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## Articles

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### Anticipated Responses to a Fee Program: The Key is Trust

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Anticipated responses to a proposed recreation fee program were examined through the use of focus groups and self-administered questionnaires. Varied communities of interest (based on ethnicity and recreation activity groups) and communities of place (based on residency within a National Forest boundary and greater geographic proximity) were targeted for the study. Conditional acceptance, and in some cases outright disapproval, were expressed during the group discussions. Social trust was revealed as the most significant predictor of anticipated impacts of new fees, general attitudes towards the recreation fees, and amounts respondents were willing to pay for daily and annual passes. Age, ethnicity and income were less helpful in understanding public response to fees, even though there were distinct differences between the communities. The importance of social trust to understanding the responses of these selected communities suggests the need for greater consideration of trust in agency/public exchanges.

**KEYWORDS:** *Social trust, fees on public lands, communities of interest, communities of place*

#### Introduction

Public land managers are challenged by flat or decreasing appropriation levels and increasing demands for natural resources. Recreation use is in the forefront of those demands, particularly at areas proximate to large urban populations. In order to provide a satisfactory or higher level of service, recreation use fees are sometimes implemented. Within public land management, recreation use fees are seen by some as a necessary part of the

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future (McCarville, 1998). Nevertheless, controversy over recreation use fees on public lands has been expressed, both from the perspective of public land managers and the publics that they serve (Crompton, 1981; McCarville, 1995). Anticipated public response to fees is important. Managers equipped with an understanding of the likely public response to fees are better positioned to develop programs with a greater likelihood of acceptance and compliance, as well as to more appropriately frame their communications regarding fee programs (McCarville, 1998; Terrell, 1998).

The primary objective of this study was to describe anticipated reactions to a proposed fee program prior to its implementation. Focus group discussions and self-administered questionnaires were utilized to obtain a view of the range and depth of selected communities' perceptions and thoughts about fees for recreational use of public lands.

### *The Controversy Over Fees for Use of Public Lands*

Charging entrance fees for use of public lands can be controversial (Becker, Berrier & Barker, 1985; Crompton, 1981; Kerr & Manfredro, 1991; McCarville, 1995), and managers of public lands are often concerned about public acceptance of new fees. Lack of public acceptance is presumed to be accompanied by the risks of reduced visitation, decreased public and financial support, and noncompliance (Becker, et al., 1985; Leuschner, Cook, Roggenbuck & Olderswald, 1987; Reiling, Criner & Oltmanns, 1988). The ethical dilemma of pricing out the economically disadvantaged is of specific concern (McCarville, 1995). Additionally, charging for use of public recreational opportunities may adversely affect loyalty of the public to particular places and to the managing agencies. Those most loyal to public recreation prefer it primarily because of price, which is typically subsidized and therefore lower in price or free (Bogle, Havitz & Dimanche, 1992).

In some cases, reduced visitation may be viewed as a desirable effect of fees (Binkley & Mendelsohn, 1987). Fees may limit use to an area, either by simply reducing numbers or screening out those who are not considered 'desirable'. For example, those who are screened out may be those who "value the site too little to pay the fee" (Binkley & Mendelsohn, 1987, p. 32). In other cases, the intent of reduced visitation through fees may be quite objectionable (Kerr & Manfredro, 1991), particularly if the definition of a 'desirable' visitor results in exclusion of the disadvantaged. In any case, whether a fee is viewed as objectionable or not, research examining the impact of fees upon actual visitation and exclusion of particular visitor groups has shown mixed effects (Becker et al., 1985; Howard & Selin, 1987; Leuschner, et al., 1987; Manning, Callinan, Echelberger, Koenemann & McEwen, 1984; Reiling, Cheng & Trott, 1992; Stevenson, 1989).

Tolerance for price is believed to vary considerably by recreation activity type (Howard & Selin, 1987). In general, people are more accepting of fees when they have paid fees for recreational opportunities in the past (Kerr &

Manfredo, 1991; Leuschner, et al., 1987; McCarville, 1991; McCarville, 1996). Beliefs about the payment of fees overall (e.g., makes me feel I am doing my part to assist the park) and the perceived cost of providing a service are also helpful in understanding intentions to pay a fee (Leuschner, et al., 1987; McCarville, 1991; McCarville & Crompton, 1987). Perceived fairness of fees, including the status quo (not traditionally paying gate fees for public recreation) and being double-billed (already paying taxes which covered the service), is a determinant of response to fees, particularly for public recreation (McCarville, Reiling & White, 1996). Certain caveats to acceptance of fees, such as wanting the managing agency to receive the fee, and collection methods which match individual preferences have been expressed by recreationists (Leuschner, et al., 1987). Finally, sociodemographic characteristics, such as age, education, income, proximity to recreational opportunities and rural residence, have been found to be correlated with opinions regarding pricing (McCarville, 1995; McCarville, Reiling & White, 1996). Some of these differences may be explained by comparing the levels of use within different sociodemographic groups for the recreational opportunities under question. There is a paucity of literature examining racial or ethnic group differences in response to fees; though authors have mentioned people of color as a specific group of concern in terms of impacts of fee implementation (McCarville, 1995; Reiling et. al, 1992). As the nation becomes increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, there is a corresponding need to examine and understand people of colors' responses to fees.

