

**National Ski Areas Association's  
Testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee's  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests & Public Lands on  
H.R. 6553**

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the National Ski Areas Association. NSAA has 126 member ski areas that operate on National Forest System lands. These public land resorts are in the great states of Arizona, California (where Mammoth is located), Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming. Twenty (20) members of the House Natural Resources Committee have public land ski areas in their state.

### **Background**

Public land ski areas work in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to deliver an outdoor recreation experience unmatched in the world. Our longstanding partnership—dating back to the 1940s, is a model public-private partnership that greatly benefits the American public. The recreation opportunities provided at public land resorts help improve the health and fitness of millions of Americans, get more kids in the woods, promote appreciation for the natural environment and benefit rural economies. Last year, we had a record 60.5 million skier/snowboarder visits, and over 50% of those visits occurred on public land.

Ski areas are the perfect place to accommodate large numbers of forest visitors. Make no mistake about it -- ski areas are *developed* sites. They inspire appreciation for the natural environment, but they also represent a built environment that is accessible and convenient for most people. Resorts own and maintain all of the facilities and improvements within their permit boundaries. In the current climate of shrinking agency budgets, this is a tremendous benefit to the Forest Service and recreating public. Resorts are responsible for controlling and mitigating impacts to the land within their permit boundaries. The concentration of visits in this controlled setting can help alleviate the burden of public demand for recreation on other parts of the National Forest. In sum, the ski area/Forest Service partnership benefits the ski areas, the Forest Service, the public and the environment.

### **Summer and Year-Round Activities**

Summer and year round activities are not new to ski areas. Resorts across the country have offered summer activities for decades. These activities include mountain biking, scenic chairlift rides, hiking, ziplines, alpine slides and many others. Photographs of resort summer activities have been provided to the Subcommittee for your reference.

To date, the authorization of summer activities at public land resorts has occurred in a variety of ways. Many ski area special use permits reference “year-round” or “four season” resorts. Forest Service policy encourages the year-round use of resort facilities. Even Congress recognized the four-season nature of resorts in 1996 by including the term “gross year-round revenue” in our fee system (16 USC 497c).

So what is new? Environmental groups are now challenging the Forest Service’s authority to allow summer activities at ski areas under the 1986 Ski Area Permit Act. Additionally, Forest Service policy on summer activities is unclear, and as a result, agency decision making on summer activities varies greatly from region to region. Rather than address these challenges and concerns on a piecemeal basis, the ski industry is respectfully requesting that Congress update the 1986 Act to clarify the authority for summer uses and reflect changes in winter uses as well. Much has changed on the slopes in the past 20 years. Snowboarding, which incidentally is not mentioned in the 1986 Act, has grown significantly, now accounting for 32% of our visits. Ski areas have diversified their offerings in both winter and summer in response to changing customer preferences. Summer activities are playing an increasingly important role at mountain resorts. As a result, we need a national and comprehensive approach to addressing these changes through an Act of Congress. We thank Congressman Udall for appreciating and understanding this need and introducing HR 6553 in response.

The clarifying language in HR 6553 would provide for more consistent decision making, afford USFS line officers a higher level of confidence in authorizing summer and year-round activities and more accurately reflect what is now taking place at modern, four season resorts. The bill would require summer and year-round activities to be natural resource-based, occur outdoors and harmonize with nature to the extent practicable. The bill would not alter the status quo with respect to who makes the ultimate decision of what is appropriate at any given site. The Forest Service would continue to have discretion to approve or not approve any site-specific proposal for summer or year-round facilities.

### **The Benefits of Summer and Year-Round Activities**

The ski industry supports HR 6553 because of the numerous benefits associated with providing summer and year-round activities at ski areas. These include:

- Providing health and fitness benefits to the public throughout the year;
- Getting kids off the couch and out into nature and reducing recent obesity trends;
- Helping kids forge a life-long connection to, and increasing their appreciation of, the natural environment;
- Introducing visitors to outdoor recreation experiences in summer that may encourage them to recreate outdoors in winter as well;
- Allowing ski areas to recoup some of the significant investments made on infrastructure and increase the use of existing facilities.
- Offsetting potential declines in operating days or revenue caused by challenging weather events or climate change;

- Offering alternatives to skiing to meet the demand of *all* members of a family and providing more variety to destination visitors;
- Supporting the Forest Service in meeting its duty to provide outdoor recreation opportunities to the public, and potentially increasing fees paid to the Forest Service;
- Offering summer recreation opportunities in a controlled and mitigated setting and alleviating the burden and impacts of dispersed recreation on the forests; and
- Significant, positive economic impacts including creating more year-round employment opportunities in rural communities and stabilizing the local economy.

### **Ski Areas and Sustainability**

Ski areas take their sustainability role seriously. The ski industry launched the Sustainable Slopes Program, a comprehensive program for improving environmental performance in resort operations, in 2000. In 2002, we adopted a climate change policy. We have aggressively implemented that policy and have a longstanding and successful partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) called “Keep Winter Cool.” Sixty-eight (68) resorts purchase green energy for their operations through Renewable Energy Credits (RECs), and 34 of those resorts offset 100% of their electrical energy use with RECs. Several resorts are generating renewable energy on-site using wind, solar and micro-hydro technology, and many more plan to do so in the future. Resorts are also using green building techniques, retrofitting existing facilities to save energy, using alternative fuels such as biodiesel in resort vehicle fleets, and providing or promoting car pooling or mass transit use by guests and employees. Resorts provide their customers the opportunity to purchase “green tags” to offset their emissions and “ski pollution free” or purchase green energy in their homes. We understand how important the environment is to you, the land management agencies, the public and our business. We understand that our customers are coming to the mountains to experience nature. Our summer activities will comply with NEPA and other environmental laws, complement the spectacular natural environment in which we operate, and offer our guests the tasteful experience that they desire.

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Thank you for your consideration of these remarks and the opportunity to address the Subcommittee today.