwood, Oregon proposes to implement a visitor entrance fee under authority of the Federal Lands Recreation Act of 2004. Fees collected under the program directly benefit the public use amenities and programs the Refuge provides to the visiting public. An important attribute of the fee program is that at least 80% of the funds collected are retained by the Refuge and are exclusively expended to support visitor facilities, programs, and safety. These funds are integral to developing, operating, and maintaining high quality visitor services, with a focus on wildlife-dependent recreation and education.

Information which follows addresses the proposed fee structure for the program. The daily entrance pass per private vehicle is \$4.00. An annual pass of \$15.00 per private vehicle will also be offered. Individuals entering on foot, by bicycle, or as part of a tour group will be charged \$2.00 per person. Youth ages 15 and under are free. All fees are waived for school groups participating in the Refuge's environmental education field trip program. Other federal recreational passes such as the Federal Duck Stamp and the America the Beautiful Pass, as well as former Golden Passes, will be honored. The complete proposal and fee plan follows.

Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking the first phase of input from the public regarding the proposed fee program. We are using a variety of means to inform the community about the proposal, including press releases, letters to local and regional elected officials, letters to chambers of commerce, and newsletter articles. Comments will be accepted from June 1 through June 30, 2007. Please submit written comments or suggestions by June 30, 2007. Send emailed comments to: kim_strassburg@fws.gov; include "Fee Program" in the subject line. Comments can also be mailed to: Fee Program, Tualatin River NWR, 19255 SW Pacific Highway, Sherwood, OR 97140.

After June 30, the public's comments will be considered and incorporated into a final proposal which will be forwarded to the Service's national headquarters office for review. Following this review the proposal will be published in the Federal Register for the last phase of public comment, a process normally taking approximately six months. A decision will then be reached by the Service regarding implementation of an entrance fee program at the Refuge.

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Refuge Name: Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge
Project Leader: Ralph Webber (ralph_webber@fws.gov)
Visitor Services Manager: Kim Strassburg (kim_strassburg@fws.gov)
Telephone: 503-590-5811
Fax: 503-590-6702

Project Title: Implementation of Entrance Fee Program at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Summary:

Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Sherwood, Oregon proposes to implement a visitor entrance fee. Fees collected under the program directly benefit the public use amenities and programs the Refuge provides to the visiting public. Authority to collect recreational fees is granted by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, approved into law December 2004. An important attribute of the fee program is that at least 80% of the funds collected are retained by the Refuge and are exclusively expended to support visitor facilities, programs, and safety. These funds are integral to developing, operating, and maintaining high quality visitor services, with a focus on wildlife-dependent recreation and education.

Site Description:

Established in 1992 as an urban national wildlife refuge, Tualatin River NWR is located just 15 miles from downtown Portland, Oregon. The Refuge restores, manages, and protects wetland, river and upland habitats for the benefit of native wildlife. Additionally, one of the primary goals of the Refuge is to provide high quality opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education to enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of Refuge fish, wildlife, habitats and cultural resources.

The Refuge currently protects nearly 1,400 acres within its 3,060-acre acquisition boundary. To date nearly 700 acres has been restored to native habitat, including the 450 acre "Atfalat'i Unit" of the Refuge. New visitor service facilities have recently been constructed on the Atfalat'i Unit and include: entry road; parking lot; regional transit bus stop; one mile long year-round trail; 5 environmental education study sites; river overlook; wetland observation deck; wayside overlook, wildlife photography blind; directional/safety signs; 3 orientation kiosks with refuge leaflets and wildlife list; and 9 interpretive panels. Upon complete construction of these facilities, the Refuge opened to the public on June 3rd, 2006. These facilities currently support several public use programs including wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation and environmental education with a field trip curriculum designed for K-8 students. In addition, a recreational fishing program will be considered for implementation under the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Planning process, scheduled to begin in 2010. A

Wildlife Center and Refuge Headquarters are currently under construction with an anticipated opening in Fall 2007. The Wildlife Center will include a visitor information desk; indoor viewing area; exhibit area; indoor restrooms; multi-purpose room; nature store; and an environmental education field laboratory. The Refuge Headquarters will house Refuge staff offices, work rooms, and a small conference area. An outdoor plaza links the two buildings and will include 3 interpretive kiosks and a wildlife overlook. An environmental education shelter will be constructed in three to four years. All visitor facilities are constructed to be full accessible and meet American’s with Disabilities Act guidelines.