Agency and public perspectives on the debate about fees are found within the literatures on resource management and recreation management in particular. However, if the goal is to fully understand the range of public responses to agency communications about fees, as well as responses to actual implementation of fee programs, and subsequently develop management strategies with these responses in mind, another area of literature lends additional understanding, that of environmental risk management.

### *Trust's Influence on Public Responses to Agency Actions*

Recent research on environmental risk management points to the importance of social trust in perception and acceptance of agency actions (Peters, Covello & McCallum, 1997; Slovic, 1997). Agency actions are often communicated in terms of risks and interventions designed to reduce those risks. Based on high levels of distrust the public is less likely to believe an agency's assessment of the degree of risk involved in environmental management, communications addressing that risk, and less likely to support agency actions for addressing risk.

This literature contains two contrasting views of social trust. The traditional view assumes that social trust is based on confidence in competence, objectivity, fairness, consistency or predictability and caring, or the perception of good will (Earle and Cvetkovich, 1995). This traditional view assumes

that the processes underlying trust are complex. It presumes a requisite level of knowledge about the agency to make the judgments necessary to arrive at a level of trust, as well as the time required to make these cognitively detailed judgments. Earle and Cvetkovich (1995) propose an alternative view which states that in many cases individuals lack requisite knowledge, or the time and willingness to make such complex decisions, and thus make their determinations of trust in a different way. They assert that the alternative approach involves judgments of perceived value similarity between the individual and the agency. Decisions to trust involve a bridge between perceptions of an agency, institution or other, and our willingness to risk a belief, or trust in their actions. Trust is then quantified in terms of perceived shared values, direction, goals, views, actions and thoughts (each judged on a 7 point semantic differential). A global judgment of trust is also measured (again on a 7 point semantic differential). Their research demonstrated that the six individual components explain much of the variation in the global trust judgment.

While originally presented within the context of risk management, and public reaction to management options and decisions, Earle and Cvetkovich's scale has been applied to other inquiries regarding agency/public interactions. For example, Cvetkovich and Winter (1998) asked campers and high school students to complete a survey querying concern about water quality in a watershed, reactions to potential management interventions, and trust. The individual trust components and the overall trust judgment were significantly correlated with each other, and with a greater acceptance of information provided by the agency, as well as more intrusive management interventions such as area closures.

Public responses to recreation fees may also be understood through an investigation of social trust. By viewing fee implementation as an agency action, communicated in terms of the need to reduce risk to the agency and resources managed (e.g., in terms of the inability to sustain current opportunities with shrinking budgets, or the need for more dollars to protect fragile resources), additional insight may be gained into public responses to fees. The Enterprise Forest Project provided the opportunity to explore the link between trust and fee implementation.

### *The Enterprise Forest Project*

In 1996 the Omnibus Consolidated Recissions Act opened the door for a new approach to fee collections, through the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. The USDA Forest Service is included in the Fee Demonstration Program; and according to an interim report to Congress, represents about 85 active projects (USDI & USDA, 1998). One of the primary aspects of this program is that at least 80 percent of the proceeds goes back to the individual projects where the money is collected. Included is the "Enterprise Forest Project", located in Southern California, encompassing the Angeles,

Cleveland, San Bernardino and Los Padres National Forests. This project involves a recreational pass that must be displayed on vehicles parked in most National Forest areas. It is unique because of its large geographic coverage, affecting almost all recreational use within approximately 4.5 million acres. In addition, these forests are proximate to large urban populations (approximately 24 million people) which are noted for their ethnic and racial diversity (Allen & Turner, 1992).

The diverse publics served by these National Forests belong to communities of interest and communities of place, or 'individuals who have group attachments based on a collective identity made up of shared interests' (Cornell, 1996). Each of these communities may have different perceptions of, and reactions to a recreation fee program. The 'communities' approach serves as a useful organizing structure for the examination of diverse public interests.

### *Trust and Responses to Fees*

The present study extends the exploration of trust, as operationalized by Earle and Cvetkovich (1995), through the study of public responses to the Enterprise Forest fee program. Social trust's relationship to perceived fairness of the program (defined in terms of anticipated impacts to self and others), general attitudes towards the program (such as thinking the program was a good thing), and amounts people were willing to pay for the recreation pass were examined. Trust's relationship to these variables was expected to vary by communities of interest and communities of place within southern California.

