

2021 SKI AREA FEE RETENTION BILL SUMMARY

Ski areas generate roughly \$39M in U.S. Forest Service permit fees (10-year average) annually, which are then remitted to the Treasury. This bill would retain a portion of those fees in local forests to improve ski area permit and program administration, the processing of ski area proposals, and to support non-ski area recreation permit administration, visitor services and other purposes. Beneficiaries of this legislation include the Forest Service; the 122 ski areas operating on National Forest System lands in thirteen states; non-ski area recreation permittees; mountain communities; and the recreating public. Under this legislation, approximately \$27M would be retained annually by the Forest Service.

Benefits of Ski Fee Retention

Resources collected through Ski Fee Retention would provide the Forest Service with the staffing capacity it needs to administer ski area permits and review ski area proposals for future improvements. Improving the agency's capacity to administer permits and review proposals is important for providing ski areas with the certainty they need to make business decisions on private investments in needed public lands infrastructure. This bill will help facilitate implementation of year-round recreation activities, thereby creating year-round jobs and boosting rural economies. It will also improve permit administration for outfitters, guides and other recreation permittees. Visitors will benefit through better resourced trailhead services (e.g. parking, plowing, toilets, and trash), interpretation, signage, and avalanche forecasting and education. Finally, the bill will help improve wildfire preparedness planning and coordination and support the leasing of USFS Administrative Sites for workforce housing and other community needs.

Partial Retention of Fees

Forests with ski area fees in excess of \$15M annually would retain 60% of the fees locally. The remaining 40% would continue to go to the Treasury. Forests with ski area fees at or below \$15M annually would retain 75% of the fees locally. The remaining 25% will continue to go to the Treasury.

Expenditures for Ski Area-Related Purposes

Seventy-five (75) percent of the total fees retained would be allocated to ski area-related purposes including permit administration, processing of ski area proposals, staff training, interpretive and visitor services, and wildfire preparedness planning and coordination. To be clear, these fees are for the Forest Service's use and will not pay for actual improvements at ski areas.

To the extent a forest with greater than \$15M in annual ski area permit fees can't reasonably spend the money retained, the Secretary can allocate fees to other forests or regions for the same ski area-related purposes. The originating forest, however, is guaranteed a minimum of 25% of those retained fees. To the extent a forest with \$15M or less in annual ski area permit fees can't reasonably spend the fees retained, the fees may be allocated to other forests or regions for ski area-related purposes. In this case, the originating forest is guaranteed a minimum of 40% of those retained fees.

If the Secretary determines that all ski area-related needs have been met across all regions, any remaining amounts can be allocated to other (non-ski) recreation purposes, visitor services and administrative sites leasing. This remaining amount would come *in addition* to the 25% allocation for the purposes explained below.

Expenditures on Other Recreation Permit Administration, Visitor Services and Administrative Sites Leasing

Twenty-five (25) percent of the ski area permit fees retained by a forest would be allocated to other recreation (non-ski area) purposes on the forest or region, including permit administration, avalanche forecasting and education, recreation management, maintenance and services, and the leasing of USFS administrative sites for workforce housing and other purposes.

Limits on Expenditures

Retained fees may not be used for wildfire suppression outside a ski area permit boundary or for the acquisition of federal lands.

Retained ski area permit fees are in addition to appropriated funds, not in lieu of appropriated funds.