

Boots in the Forest

ROPEWAY ENGINEER

Hi, I'm Curt Panter, a ropeway engineer for the Intermountain and Pacific Southwest Regions. My work takes me to all the ski areas that operate on the National Forests in Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada, and California. A big part of my job is making sure ski lifts and other ropeways are installed properly and operate safely.

Where were you when this photo was taken??

I was at a former ski area in the Abajo Mountains, part of the Manti-La Sal National Forest in southeast Utah.

What were you doing that day?

I was overseeing a contract to remove an abandoned ski lift. Because of the terrain and location, we determined that removal by a helicopter was the best option.

What kind of education and training did you need to become a ski lift engineer and then to join the Forest Service?

Since my father was the mountain manager at Powder Mountain in Northern Utah, I grew up in the ski industry and spent a lot of time at the state's ski areas. A neighbor of ours was in the ropeway engineer position that I'm in now. When I became aware of what he did for a living, I became very interested. I obtained a civil engineering degree with the intent of someday working for the Forest Service.

What is a typical day for you?

One of my main responsibilities is to attend and oversee an acceptance test and inspection, which occurs after the new ropeway has been installed and prior to public operation. This can take place over two or three days.

What kind of footwear do you typically wear?

During these commissioning tests and inspections, we wear safety boots with adequate traction and protection. They're necessary because we are in mountainous terrain and in ropeway machinery rooms that house a lot of moving parts.

During the operating season, we visit the ski area and inspect the ropeways while in operation. To do this, we wear skiing equipment to access each ropeway and speak to operators and attendants to make sure their training is adequate and that they have proper documentation.



Curt wears safety boots with good traction when working around ski lifts.

SKI AREAS IN THE INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

With 122 ski and snowboard areas across the country, National Forests offer deep powder adventures and wide-open groomed runs with appeal for both beginners and veterans alike.

The Intermountain Region has 21 permitted ski areas that are in part or entirely located on National Forest lands. These facilities vary from large world-class Olympic venues to smaller local ski areas. They provide exciting winter downhill and Nordic ski experiences. See the [Intermountain Region's Map of Ski Areas](#) for names, locations, and links to websites.

What do you like most about your job?

It's interesting to interact with the ski industry and I think that is what I enjoy the most. It's very dynamic and there is a lot of camaraderie even though ski areas are in competition with one another. The ski areas that are under Forest Service special use permits are providing an important service as far as recreation on national forest lands.

"In the 15 years that I've worked for the Forest Service, I don't remember ever waking up and not wanting to come into work."

If you had to pick another occupation, what would it be?

That's a very difficult question because I feel that I'm actually doing what I want to do, no matter what. This might sound impossible but, in the 15 years that I've worked for the Forest Service, I don't remember ever waking up and not wanting to come into work.

[Read the full interview](#)

[Return to Boots in the Field home page](#)

Numerous rope tows, ski lifts, and other ropeways were constructed in the 1930s and 1940s as skiing became more popular.



Alta Ski Lift
Wasatch NF



Bald Mountain Ski Lift, 1940
Sawtooth NF



Cable Tow Sled, 1938
Idaho NF



Mt. Millicent Ski Lift, Brighton
Wasatch NF