

June 1, 2021

**MEMBER
JURISDICTIONS**

City of Glenwood
Springs

City of Steamboat
Springs

Town of Hayden

EAGLE COUNTY

Avon
Basalt
Eagle
Gypsum
Minturn
Red Cliff
Vail

GRAND COUNTY

Fraser
Granby
Grand Lake
Hot Sulphur Springs
Kremmling
Winter Park

JACKSON COUNTY

Walden

PITKIN COUNTY

Aspen
Snowmass Village

SUMMIT COUNTY

Breckenridge
Blue River
Dillon
Frisco
Montezuma
Silverthorne

Senator Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for Ski Area Fee Retention Bill

Dear Senator,

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, representing 30 municipalities and counties in the heart of mountain recreation country, believes the 2021 Ski Area Fee Retention Bill is a step in the right direction. This bill is not only critical to maintaining the active management of our national forests by providing much needed support to the United States Forest Service (USFS), but it also greatly aids in the sustainability and vibrancy of our mountain communities and local recreational opportunities.

By allowing local national forests to retain the fees generated from the ski areas in which they originate, forest managers are better equipped to address the many impacts creating a crisis in our forests. Retaining ski fees to mitigate adverse impacts locally is similar to fees for other uses such as timber, grazing and filming. The White River National Forest, which manages 85% of the land in three of our five counties, creates more ski revenue and has more visitors than any other forested area; however, like many of our local forests in Colorado, it is being overrun. Although the 2018 and 2019 proposed bills would have been effective, this newest iteration of the bill is more thorough and much stronger in its support of local governments as well as the ski areas.

In recent years, our counties have been supplementing USFS for front country ranger services. We believe the language specified in 2021 Ski Area Fee Retention Bill will alleviate this continual need for county support and truly encompasses what we envision when we think of managing these lands for a variety of public uses. We appreciate that the bill not only outlines the parameters for retaining these fees to the local forest, but that it prohibits these funds for certain uses such as fire suppression which has overwhelmed USFS budgets for years. The creation of two independent funds will greatly help with the funding and prioritizing of projects. With one fund retaining 75% expressly for ski area purposes and the other preserving 25% for "recreation management, maintenance and services," together they satisfy the many needs expressly lobbied for by our public and local communities. Additionally, by allowing the discretion for portions of the 75% to spill over into other uses once all ski area backlogs, other ski area related need, and "all necessary program expenditures" have been addressed, enables the fund to adapt and re-balance to address pressing concerns and provide for robust and nimble management—week to week and year to year.

After a decade of underfunding recreation management, from boots on the ground at trailheads and un-authorized camping, to staffing of offices, it is time to adequately fund the USFS. The 2021 Ski Area Fee Retention Bill directly promotes increased funding which will enable the USFS to properly do its job by addressing the rapidly evolving needs including overrun trailheads, garbage and human waste at dispersed camping sites, trail improvements and recreation infrastructure; as well as working closely with nearby land-partners to address wildfire mitigation and processing forest management plans in a timely manner. Improved services should also include timely NEPA review of ski area plans and increased office and field staff to best meet the needs of our four-season recreational activities.

NWCCOG fully supports the 2021 Ski Area Fee Retention Bill as drafted and is hopeful its implementation will provide our local USFS with the long overdue and necessary support imperative for its operations to run successfully and efficiently for decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alyssa Shenk', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Alyssa Shenk, NWCCOG Council Chair