Table 1: Proposed Entrance Fee and Pass Structure

Daily Refuge Entrance Fee (per private vehicle)	\$4.00
Annual Refuge Pass (per private vehicle)—valid for one year from date of purchase	\$15.00
Daily Individual Entrance Fee (per person/per day when arriving on foot, bicycle, as part of a tour group, or on a bus)	\$2.00
Youth Ages 15 and Under	Free
Federal Duck Stamp (per private vehicle)—valid July 1 through June 30	\$15.00
America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass	\$80.00
America the Beautiful Senior Pass (lifetime)	One time fee of \$10.00
America the Beautiful Access Pass (lifetime)	Free
Golden Eagle, Golden Age & Golden Access Pass	Honored until pass expires or is replaced

Special Provisions and Exceptions to Fee Structure:

- National Public Lands Day (NPLD), usually celebrated on a Saturday in late September, will be considered a “fee-free” day for all visitors to the Refuge. The date of NPLD is determined on an annual basis by the National Training and Environmental Education Foundation.
- Refuge management may also establish other “fee-free” days in conjunction with special events such as International Migratory Bird Day and National Wildlife Refuge Week.
- Volunteers who are actively working on or for the Refuge will not be charged an entrance fee during their scheduled duty times. In addition, volunteers who contribute and record at least 80 hours of volunteer service during a fiscal year will receive an Annual Refuge Pass at no charge. The fiscal year begins October 1st and ends September 30th. In preparation for implementing the proposed fee program, the Refuge will begin tallying volunteer contributions beginning October 1, 2007.
- All fees are waived for school groups participating in the Refuge’s environmental education field trip program. Currently, all educators interested in bringing K-8 aged students to the Refuge must complete the Refuge’s teacher workshop first. Fees are also waived for secondary level and collegiate student field trips, providing that the

educator in charge demonstrates a stated educational objective that supports a larger unit of study.

Analysis of Proposed Fees:

A market study comparing fees of other local and regional national wildlife refuges, natural areas, and educational facilities was conducted in December 2006. Though recreational and educational opportunities at Tualatin River NWR may differ from those identified, the quality and types of services provide a logical comparison. The proposed fees at Tualatin River NWR are commensurate with fees associated with other local opportunities and range between \$3.00 to \$10.00 daily and \$11.00 to \$75.00 annually. Table 2 identifies the results of the study.

Justification for Activities and Fees:

The fee program will directly support one of the highest goals of the Refuge which is to “provide high-quality opportunities for wildlands and wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental education to enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of refuge fish, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources with an emphasis towards urban residents.”

Because of its close proximity to a large urban audience and strong local support, the Wildlife Center at Tualatin River NWR was ranked as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s #1 priority visitor center nationwide. This facility will open to the public in Fall 2007. Additionally, representatives from 14 school districts within the Refuge’s service area have expressed an interest participating in environmental education at the Refuge.

Compared to other similar areas, visitation to Tualatin River NWR is expected to soar. As an example, Nisqually NWR near Olympia, Washington, has comparable public use facilities and had nearly 160,000 visitors in 2006. Nisqually NWR has an established fee program as articulated in Table 2. Tualatin River NWR visitation could reach twice this number once visitor programs are fully developed, since this urban refuge is much more easily accessible to Portland metro residents. Another example is Tryon Creek State Park, an urban natural area near Portland, which averages 330,000 visitors annually.

