

**Statement for the Record
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**Before the Colorado General Assembly
Senate Agriculture, Natural Resources & Energy Committee
Concerning Opposition to New Special Use Permit Water Requirements**

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Good afternoon Chairwoman Schwartz and Members of the Committee. My name is Craig Bobzien, and I am the Deputy Regional Forester for the Rocky Mountain Region of the USDA Forest Service.

I greatly appreciate the work the general assembly has done to address challenging natural resource issues in Colorado, and I'm grateful for this opportunity to provide a statement.

National Forest System lands occupy approximately 192 million acres of forests and grasslands in 43 states. We recognize the importance of our public national forest lands to the ski industry and local communities. The Forest Service fully supports the ski industry and the outdoor recreation economy. We estimate that skiers and snowboarders at the 22 ski areas on national forests in Colorado contribute approximately 1.5 billion dollars to local and state economies.

Skiing is part of the identity and economic livelihood of Colorado. We are known around the world for these opportunities, and ski areas in the national forests contribute substantially to rural and state economies and to the unique quality of life here. It is our obligation to help provide the natural resources now and in the future, and to work with the ski industry to achieve that goal. Together, we can find effective solutions that support a strong ski industry, keep the water with ski area activities to sustain local communities, and ensure the viability of these recreation opportunities.

Corporate interests may fluctuate, but our obligation to publically-owned National Forest System lands and the uses they support are for the long term. Our water rights policy for activities that we permit on National Forest System lands exists to serve that goal. It helps sustain skiing in the national forests, which is a common interest the public, our communities and the many businesses involved in supporting outdoor recreation have. We know that the need for snowmaking is likely to grow, as evidenced by our current prolonged drought and warmer winters, which increases the importance of these issues for the industry and the public.

We want mountain communities to thrive based on the success of recreational opportunities offered in nearby national forests. By ensuring that water stays with ski area uses such as snowmaking and other purposes necessary for ski area operations,

Forest Service policy supports the long term viability of these activities that are so important to skiers, the mountain communities, and visitors from around the world.

Today I am here to speak about Colorado House Joint Resolution 13-1004, related to the permitting of ski areas on national forest system lands. I would like to address some of the issues that are raised in the resolution.

In a December 19, 2012, ruling in the United States District Court for the District of Colorado in *National Ski Areas Association, Inc. v. United States Forest Service*, the 2012 ski area directive was vacated. The court declined to rule on the substance of the directive and indicated that the agency should proceed with public notice and comment for this type of directive.

In response to this ruling, the Forest Service will be moving forward with a public process that will allow ski areas and other constituents to work together to address these issues with a long term goal of a thriving ski industry where water needed for recreational ski area activities stays with these ski area purposes. By early August 2013, the Forest Service intends to publish a notice of a proposed ski area water rights clause in the Federal Register with a 60-day comment period. The Forest Service anticipates publishing a notice of a final clause in the Federal Register by February 2014.

A series of stakeholder meetings is planned before publication of the proposed clause. These meetings are taking place in Denver CO, Salt Lake City UT, and Lake Tahoe CA. The Denver stakeholder meeting will be held on April 16.

I anticipate that this process will allow us to move forward with a dialogue in an inclusive manner with all interested stakeholders. I look forward to working with you in that process to find creative solutions that benefit Colorado and the nation.

I have submitted written testimony to the Committee for the record, and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to come before you today.