

Forest Products Modernization: Innovation Underway

Streamlining Ski Area Timber Disposal in the Rocky Mountain Region

Chairlift at Crested Butte Mountain Resort in Colorado.
Photo by: Matthew Etzenhouser, USDA Forest Service.

In 2017, the Rocky Mountain Region of the USDA Forest Service began to develop a flexible contracting process to streamline timber disposal for ski area operations. Traditional Forest Service timber contracting procedures are overly stringent relative to the small scale, low risk and value associated with ski area timber disposal. For ski areas, timber disposal is usually a cost rather than a revenue generator.

Contracts often need to be flexible because projects may span multiple years, have partial completion, or begin on short notice. To address these issues, the Rocky Mountain Region will contract with ski areas using FS-2400-4 contracts for low-risk and low-volume timber disposal projects. FS-2400-4 contracts allow the use of "Designation by Description" (DxD), standard rates or comparison appraisals, and local volume tables. These processes offer the efficiency needed for successful ski area operations.

Ingredients for Success

Collaboration between ski area personnel and Forest Service staff is essential. Under FS-2400-4 contracts, Forest Service staff have the discretion to forgo marking and designation approval. Using DxD in small-scale projects, ski area personnel can carry out the designation process.

In addition, many projects require dual ski management and silvicultural expertise. For example, "glading" (i.e., thinning a stand to a heterogeneous skiable density) is an important ski area management activity that requires knowledge of both skiing needs and the forest health consequences of thinning.

Lessons Learned

Ski areas typically engage in three types of timber disposal, including routine maintenance, construction, and stand-level treatments. Each type of project entails differing needs for flexibility and oversight.

- **Routine maintenance:** Ski area maintenance requires ongoing individual hazard tree removal and road and trail

clearing. This recurring need is best served by permitting rather than timber contracting.

- **Construction and infrastructure:** Ski areas periodically cut timber for ski lift lines, ski trails, roads, facilities, and other amenities and attractions. These projects require high levels of flexibility in the contracting process because designation of timber for removal is by location rather than tree characteristics. These projects are best served with FS-2400-4 contracts. Due to the minimal control over removals in these contracts, the National Environmental Policy Act process takes on greater importance to mitigate environmental impacts.
- **Stand-level treatments:** Ski areas sometimes implement larger-scale timber removal for glading, ski area expansion, hazardous fuels reductions, and forest health restoration. These projects entail higher levels of risk than routine maintenance and construction. Sales larger than 500 ccf (hundred cubic feet) warrant marking, designation approval, and the transaction evidence appraisal method.

Next Steps

National Forests across the Rocky Mountain region have received outreach and training materials about flexible contracting for ski area timber disposal. This written guidance is available to share with other Forest Service regions. A pre-recorded AdobeConnect webinar on ski area timber disposal can be viewed at: <https://usfs.adobeconnect.com/p8jqcjqeytw/>.

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