

# WESTERN SLOPE NO-FEE COALITION

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## **Jackson County, CO Says “No” To Routt National Forest Fees *Pitkin County To Call For End Of Fee Demo***

NORWOOD, CO — Two more Colorado counties have taken steps to try and prevent the spread of the controversial Fee Demo program on federal land within their boundaries, bringing to twelve the number of Colorado counties officially opposed to Fee Demo.

In Walden, the Jackson County Board of County Commissioners acted to oppose a fee area that has been proposed by the Forest Service on the Routt National Forest. The fee would apply to skiers, snowshoers, and snowmobilers using Rabbit Ears Pass, Buffalo Pass, and the Hahns Peak area in winter. The Commissioners based their action largely on concern about the economic impact of the fee, since the public tends to avoid fee areas and their county is heavily dependent on tourism. The resolution states that “the Jackson County Board of Commissioners hereby requests that no new recreational fees be imposed on Federal lands under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program within the boundaries of Jackson County, Colorado after the date of adoption of this Resolution.” The resolution was adopted unanimously on February 9.

In Aspen, Pitkin County Commissioners held a 90-minute work session on February 10 with local residents, representatives from White River National Forest, and the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition. The move to request a resolution was spearheaded by local resident Malcolm McMichael, who expressed concern about increasing commercialization of public land. “Sooner or later,” said McMichael, “you will be asked to pay to do it all.” At the end of the work session, the Commissioners directed their staff to draft a resolution opposing Fee Demo, which they will vote on later this month. The resolution is expected to pass unanimously.

The Maroon Bells Wilderness in Pitkin County has been a Fee Demo area since 2001. Vehicles are charged \$10 to use a county road that accesses the most popular trailhead. A toilet at the trailhead, constructed at a cost of \$1.6 million, has been cited as a prime example of Forest Service financial mismanagement. “We funded this million-dollar toilet with taxes, but there’s not enough money for cleaning and supplies, so they make us pay a fee to use it,” said WSNFC spokesperson Kitty Benzar of Durango. “The answer

is not just giving the agencies more money, it's demanding better accountability for how the money is spent.”

The Routt National Forest proposal is for a new winter management plan that would separate motorized from non-motorized users. During the public comment period required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Forest officials solicited comments about the details of the plan, but not about whether or not a fee should be charged. Instead, the Forest Service proposal declares that “User fees are an administrative decision under the recreation fee demonstration project, and will be part of the management strategy in implementing any of the action decisions.”

[\[www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/rec\]](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/rec)

The Western Slope No-Fee Coalition has called for a new 30-day comment period specifically to address the fee issue. Coalition President Robert Funkhouser said, “Fee Demo has environmental, economic, and social impacts that should be considered as part of the NEPA process along with all other impacts. To conduct a scoping process that fails to take into account the most controversial aspect of the proposed action shows an utter disregard for public opinion is simply unacceptable in a publicly funded agency.”

The WSNFC is a broad-based group with members in 35 states that wants to end the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (Fee Demo) in the Forest Service, BLM, and Fish & Wildlife Service. The Coalition assists local residents to obtain anti-Fee Demo resolutions from their elected officials as one way to encourage Congress to terminate the program.

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