## Methods

### *Participants and Respondents*

Focus group participants were recruited based on membership in selected target populations. The target populations included specific communities of interest and communities of place (Table 1), targeted because they represent the diversity of interests, activities, and frequency of use within the Enterprise Forest area. The 'community of interest' group included three targeted sub-groups based on ethnicity (Latino/Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans) and three based on recreation use (mountain bikers, hikers, off-highway vehicle users). The 'community of place' group included two forest resident sub-groups (labeled A and B to preserve confidentiality) and two forest proximate sub-groups (labeled 1 and 2 to preserve confidentiality). The forest proximate sub-groups had members whose residences were close to, but not within one of the Enterprise Forest boundaries. Although there were many more communities which could have been iden-

**TABLE 1**  
*Composition of the Focus Groups*

Community Basis	Target Population	Number of Attendees	Number of Participants	Number of Respondents
Ethnicity	Latino/Hispanic Americans	8	8	7
	African Americans	12	12	5
	Asian Americans	9	9	9
Recreation activity	Mountain bikers	7	7	7
	Hikers	6	6	6
	Off-highway vehicle users	13	13	12
Forest residence	Local Resident group A	20	12	19
	Local Resident group B	19	12	11
Proximity to forest	Forest Proximate group 1	8	8	7
	Forest Proximate group 2	13	13	12
Total		115	100	95

*Note:* Attendees came to the focus group sessions and either directly participated in discussions, or indirectly participated through submission of written comments and questionnaires. Participants were active during focus groups discussions. Respondents were those who completed the questionnaires within each of the groups. Number of respondents was reduced through the deletion of cases because of questionable response patterns (2), not fitting within the target population (6), and not receiving a correct version of the questionnaire (1).

tified as having concerns or opinions regarding a recreation use fee, these communities were of key interest and were accessible given the time and resources available. Participants were not meant to be representative of the larger population potentially affected by the fee pilot program, rather they were selected to obtain a view of the styles and ranges of thinking regarding the fee program.

In keeping with focus group methodology, the interest was in depth of information from a purposively selected group of individuals, rather than in obtaining a statistically representative sample (Morgan, 1998; Patton, 1990). The presence of similar others within the group was expected to serve as a stimulus where an idea expressed by one member might lead to another being expressed by a different member in a synergistic fashion (Asquith, 1990). Interactions between group members provided the opportunity to stimulate a dialogue and set members at ease, an advantage over individual interviews (Asquith, 1990).<sup>1</sup> One hundred and fifteen individuals attended

<sup>1</sup>Group think, or pressures towards consensus led by a select few, has been explored as a possible drawback to focus group discussions (Asquith, 1990). The moderator plays a central role in ensuring that discussions are open, not focused on majority vote, and that members have ample opportunity to express their diverse and sometimes conflicting views.

the ten focus group sessions, with a maximum of 13 actively participating in the discussions in order to allow a depth of information to be gathered.<sup>2</sup>

At the conclusion of the focus group discussion, questionnaires were completed by 104 attendees.<sup>3</sup> The questionnaires were designed to assess specific perceptions that individuals held about the fee program, beyond those that might have been expressed or withheld during group discussions. Those directly participating in discussions, as well as attendees who had not directly participated, were asked to complete the questionnaire. The purposes of combining the two methods included: 1) A multi-method approach to more fully capture public responses to the recreational fee program; 2) Application of a validated trust scale to assess social trust among focus group members; and 3) A vehicle for gathering accurate sociodemographic data of focus group members beyond membership in the defining group category (e.g., local resident). The pairing of focus group discussions with surveys was applied in a similar manner by Wolff, Knodel and Sittitrai (1993), and by Herek and Glunt (1993). In both of these instances the goals were very similar to the present study, in that a depth of information derived from group discussions, along with specific individual information and clarification of trends emerging from the discussions was desired.

#### *Procedure and Analysis—Focus Group Discussions*

The focus group sessions were conducted over a four-month period preceding implementation of the fee program. Minimal marketing information and public service announcements had been released about the program. Each session commenced with the reading of an opening statement, standard across all sessions. The statement was brief and provided information on the recreational use pass as proposed, along with a brief background for why the pass was being implemented. Specifically, attendees were told that while the Forest Service had been receiving less funding (30 percent on average across programs in the last three years), visitor use of the forests had been increasing, and this meant less money was available to support programs and facil-

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<sup>2</sup>Patton (1990) recommends a maximum of 12 active group members. However, in the two instances where one additional person was included in the group, it was not believed to have an adverse impact upon the quality and depth of dialogue. This belief was based on work by Asquith (1990) demonstrating that the impact of including more than 8 members in a focus group is a reduction in the total number of ideas generated by each individual, rather than a reduction in quality.

