

# Mt. Emily Recreation Area Parking Permit Program

## **Parking Fee Subcommittee Background**

Subcommittee was enacted at the November 2022 MERA Advisory Council meeting. The purpose is to evaluate a possible parking permit fee for non-motorized parking areas of Mt. Emily Recreation Area (MERA). Parking fees could provide funding for the operation and enhancement of the non-motorized trail system.

Subcommittee members met on November 20, 2022. Committee members completed individual research and then met again on January 11<sup>th</sup> 2023. The Subcommittee followed up on this research a second time January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024.

## **Proposal and Overview**

MERA was created with the intent to be self-sustaining without the use of Union County general funds. Currently OPRD grant opportunities for operations and maintenance are utilized to support MERA's motorized trail system. Revenue generated from a parking permit system would be utilized for operations and maintenance on MERA's non-motorized trail system.

The Parking Permit Program will designate fee parking at MERA's non-motorized trailheads. Individuals wishing to park in these designated fee areas will be lawfully required to obtain a MERA parking pass prior to parking. Parking passes will be transferable between vehicles, but only valid for one vehicle at a time. We propose the start date of the parking program begin January, 1 2025 with a grace period with no citations being issued January, 1 2025 – December, 31 2025.

## **Key Items and Recommendations**

- MERA was created with the intent to be self-sustaining without the use of Union County general funds
- Oregon State Parks O&M All-Terrain Vehicle Grant Program has been the largest source of grant funding for MERA. Volunteer work and in-kind support from Union County has developed MERA into a valuable asset. Trail use has grown significantly, and parking at Owsley Canyon Trailhead has increased in recent years.
- Any parking permit system should not impact motorized recreation users on the Fox Hill areas of MERA. Motorized users have already directly and indirectly provided funding to MERA by purchasing OHV permits, which makes it possible for MERA to receive O&M funding.
- Any parking permit system should not negatively impact Grande Ronde Bowman Club's use of the archery range.
- Parking Ordinance do not appear to impact recreational immunity land in Oregon.
- Other areas around the state have implemented parking ordinances such as Hood River County Forestry, Rocky Point, and Sandy Ridge.

- Any parking permit system should be easy to administer.
- Any parking permit system should include day and annual passes, and allow online purchases.
- Trailheads that require a parking fee should display clear signage and messaging.
- Union County has set aside \$40,000.00 of APRA funds to help start a parking program.

### **Program Recommendations**

1. Fee parking areas should include the Owsley Canyon Trailhead, Lower Igo Trailhead, and Upper Igo Trailhead.
2. No fee shall be collected for recreationist who choose to use Mt. Emily County Road to access MERA.
3. “No parking” signs should be posted at the Owsley Access area turn around. The road past the archery range is a private road in which the owner allows MERA users to travel across to access MERA. Owsley Access should remain open for local access only.
4. Two permits types should be provided.
  - a. Day Use Parking Pass
  - b. Annual Parking Pass
5. There should be three permit rates.
  - a. \$5 - Day Use Parking Pass
  - b. \$30 - Annual Parking Permit
  - c. \$20 - Annual Parking Permit for military, veterans, EMS, law enforcement, and low income families
6. Day Use passes and annual permits should be purchased online at the [meetmera.org](http://meetmera.org) website.
7. Proof of purchase – MERA users will use the information from their online purchase to fill out the temporary permits provided at each trailhead. Permits should be placed on the rearview mirror with the information from their order facing out. People who order an annual pass shall use the temporary permit until they receive their annual permit in the mail.
8. Length of validation will be for the date of purchase for the day use, or for the calendar year for the annual permit. Annual permits will not be discounted if purchased later in the year.
9. It should be the responsibility of Union County Parks staff to issue warnings and citations when a day use or annual pass is displayed improperly or absent. Citation fees should be between \$50-100 with the option to receive an annual pass when the citation is paid. Citations should be paid online at [meetmera.org](http://meetmera.org).
10. Bailment language that is determined by an attorney should be displayed on the [meetmeag.org](http://meetmeag.org) website, the parking pass, and on trailhead signs.

11. Parking Permit Exemptions- Daily Access Exceptions: The MERA Coordinator may grant exceptions to the day-use parking permit requirement under the following circumstances:

- a. Emergency vehicles;
- b. Government vehicles on official business;
- c. Business and delivery vehicles on official business;
- d. Park concessionaires and their employees;
- e. A person entering the park to engage in specially permitted non-recreation activities;
- f. Park volunteers on duty in the park;
- g. A person with a permit issued by another entity with which the department has a written agreement to honor their passes;
- h. Other persons as designated by the director.