

Climbing could get more costly

New permit likely required to summit Mount Hood beginning in 2023

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Climbing Oregon's tallest mountain will likely require a new permit beginning in 2023.

The U.S. Forest Service will propose a rule this month requiring anyone heading above 9,000 feet on Mount Hood to get a special permit that would cost around \$20 per person, per climb, or \$100 for a season, the agency told the Statesman Journal.

The mountain's summit is 11,249 feet. There would be an unlimited number of permits available, at least in the first year, marking a contrast to permit systems on South Sister and Mount St. Helens that are used to limit crowding.

"This permit wouldn't be required for any ski area, the Timberline Trail or for the vast majority of the mountain," Mount Hood National Forest spokeswoman Heather Isben said. "This is really just for the technical climb to the summit."

The new permits come in the wake of a growing number of people and accidents reported on Mount Hood, one of the most frequently climbed glaciated mountains in the United States.

"We are seeing a lot more people up there," said Nick Maslen, president of Portland Mountain Rescue, which conducts rescues on Mount Hood. "It has kind of been a perfect storm ever since the pandemic closed things down and the outdoors was the first thing people get outdoors and do, and that's brought the potential for more accidents."

Ibsen said the Forest Service will seek comment on the permit requirement over the summer, after they release their formal proposal in about a month.

"We're genuinely interested in what people think about this proposal, what they think needs changing or how we could do this a different way," she said. "It shouldn't just be a 'boo' or 'yay' type of comment, but people's experiences on the mountain and ways to make the experience better."

Currently, climbers are required to fill out a free self-issue wilderness permit



Climbers head for the summit of Mount Hood, Oregon's tallest mountain. TYLER DODDS

at Timberline Lodge, but it's not clear how many actually do, while other climbers start at different locations, leading to an incomplete accounting of numbers on the mountain, Ibsen said.

Why a new permit and where would the money go?

Those planning to climb to Mount Hood's summit would be required to purchase the permit before heading up the mountain from the website Recreation.gov.

Officials are also hoping to make them available for purchase in person at ranger district offices and Wy'East Timberline Lodge "to offer more options for climbers," Ibsen said.

There are several reasons to require a new permit, Ibsen said, including:

1: The money would be used to hire two additional climbing rangers who could help with safety on the mountain. Currently, there is only funding for one climbing ranger on Hood. The money would also go toward improved signage

and giving each climber a free waste bag — known as a WAG bag — to reduce human waste on the peak.

"There has been an increase in people climbing, and that includes people with very little climbing experience," she said. "This would allow us to hire additional climbing rangers who can talk with climbers along the route and really improve the safety experience and reduce human waste issues."

2: Currently, many climbers, including those without experience, can simply show up at Timberline Lodge and attempt to climb Mount Hood, without any real idea of what's above them. A permit requirement would force climbers to have a better understanding of the risks by bringing them "increased interaction with safety information," Ibsen said.

3: The permit would allow the Forest Service to gather data and get hard numbers on how many people are actually climbing the mountain and what times of year.

"This will get us much better num-

bers on how many people are climbing on a busy weekend, for example, or how many people are climbing the busiest routes," Ibsen said. "Right now we really only have anecdotal information on numbers but we do know it's impacting the wilderness and parking."

Ibsen declined to say whether the number of permits would be limited in the future, as a tool to limit crowding, which has occurred in a number of places across Oregon and the West. But it would give the agency the numbers to make that case in the future.

"That conversation is probably down the road but there won't be any limit in 2023," Ibsen said.

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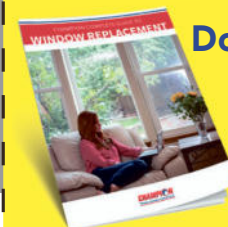
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