<sup>3</sup>While 104 surveys were completed, two were eliminated due to questionable response patterns, one because of receipt of an incorrect survey form, and six were eliminated because of lack of fit within their target population. Within the African American group, contacted through an African American church, there were five Caucasians, and one respondent who did not mark ethnicity. Statistical comparisons showed differences in income as well as differences on several attitudinal items. The Caucasians and person of unknown ethnic origin, contacted in this focus group, were deleted from analyses of the questionnaires. There was no way to distinguish them in analysis of the qualitative data however.

ities. They were told daily and annual passes would be available for sale on a per vehicle basis, necessary for recreational use in most forest areas.

Attendees were told that the sessions were being audiotaped. A set of guidelines reminding participants of rules of courtesy, the importance of open dialogue, and confidentiality was also included. Groups were led through five main topic areas during the discussions: 1) Reasonable price for daily and annual fees; 2) How the money should be used; 3) Factors in compliance (how people will make decisions about compliance and what people might do to avoid paying); 4) Critical information for the public when communicating about the fees; and 5) How participants felt about being charged to use local forest areas. Each session was run by one facilitator, with an assistant present to take notes throughout and assist with audiotaping.<sup>4</sup> Abridged transcripts were constructed from the audiotapes, as recommended by Krueger (1998), with two analysts listening independently and recording key discreet topics as well as illustrative quotations. These abridged transcripts were not verbatim, but captured the key topics emerging from each group. A master transcript was then produced by combining the information from the two abridged transcripts, eliminating redundancies between the two and ensuring that all comments and quotations coded were contained in the final transcript. Written comments from attendees who had not directly participated in the discussions were incorporated at this point. The master transcripts were coded for major themes by two different analysts. Themes had been identified by the focus group facilitators and assistants as those repeated across groups, as recommended by Knodel (1993).

### *Procedure and Analysis—Questionnaires*

Following the discussions each focus group attendee was asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire, with a resulting response rate of 90.4 percent (usable response rate was 82.6 percent). Areas queried included attitudes about the fee program, specifically anticipated impacts of the fee program and general opinions about the fee program (Table 2), number of visits to a Southern California forest during the last year (open ended), components of trust (Table 3), amounts willing to pay on a daily and annual basis (open ended), and sociodemographics (year of birth, ethnic background, educational level, marital status and individual annual income).

Based on a priori combinations, three sets of response items (anticipated impacts of the fee program, opinions about the fee program, and the five components of trust) were each submitted to reliability analysis (using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient). 'Anticipated Impacts' was based on the calculated average of four, out of the six original impact items ( $\alpha =$

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<sup>4</sup>A maximum of 12 attendees from local resident groups A and B were invited to directly participate in the focus group discussions. Those not directly participating in the discussions were encouraged to write down their thoughts and opinions on each discussion topic. These comments were gathered by facilitators at the close of the session.



.8702, Table 2). 'Fee Attitudes' represents the calculated average of three out of the four original items measuring general attitudes ( $\alpha = .9033$ , Table 2). The last scale 'Trust Average' was based on the calculated average of responses to the five trust components<sup>5</sup> ( $\alpha = .9581$ , Table 3). Scale construction was particularly important for these items, since there was significant multicollinearity (Table 4).

Contrasts on sociodemographic items and the three scales were conducted between groups. Multiple regression analyses queried the prediction of responses on the anticipated impacts scale, the opinions about the fee program scale, and the amounts willing to pay daily and annually. Checks of the data were conducted to ensure they were appropriate for regression analyses, including verifications of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and independence of residuals, as well as an adequate case to independent variable relationship as recommended by Tabachnik and Fidel (1989). Analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), personal computer versions 6.1 and 7.5 for Windows.

TABLE 2  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Attitude Scale Items*

Variable	M	SD
<b><i>Anticipated Impacts Scale</i></b>	<b>2.155</b>	<b>.945</b>
<i>The fee program will not have any effect on the way I visit the forest.</i>	2.167	1.114
<i>I will have to plan further ahead when the fee program goes into effect. (R)<sup>6</sup></i>	1.956	1.111
<i>I will visit the forest less often once the fee program is in place. (R)</i>	2.378	1.108
<i>Having to pay a recreational use fee will decrease the spontaneity of some of my forest visits. (R)</i>	1.978	1.070
<i>The fee program will limit access to the forest for some people.<sup>7</sup> (R)</i>	1.638	.866
<i>I will use the forest whether I have to pay a fee or not.</i>	2.835	.981
<b><i>Fee Attitudes Scale</i></b>	<b>2.286</b>	<b>1.050</b>
<i>Overall, the fee program is a good thing.</i>	2.152	1.176
<i>I think the Forest Service needs to charge the fees in order to maintain the quality of services provided to the public.</i>	2.337	1.161
<i>The fee money will go directly into improving forest services and personnel.</i>	2.380	1.156
<i>I understand the reasons behind the fee program.</i>	2.720	1.126

*Note.* Lower scores indicate more negative impacts (Anticipated Impacts), or negative attitudes (Fee Attitudes). Responses are based on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree.

