

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**  
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
**FOREST SERVICE**  
**Before the**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**FEDERAL LANDS SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**Regarding**  
**H.R. 3400 – RECREATION NOT RED TAPE ACT**  
**October 3, 2017**

Thank you for the opportunity for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, to provide views on H.R. 3400, the Recreation Not Red Tape Act.

The Forest Service is deeply committed to connecting all Americans to the outdoors, and we value the important role played by guides and outfitters, resorts, schools, non-profit organizations, and others as partners in connecting people to recreational opportunities on national forests and grasslands. Outdoor recreation supports health and wellbeing. It also attracts people to visit, live and work in gateway and rural communities, and supports the economic vitality of those communities. Recreation on the National Forest System contributes over \$10 billion to the nation’s gross domestic product and supports more than 143,000 jobs, the vast majority of which are in gateway and rural communities.

USDA supports the overall goal of H.R. 3400 to improve recreation management on National Forest System lands and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee and the bill’s sponsors to ensure the bill achieves its goals. Our comments pertain to the effect of the bill on the Forest Service and management of National Forest System lands. USDA defers to DOI on the effects of the bill on DOI agencies and the lands under their jurisdiction.

Title I reaffirms the need to expedite and streamline the issuance of special use permits for guides and outfitters and recreation passes. USDA strongly supports this goal. Recently, the Forest Service initiated efforts to modernize our recreation special uses program including the development of a new ePermit platform and updating our special uses database system. We also identified gaps in policy and business practices contributing to the state of our current program including the backlog of thousands of expired recreation special use permits awaiting reissuance. With this knowledge, we would like to work with the Subcommittee to ensure that the bill language aligns with these advances and lessons learned. This includes implementation of the concept of a “cross-jurisdictional” special use permit.

The Forest Service supports the goal of improving the availability, convenience, and versatility of federal recreational lands passes as provided in Sections 102 and 103 and would like to work with the Subcommittee to adjust the language to ensure the goals of the legislation are met.

Currently, the Annual and Senior Recreational lands passes can be purchased online at [Recreation.gov](http://Recreation.gov) and at [Store.USGS.gov](http://Store.USGS.gov).

The goal in Title II of encouraging service member and veteran access to the outdoors is firmly supported by the Forest Service mission. Research shows that outdoor recreation contributes to both physical and mental health including lowering blood pressure, boosting immunity, and improving concentration. As health care providers continue to focus on preventative activities and lifestyles, the Forest Service believes that our National Forests and Grasslands will play an increasingly important role in enhancing community wellness.

Given the growing recognition of the importance of the outdoor recreation economy, both to the national GDP and to the vitality of gateway and rural communities, the goal in Title III of making recreation a priority is timely and relevant to our National Forests and Grasslands.

USDA supports Section 304 which allows for the retention of a percentage of permit fees paid by ski areas to the United States for their use of the National Forest System lands. The 122 ski areas on public lands accommodate about 30 million skier/snowboarder visits per year and generate approximately \$37 million in permit fees to the Treasury annually. Retained fees would be used at mountain sites to improve recreation opportunities for the future. This type of investment is critical as ski areas play an important role in job creation and economic development in rural areas.

The Forest Service manages 22 National Recreation Areas that draw visitors from across the nation and from around the world. The economic benefits manifest as both jobs and revenue to local, state, and regional economies. National Recreation Areas also contribute to the sense of place and quality of life for local residents and communities. There are extensive needs for investments to address existing deferred maintenance backlogs and to explore opportunities to broaden the scope and scale of benefits through potential additional designations. We look forward to improving and expanding National Recreation Area benefits that strengthen economies, enhance local communities, instill public conservation values, and encourage shared stewardship. We would like to work with the Subcommittee and the bill's sponsors to ensure the necessary skill sets and capacity are available and strategically placed to address the associated workload to achieve the bill's intent.

USDA fully supports the intent of Section 401 to promote volunteerism and service to enhance stewardship, recreation access, and sustainability of the resources, values, and facilities of US Forest Service units. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Service Corps is helping the Forest Service expand opportunities for young people and Veterans to work and learn on Forest units. Increased emphasis on Veteran engagement is an agency priority. Established volunteerism and service goals align well with the objectives outlined in the bill.

USDA supports the intent of Section 411 to work toward ensuring increased coordination and consistency in the management and maintenance of trails crossing jurisdictional boundaries. The

Forest Service believes that incorporating and applying standard management tools such as Trail Management Objectives and working collaboratively through the interagency National Trails Council to implement Section 411 would be effective means for accomplishing this intent.

As you are well aware, increasingly severe fire seasons are one of the greatest challenges facing the Nation's forests and 2017 was no exception. Fire now consumes greater than 60 percent of the Forest Service budget and transfers from non-fire accounts were necessary to cover the cost of fire suppression again this year. Our forecast models suggest wildfire seasons will continue to be longer and large fires more frequent; both of which are significant program cost drivers and challenge our capacity to deliver on recreation management and other critical components of our mission. We welcome any opportunity to work with the Subcommittee to identify the necessary statutory authorities to fix the fire funding situation.

We again thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide this statement, and look forward to working together on targeted amendments to improve the effect of this important bill.