Public Outreach and Involvement:

The proposed fee program is being shared with the public through a variety of means highlighted below. The purpose of this outreach is to publicize and share the proposal, articulate how fee revenues would be spent, and to solicit feedback from individuals and stakeholders.

- A press release was issued to all local print media on May 15th, 2007.
- A semi-permanent sign, installed June 2006, was included on all three information kiosks informing visitors of a future entrance fee program.
- An article was written for the Friends of the Refuge Spring 2007 quarterly newsletter.
- A copy of the proposal is posted on the Refuge’s website.

- Letters describing the proposal were written to all five members of Oregon’s U.S. Congressional delegation, as well as to both of Oregon’s U.S. Senators.
- A letter describing the proposal was written to the Chair of the Tribal Council, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.
- Verbal communication occurred during outreach talks and other stakeholder presentations.
- Letters describing the proposal were written to local chambers of commerce, visitors bureaus, and local government officials.

Anticipated Income:

Projections of income are based on those received by Nisqually NWR, the closest refuge that is providing the most similar visitor services and programs. In fiscal year 2006, Nisqually NWR collected \$46,433, of which \$31,676 was retained at their station. Based on similarities, the initial projected net income for Tualatin River NWR is \$32,000 per year.

Planned Use for Revenues:

A summary of visitor service expenses for fiscal year 2009 is projected below.

Fee Program Start-Up Costs:	\$13,000
Fee Program Annual Operating Costs:	\$ 2,340

Fiscal Year 2009 Visitor Service Expenses	\$59,545
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<i>Repair, maintenance and facility enhancement:</i>	<i>\$17,215</i>
<i>Interpretation, visitor information and service:</i>	<i>\$11,540</i>
<i>Law enforcement:</i>	<i>\$30,000</i>
<i>Fee Collection costs:</i>	<i>\$ 790</i>

***Fee collection costs are lower in 2009 due to printing costs being included in start-up expenses.*

Table 2: Market Study—Fees of Regional Recreation and Education Opportunities

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Daily</i>	<i>Annual</i>	<i>Description</i>
Proposed Entrance Fee				
USFWS	Tualatin River NWR	\$4.00	\$15.00	Proposed per private vehicle
	Tualatin River NWR	\$2.00	n/a	Proposed per person/per day when on foot/bikes/ tour group/bus
Comparisons of Regional Public Recreation & Education Opportunities				
USFWS	Ridgefield NWR, WA	\$3.00	\$15.00	Proposed per vehicle fee
USFWS	Nisqually NWR, WA	\$3.00	\$12.00	Per family
USFWS	Dungeness NWR, WA	\$3.00		Per family
Metro (Portland's regional government)	Blue Lake Regional Park Oxbow Regional Park	\$4.00	\$40.00	Per private vehicle
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife	Sauvie Island Wildlife Area (Portland)	\$3.50	\$11.00	Parking permit
Oregon State Parks	26 day-use fee areas in state parks	\$3.00	\$25.00	Per vehicle
Multi-Agency (OR Pacific Coast Pass)	16 Oregon Pacific Coast day-use areas	\$10.00	\$35.00	Per vehicle \$10.00 pass for 5 days
US Forest Service (NW Forest Pass)	All USFS entrance and day-use fee sites in WA and OR	\$5.00	\$30.00	Per vehicle
Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation Department	Tualatin Hills Nature Park	**		**Entrance is free. Program fees begin at \$8.00 per person/per day.
OMSI	Oregon Museum of Science and Industry	\$7.00 to \$9.00	\$75.00	Daily fee is per person. Annual fee is per family.
World Forestry Center	World Forestry Center Discovery Museum	\$5.00 to \$7.00	\$45.00	Daily fee is per person. Annual fee is per family. Add \$1.00 parking fee per vehicle.
Metro (Portland's regional government)	Oregon Zoo	\$6.50 to \$9.50	\$69.00	Daily fee is per person. Annual fee is per family. Add \$1.00 parking fee per vehicle.