<sup>5</sup>The overall trust judgment question was not included in this scale because it was inadvertently omitted from the first focus groups' questionnaire. A reduced *n* was viewed as undesirable for the regressions, and a majority of variance in the overall trust item was predicted by the five components of trust among respondents who answered all of the trust items.

<sup>6</sup>Indicates item was reverse-coded for analysis.

<sup>7</sup>Items appearing in regular type, rather than italics, were not included in the final scales.

*TABLE 3*  
*Social Trust Components*

Trust Component	Similarity Anchor	Dissimilarity Anchor
Values	"shares my values"	"different values"
Direction	"in line with me"	"wrong direction"
Goals	"same goals"	"different goals"
Views	"supports my view"	"sopposes my view"
Thoughts	"thinks like me"	"thinks unlike me"

*Note.* Between each of the pairs of anchors were seven places upon which respondents could indicate their degree of agreement along a continuum.

### Results

Results are presented in two parts: 1) the focus group results and 2) questionnaire results. The reader is reminded that the same individuals completed the questionnaires as attended the focus groups. Presentation of the focus group results is organized around the main themes which emerged from analysis of the abridged transcripts.

#### *Focus Group Statements Characterizing Acceptance*

Daily and annual fee amounts were linked to perceived dramatic increases in the use of areas, paired with damage to forest areas and private property. High fees were viewed as a tool to limit use and to change the profile of users in the area. For example, the highest daily and annual fees were advocated by local resident group A, one of whom stated "Higher fees will enhance the quality of the users." The geographic community of these residents has been especially impacted by high levels of use, recently addressed through re-design of the primary recreational destination in that area.

Across the 10 groups, favorable remarks about the fee program were accompanied by some common themes (viewed as reasons for finding a fee acceptable) including the vast amount of recreational land included for the annual price, the benefit of protecting lands for future enjoyment, potential site improvements such as better restrooms and more trees, additional funds for rule enforcement, and the proposed minimum 80 percent return to the forest (which was introduced by the group moderator in each session during discussions about the program).

#### *Focus Group Statements Revealing a Conditional Acceptance of Fees*

Several statements of conditional acceptance were made. Some participants linked acceptance to how fee proceeds would be used. Local residents wanted fee money to "Stay in the area. Important that (residential area) see

**TABLE 4**  
*Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations Among Trust Components (N = 85)*

Trust Scale Item	M	SD	THOUGHTS	VIEWS	GOALS	DIRECTN	VALUES
The Forest Service shares my values.	4.459	2.196	.800	.802	.767	.816	
The Forest Service is in line with me.	4.576	2.090	.893	.893	.760		
The Forest Service has the same goals as me.	4.412	2.112	.767	.805			
The Forest Service supports my view.	4.565	2.096	.904				
The Forest Service thinks like me.	4.788	2.082					

*Note:* All intercorrelations between the trust components are significant at  $p < .001$ . Scores range from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating shared values, direction, goals, views and thoughts. As 7 indicates lack of perceived similarity on these items.

the money from the visitors to the area" (local resident group A). The type of area or facilities was also of concern. "Money should go to high density spots, but we should charge only for those spots and not for access. The only areas that really need improvement are the campgrounds" (forest proximate group 1). An opposing opinion was offered from another group, concerned that improvements would not be on features they are interested in. "They want money to fix the high buck item like bathrooms and campgrounds, they could care less about our trails" (off-highway vehicle group). These statements reveal the complexity of trying to address the varied public expectations when using fee proceeds.

Another primary condition of acceptability focused on who should have to pay. While statements revealed that fees should be charged to some individuals or groups, exclusion of some groups was expected. For example, some felt that charging others a fee was reasonable, but that they should not have to pay. This message came most often from local residents and user group members who volunteer in the forests. "As a resident I don't think we should have to pay since I'm already paying property tax. Nor should my relatives or any of the businesses have to pay" (local resident group B). "I think the fee is a good idea, just don't expect me to pay it . . . I already volunteer" (mountain biking group). And, expressing even greater opposition, "If the Forest Service makes us pay for one, I would stop volunteering" (mountain biking group).

Other comments were about other groups of concern. "What about special groups, such as the handicapped, or Boy Scouts?" (off-highway vehicle group). "A low income family, with family plus gas, plus something to eat and drink, if you charge \$5, they will not go" (Latino/Hispanic American group). "Those who need it the most, are able to pay the least. First place, they can't get there, and the second place, if they get there they don't have the money left to pay a fee" (African American group).

### *Focus Group Statements Revealing Outright Disapproval of Fees*

Overall the vast majority of statements gathered at the focus groups were negative. Disapproval was based on concerns over changing the recreational experience, image of the managing agency, ideological concerns, and distrust.

*Disapproval based on changing recreation and recreation management.* Impacts upon the recreational experience represent one of the specific concerns. ". . . so bureaucratic and so wrapped up, the whole point of why you came there in the first place is gone and then people will say it's too much of a hassle and they won't have the freedom of just packing everyone in the car and taking off" (forest proximate group 2). "Spontaneity may be lost. People who visit the forest on a whim may be the ones who may not pay" (mountain biker group).

