

What is a Special Use Permit?

Special Use Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a Special Use Authorization and why is it needed for certain activities on public lands (Organized Recreation activities, Commercial Film & Photography, Transportation Systems, Utility Systems, Facilities and more)?

A Special Use Authorization is a legal document such as a permit, term permit, lease, or easement, which allows occupancy, use, rights, or privileges on National Forest System (NFS) lands. The authorization is granted for a specific use of the land for a specific period of time. Most activities that allow occupancy, use, rights, or privileges must have a Special Use Authorization. Examples of these activities include hosted recreation events, commercial outfitting and guiding, water transmission, telecommunications, the granting of road and utility rights-of-ways and most other third party public land uses.

How do I apply for a Special Use Authorization?

To begin the process, proponents are responsible for completing and submitting an Application Form. Before completing the Application Form, the applicant should completely review the form and schedule a pre-application meeting with a Special Use Permit Administrator. Applications are available at [Pre-Application Form](#). A Special Use Permit Administrator can also provide an Application Form and will give instructions whenever specific items like plans or survey maps are required.

The USDA Forest Service carefully reviews each application to determine how the request affects the public's use of NFS lands and potential resource impacts. NFS lands are not made available if the overall needs of the individual or business can be met on non-NFS lands. Detailed information is listed in the [Code of Federal Regulations in section 36 CFR part 251, subpart B - Special Uses](#) .

What is the timeline for reviewing an application for proposed activities?

The length of time that it takes to issue a Special Use Authorization depends on a number of factors including:

- The type and scope of the activity
- Whether structures are proposed
- The anticipated environmental impacts and resultant level of analysis and public involvement required
- Whether or not there are appeals or legal actions contesting the permit issuance
- Coordination with appropriate agencies

The best way to ensure you receive a timely authorization is to start as early as possible and contact the Special Use team at SM.FS.BDFspecUses@usda.gov to assess an estimated processing time.

What are the fees?

For one time events such as a recreation event or commercial film/photography use, there is a one time use fee charged to the holder of a Special Use Authorization depending on factors like gross revenue or days of activity on NFS lands and number of people involved. For continuing uses, there are annually land use fees determined by multiple fee formulas depending on the type of use. In addition, the Special Use Authorization may require an upfront cost recovery fee to cover processing and monitoring costs for activity.

What are Cost Recovery Fees?

Cost recovery fees cover the administrative costs incurred by the USDA Forest Service to process a special use application or to monitor during implementation of a Special Use Authorization. The fee does not apply to non-commercial group use and recreation special use applications that require less than 50 hours to process. Fee determination is based on an estimate of the number of hours USDA Forest Service personnel will spend on work necessary to process an application and to monitor the implementation of a project. That estimate will be applied to the corresponding category and rate in the appropriate processing or monitoring fee schedule. For processing and monitoring requirements of less than 50 person hours, there is a fee schedule. A Cost Recovery Agreement for actual hours will need to be entered into by the proponent for processing and monitoring requirements over 50 hours.

Are there additional state and local requirements to uphold?

If the activity necessitates occupancy, use, rights, or privileges on adjacent non- NFS lands, or private property, any authorizations needed from these agencies, companies, or individuals must be obtained prior to USDA Forest Service permit issuance. If construction includes any structures, county approval and licensing may be required.

Who Do I Contact to get a more Information?

For more information on Special Use Authorizations, email SM.FS.BDFspecUses@usda.gov with a detailed description of the activity you are considering proposing, including the location and duration of the activity, and ask for a pre-application meeting with a District Permit Administrator.

San Bernardino National Forest Resource Links & Application Forms:

General information and application forms regarding Special Use permits on the San Bernardino National Forest are available at: [BDF Special Uses](#). Please submit proposals to SM.FS.BDFspecUses@usda.gov and include a detailed map of the area proposed for use.

General information about Special Use Authorizations from the USDA Forest Service is available at: [USDA Forest Service Special Uses](#).