

**WESTERN SLOPE NO-FEE COALITION**  
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**WESTERN LEADERS IN MONTANA AND COLORADO CALL FOR  
REPEAL OF THE RAT**

Opposition continues to grow against a new fee scheme for recreational use of federally managed public lands. Known as the Recreational Access Tax, or RAT, the measure was buried as a rider in a 3,000-plus page appropriations bill in the waning days of the last congress.

In Montana, the state House of Representatives approved a resolution calling for repeal of the RAT by a vote of 92-8 on February 21st. The 100-member body is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. "This overwhelming vote shows the level of outrage that exists in Montana about this major change in public lands policy. Obviously this is not a partisan issue- this is a citizen issue," said Bob Raney, Executive Director of the Montana State Parks Foundation.

The measure, House Joint Resolution 13, now moves to the state Senate, where a favorable vote is also anticipated. It asserts that "Montana's culture, quality of life, and traditions demand free access to public lands" and goes on to say that "the Montana Legislature demands that H.R. 3283 be repealed by the United States Congress."

In Colorado, Ouray and San Juan Counties have also called for repeal of the RAT, joining San Miguel, Hinsdale, and La Plata Counties. All the county resolutions express dismay that a major change in public land policy was made behind closed doors, without congressional debate. They are directed to the leadership of the U.S. House and Senate, and to the Colorado congressional delegation.

U.S. Representative Ralph Regula (R-OH), who has no federal public lands in his district, originally introduced the RAT, officially known as the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, as H.R. 3283. It allows the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Reclamation to charge fees for recreational use of vast tracts of federally managed land by the general public. H.R. 3283 passed the House Resources Committee on a voice vote in October but never passed the floor of the House and was never introduced into the Senate. It became law nevertheless by being attached as a rider on the huge Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which must pass in order to keep all government operations funded.

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The RAT supersedes the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (Fee Demo). Fee Demo was originally a two-year test program but was repeatedly renewed and expanded and ran for eight years. Regula attached Fee Demo to the 1996 Omnibus Appropriations Bill as a rider, meaning that it, too, never was subjected to hearings or a vote on its own merits.

Robert Funkhouser, President of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition and a leading opponent of Fee Demo, is pleased that elected officials are taking action. “The RAT fundamentally changes the way our public lands are funded and managed. It will have a disproportionate impact on poor and rural Americans, and will mean that all Americans will be treated as customers of the land management agencies instead of as the owners of the land. I hope that every elected body in the country calls for repeal of the RAT so that Congress will reconsider its approval of this misguided program.”

The WSNFC is actively pursuing additional resolutions from elected bodies nationwide.