A changing view of the agency was also of concern. "I don't want the Forest Service becoming another police service" (forest proximate group 1).

*Disapproval based on ideological concerns.* A series of objections were ideological in nature, focused on double-taxation and perceived meanings of 'public lands'. "There is tax money for this, it doesn't make sense. The federal government should be willing to set aside money to keep land clean, to take care of public land with tax money. Why should you pay when you already pay taxes?" (Asian American group).

Off-highway vehicle users felt that in addition to regular taxes, Green Stickers should cover their access to public lands. "I would like to voice my objection to a fee, because we have already paid it. The trails up there have been paid for, they're being maintained, the people who work there are already being paid by us-the Green Sticker Grant Program. So when it comes down to people who shouldn't have to pay, off-roaders are one of them."

Debate about the nature of public lands also emerged. "I don't think people should be charged to use public land since they own it" (local resident group B). "I'm concerned with access of land by people who don't have the money, by people to use the land that in effect belongs to them" (African American group).

*Disapproval centered in distrust of the agency.* Specific issues of distrust were raised as well as distrust of the government. For example, participants were concerned that once fees became established regular appropriations for management would be reduced even further. "If the program is successful, government will no longer subsidize or provide funds for the Forest Service. May cut back funds and fee will increase" (forest proximate group 2). These concerns expressed a distrust of the program functioning as proposed.

General trust that individuals held in the agency was a key issue in responses to the fee program, based on perceptions of the Forest Service as part of the government, and questions regarding management of existing funds. "I have a big aversion to giving money to the Federal government" (mountain biking group). "I'm very skeptical anytime I hear I'm from the government, I'm here to help you. That sounds like an oxymoron to me" (African American group). "It's not so much the opposition to the pass, but the distrust at how the existing money is managed and how this extra money will be managed" (forest proximate group 2).

### *Questionnaire Findings*

Questionnaire results are presented in sections, beginning with a descriptive approach to focus group members, moving on to a comparison of focus group types to assess their similarities and differences by type, then proceeding to focused inquiries designed to understand willingness to pay daily and annual fees, as well as perceived impacts and general opinions about the fee program.

*Focus group characteristics.* A majority of respondents were male (63.2 percent) and married (56.8 percent). Respondents were middle-aged ( $M = 44.36$  years,  $SD = 14.06$ ) and well educated (48.4 percent had a college or post-graduate degree). The ethnic distribution of participants was mixed:

58.9 percent Caucasian, 10.5 percent Asian American, 9.5 percent Latino/Hispanic American, 5.3 percent African American, 2.1 percent American Indian, and 7.4 percent multi-racial. Incomes varied widely, but most (51.6 percent) reported incomes between \$18,000 and \$58,000 annually.

*Willingness to pay a daily fee.* Participants were asked what amount they would be willing to pay for a daily pass. About one-fourth (27.4 percent) were not willing to pay any daily amount. The median daily amount was \$2.00 ( $M = 3.088$ ,  $SD = 4.005$ ). Daily fee amounts varied significantly by type of group (ANOVA,  $F(9, 81) = 5.7447$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Local resident group A indicated the highest average daily fee ( $M = \$7.35$ ,  $SD = 3.409$ ). Mountain bikers indicated the second highest, at \$5.71 ( $SD = 1.890$ ). The lowest daily fee amount was offered by the off-highway vehicle users at \$0. Tukey's HSD contrasts ( $p < .05$ ) showed significant differences between local resident group A and all other groups except local resident group B and mountain bikers. The average daily fee amount offered by the mountain biking group was significantly higher than that offered by the off-highway vehicle users ( $p < .05$ , Tukey's HSD). Differences by gender, education level and marital status were not significant.

A regression analysis predicting the daily amount participants were willing to pay showed that 'Trust Average', age, ethnic group (Caucasians/people of color), and income accounted for 27 percent of the variance ( $R^2 = .271$ ,  $F(4,77) = 7.148$ ,  $p < .001$ ). 'Trust Average' was the only significant predictor of the daily fee amount ( $t = -3.939$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr^2 = .168$ , Table 5), such that individuals with higher levels of trust were supportive of higher daily fee amounts.

*Willingness to pay an annual fee.* Participants were also asked what amount they would be willing to pay for an annual pass. Similar to the daily fee, about one-fourth (28.4 percent) were not willing to pay any amount annually. The median annual amount was \$20.00 ( $M = 24.761$ ,  $SD = 26.610$ ). Consistent with the daily fee results, groups differed significantly in their reported annual fee amounts ( $F(9,78) = 23.1642$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Individual group differences mirrored results for daily fees as well. Local resident group A indicated the highest average annual fee ( $M = \$66.59$ ,  $SD = 24.880$ ). Mountain bikers again indicated the second highest amount, at \$33.57 ( $SD = 8.522$ ). The lowest annual fee amount was offered by the off-highway vehicle users at 42 cents ( $SD = 1.44$ ). Post-hoc contrasts between groups revealed that the amount offered by local resident group A was significantly higher than all other groups ( $p < .05$ ), mountain bikers and forest proximate group 2 both offered significantly higher amounts than off-highway vehicle users and Asian Americans. Differences by gender, education level and marital status were not significant.

The annual amount participants were willing to pay was examined through multiple regression analysis. 'Trust Average', age, ethnic group, and income accounted for 53 percent of the variance ( $R^2 = .531$ ,  $F(4,73) = 20.648$ ,  $p < .001$ , Table 5). 'Trust Average' was again the most significant predictor of the amount participants were willing to pay ( $t = -7.065$ ,  $p <$

TABLE 5  
Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analyses

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Willing to pay daily ( $n = 82$ )			
Income	-.317	.546	-.062
Age	1.404	.733	.217
Ethnicity	1.339	.835	.168
'Trust Avg.'	-.807	.205	-.389***
Willing to pay annual ( $n = 78$ )			
Income	-.464	2.773	-.015
Age	10.101	3.691	.257*
Ethnicity	10.734	4.242	.218**
'Trust Avg.'	-7.252	1.026	-.576***
'Anticipated Impacts' ( $n = 84$ )			
Age	.210	.140	.138
Ethnicity	.128	.169	.069
'Trust Avg.'	-.294	.041	-.608***
'Fee Attitudes' ( $n = 84$ )			
Age	.248	.126	.151
Ethnicity	.033	.154	.017
'Trust Avg.'	-.382	.038	-.735***

Note.  $R^2$  for 'Anticipated Impacts' = .420,  $R^2$  for 'Fee Attitudes' = .586,  $R^2$  for willing to pay daily = .271,  $R^2$  for willing to pay annual = .531. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

.001,  $pr^2 = .406$ ), although age ( $t = 2.737$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $pr^2 = .093$ ) and ethnicity ( $t = 2.530$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $pr^2 = .081$ ) emerged as significant as well. Based on their squared partial correlations, 'Trust Average' was clearly the most important contributor to understanding respondents' willingness to pay annual fees.

*Anticipated impacts of the fee program.* Anticipated impacts were measured on a four-point scale with a '1' indicating the most negative impacts. Groups varied significantly in their perceptions of the potential impact of fees ( $F(9, 85) = 9.8646$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Off-highway vehicle users anticipated the most negative impacts ( $M = 1.083$ ,  $SD = .222$ ), while local resident group A anticipated the least ( $M = 3.246$ ,  $SD = .620$ ). Local resident group A's anticipated impacts were significantly lower than all other groups except local resident group B and the mountain bikers (Tukey's HSD at  $p < .05$ ). A significant amount of the variance in 'Anticipated Impacts' was predicted by 'Trust Average', ethnicity and age ( $R^2 = .420$ ,  $F(3,80) = 19.321$ ,  $p < .001$ , Table 5). 'Trust Average' was the only significant predictor of 'Anticipated Impacts' ( $t = -7.112$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $pr^2 = .387$ ).

*General opinions about the fee program.* 'Fee Attitudes' measured general opinions about the fee program on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 indicating the most positive attitudes. In keeping with findings on the other measures re-

ported, there were significant differences on 'Fee Attitudes' by group ( $F(9, 85) = 29.1845, p < .001$ ). The most positive opinions regarding the fee program were expressed by local resident group A ( $M = 3.790, SD = .433$ ). 'Fee Attitudes' was significantly higher for this group than each of the other groups (Tukey's HSD,  $p < .05$ ). In keeping with other opinions expressed by the off-highway vehicle users, their attitudes toward the fee program were the least favorable ( $M = 1.083, SD = .151$ ). A substantial portion of the variance in 'Fee Attitudes' was explained by 'Trust Average', age and ethnicity ( $R^2 = .586, F(3,80) = 37.699, p < .001$ , Table 5). 'Trust Average' was the only significant predictor in the regression equation ( $t = -10.170, p < .001, pr^2 = .564$ ).

### Discussion

Findings from the focus group discussions and self-administered questionnaires reflect a thriving controversy over charging fees for recreation on public lands. While daily and annual fee amounts were provided by several participants in focus group discussions, they were paired with qualified acceptance. Aspects of qualified acceptance seemed based less upon a perception of personal adverse impacts of fees (measured through items in 'Anticipated Impacts'), and more about concerns over who should, and should not have to pay. Some of the debate reflected the ethical dilemma of fees discussed by McCarville (1995). 'Others' who should not have to pay included individuals and families with low incomes, larger families, the handicapped, and youth groups, e.g., Boy Scouts. When it came to considerations about whether or not individual participants should have to pay, local residents, volunteers, and certain activity groups (e.g., off-highway vehicle users) seemed most in opposition. On an individual level, however, anticipated personal impacts were more likely to involve reduced spontaneity rather than reduced visitation.

A positive view of reduced visitation through fees, functioning particularly to filter out those who were viewed as 'undesirable visitors', as suggested by Binkley and Mendelsohn (1987), was held by one local resident group. This group in particular supported the highest daily and annual fees as well as perceived the least anticipated impacts and expressing the most positive general attitudes towards fees. In spite of this, it is not clear whether these same residents expected they would have to pay the fee; they expressed opposition to being personally charged. This finding was in line with McCarville, Reiling and White's (1996) study demonstrating opposition to being charged among residents closest to recreational sites.

In keeping with Leuschner et al. (1987), concerns were expressed about how the money should be spent. In particular, a variety of preferences about expenditures for campground improvements, protection of the natural resource, and development of trails reveal the diversity of attitudes. As suggested in several comments, type of recreation activity involvement was influential in participants' reactions to fees.



Perceived fairness of fees, as discussed by McCarville, Reiling and White (1996) was a critical component for a majority of the responses. Double-billing, or double-taxation was also central to perceived fairness. For many of the participants, the fee for use of public forest lands was an additional tax. Triple-billing was the essence of some discontent for the off-highway vehicle users, since they already pay green sticker fees and general taxes. Volunteers did not perceive fees to be fair, since they already made a contribution to the maintenance of natural resources.

Trust has been alluded to as important in examinations of another proposed fee program (Lime and Lewis, 1997), and appeared as a central consideration in the present study. Discussion among participants seemed to indicate that trust was an aspect of belief in the ability to implement the program as proposed, in particular whether or not people believed the majority of funds would be returned to the local areas where they were collected, and used in a way they deemed important. A number of participants revealed a fair amount of distrust with the agency, and therefore a clear lack of acceptance of the fee program.

Social trust was revealed as the most important predictor of written responses to the fee program. The predictive power of trust, measured through the five component scale adopted from Earle and Cvetkovich (1995) was significant in understanding support for daily and annual fee amounts, as well as anticipated impacts and general attitudes towards the fee program. In spite of the appearance of age and ethnicity as significant predictors of annual fee amounts, their contribution to the regression equations was minor compared to 'Trust Average'. Trust was the most important, and only significant contributor to explaining (more than 38 percent) the variance in anticipated impacts and general opinions about fees.

The purpose and design of the study require some notes of caution. Differences between the focus groups were many times significant, indicating patterns of how the selected communities were distinct from each other. These differences indicate the wide variation among communities impacted by the proposed fee program and their anticipated responses. These variations may be reflected in the population at large; however, generalizations about specific communities selected should not be made. For example, one can not describe how all off-highway vehicle users would be affected from findings reported here.

It is also important to note that while there is precedent within the literature for combining focus group and survey methods (e.g., Wolff, Knodel and Sittitrai, 1993), the impact of discussions on survey responses is not fully known. In spite of the belief held by some that trust in an agency is stable (Cvetkovich, 1998, personal communication), explorations of the linkage between trust, willingness to pay fees, anticipated impacts, and general attitudes towards fees are worthy of additional investigation.

The complexities of implementing a fee program across diverse communities' expectations and preferences are an important finding. Flexibility within programs of such a large scope could increase implementation suc-

cess, wherein tailoring the program to assist with some of the affected communities' concerns is recommended. Expectations of the various communities served would need to be understood to make the program work well. Communication regarding how those expectations and preferences are being addressed would also be important.

The measure of social trust appears to have great utility in the study of reactions to and acceptance of land management agencies' actions. The ability to quantify social trust is desirable, given its reported importance as an influence in agency/public interactions (Lime and Lewis, 1997; Slovic, 1997). Use of Earle and Cvetkovich's (1995) scale sheds light on the role of trust in community reactions to the fee program.

Findings point to the importance of trust in understanding the selected communities' anticipated response to the recreation fee program proposed by the Enterprise Forest Project in Southern California. Trust can be addressed in a variety of ways by public land managers. Communication may be central in the establishment and maintenance of trust. For example, the necessity for agency actions as well as their rationale should be clearly stated. Public land managers need to be open to establishing a dialogue about why certain decisions are made. Openness should extend to a sense of accountability to the publics served. Specifically, as a program is implemented its effects and outcomes should be monitored, and reported back to the publics served. For example, in the case of fee implementation it is important to communicate how fee proceeds will be used. One might also wish to report what impacts, if any, are seen on visitation levels and visitor profiles for an area. It is our opinion that many of the concerns expressed in the focus group discussions could be answered through demonstrated success of the fee program and communications focused on that demonstrated success. The burden of proof for actions and programs in public land management rests with the agency. In addressing that burden of proof, public trust should be an overriding concern.

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