

Steamboat Springs (CO) Pilot

Buffalo Pass access fee in the works

By [Joel Reichenberger](#) Saturday, December 12, 2009

Steamboat Springs — A typical winter weekend morning at the Dry Lake Campground parking lot that serves as a winter access point for Buffalo Pass is the kind of mess that would drive a neat freak crazy. Trucks with long trailers quickly overflow the available parking and are lined up alongside the road before the sun climbs very high in the sky.

Snowmobiles zip around as dozens of riders load skis and snowboards and fuel up their machines.

It's no mystery to U.S. Forest Service recreation specialist Kent Foster as to why, either.

"Traditionally, that area gets the most snow in the state," he said. "When the ski area reports a foot, it gets 2 feet up there. ... You get a chance to ski powder snow waist deep or higher pretty much daily."

A backcountry permit made available for free at the Forest Service's Steamboat office and at the Buff Pass trailhead has been required for years, but the powder-hound magnet that the area has become has encouraged officials to institute a fee, as well.

Foster said that long-discussed idea could go into effect next season. A daily pass would cost \$5 and a season pass could be purchased for \$30 or \$40.

"We are planning on charging in the future ... next year, for 2010-11," he said Thursday morning.

That's not an idea that sits well with representatives from groups that frequent Routt County's most well-known backcountry powder stash.

Leslie Lovejoy, director of the Friends of the Routt Backcountry nonmotorized skiers and snowshoers group, and George Kostiuk, vice president of Routt Powder Riders snowmobile club, said they have reservations about the fee.

"As skiers, our reaction is that we don't feel like we should have to pay because we're not impacting anything to use that area," said Lovejoy, who said the onslaught of snowmobiles has pushed her to find new areas to recreate. "We don't cause that much of a problem, but they have to manage the motorized use so they have to charge money. We're not thrilled at having to pay."

Kostiuk said he gave up skiing once he started riding a snowmobile more than 30 years ago and used to love trips to the Buff Pass area. He said even though you rarely see

anyone else once you get away from the parking lot, the congestion in that lot has limited his trips.

“The only good parking lot (the Forest Service) has is up at Columbine. That’s the only place where you can find a spot and don’t have to get there at 8 a.m. or 6 a.m. or the day before to park,” he said. “My question is, what are they going to provide? What are they doing that deserves a fee?”

Those concerns aren’t new to Foster, however, and he said he hopes the Forest Service’s plans alleviate users’ concerns.

He said about 5,000 day-use permits are used every winter and he sees no reason why that would change with a small fee. That adds up to about \$25,000 in new revenue that could be plowed back into the area.

Kostiuk would love to see an expanded and reconsidered parking lot.

“One of the biggest problems is the design of it,” he said. “You can’t get in and out of them a lot of the times. The way they are made is just not efficient.”

Lovejoy, meanwhile, called for an entirely new parking lot, one that would help separate the riders from hikers and skiers.

“That seems reasonable to ask,” she said. “It would be nice to be able to park our vehicles where there weren’t a bunch of snowmobiles around. We don’t like the smell or the noise.”

Foster said anything’s possible.

“The money that would be collected from this would go back into the management of it and to make improvements to the parking,” he said. “In addition to the parking, we have some sanitation concerns and this would help us fund some improvements to that and to the traffic flow in the area.”

Whatever happens, no one expects interest in the area to subside.

“The quality of the skiing up there, it’s different than the ski area,” Foster said. “The backcountry experience is different, and Buffalo Pass is one of the ultimate places. To be this close to town and have that access, it’s pretty incredible.”

Comments



[isr57](#) (*anonymous*) says...

this has been going on forever, what will the extra money buy us, oh and cant we all just get along

December 12, 2009 at 8:37 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[bcpow](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

Can't we have our own parking lot?

Own your statement Leslie. You don't represent me.

If your experience is so disturbed in the parking lot you should probably stay at home. I ski in the Soda drainage and BTR all the time. Smile and wave to the riders and then head off on your tour. You will ski untracked pow with no machines around.

December 12, 2009 at 8:54 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[JustSomeJoe](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

a \$40 season pass for non-motorized users? For those earning their turns this is just a parking fee that subsidizes improvements needed for the sledgers. I don't drag some big-ass pickup truck and a 20 foot trailer up there, and take up 2-3 parking spots. I'm not saying big trucks and trailers don't deserve access to buff pass, but the parking lot issues should be owned by them as the trailers are causing the parking issue.

How about this? Two axles no fee, more than two axles have to pay a fee.

December 12, 2009 at 9:28 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[flower](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

bcpow---I love your attitude!!! Let everyone have their fun even if it isn't your cup of tea, it is public land.

December 12, 2009 at 11:53 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[sledneck](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

Ask the USFS if they will EXPAND the parking lot and you will get a no answer. The capacity is the big problem and that is the one thing they don't want to fix. Perhaps this is used as a bottleneck to limit the use on the forest. The USFS will probably offer a bathroom or to "improve" the parking but that's not enough. The trailhead already has a porta-potty and people do not come there to use the restroom. They are there to park and many weekends people are turned away due to lack of capacity. Fees are double taxation in the first place but it is really shameful for them to charge a fee unless they provide adequate capacity.

The same problem exists on Rabbit Ears. Over-crowded lots are a big problem. The local snowmobile club and others have asked repeatedly for more parking. None has been provided.

The lack of parking on Rabbit Ears is the most important issue. Why? Because when people come from the Front Range and can not find parking on Rabbit Ears they continue to Buff Pass. Since that lot is crammed they head north. Many of us have explained that to USFS but they don't seem to care. If they would provide ample parking on Rabbit Ears problems on Buff Pass and North Routt would be reduced. Even the traffic through town and up 129 would improve.

Ironically, the USFS has proposed to build a new, large parking lot. Where?? Several miles north of Columbine! Then they want to eliminate the old quarry lot. The current lot up there is not nearly as over-crowded as Buff or Rabbit Ears yet somehow that's the one they want to "fix". This plan also calls for the county to plow the extended road at taxpayers expense. At a time when the county is struggling to keep its own roads plowed why are they and the USFS considering more plowing in the snowiest part of the county on a USFS road nobody lives on?

December 12, 2009 at 3:31 p.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[sledneck](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

Oh, and for "just some joe". Snowmobilers pay a registration fee that pays to groom ALL trails on Buff and Rabbit Ears. Volunteer SNOWMOBILERS groom them. Those trails are open to non-motorized users who pay nothing! NO taxpayer funds are used. To me that means snowmobilers do "earn" their turns; and if you use any of those trails to access your skiing they "earn" yours too.

Additionally, snowmobile funds were used to originally build and improve parking lots on Rabbit Ears and Buff, You know, the ones YOU currently use.
They also pay road tax on fuel that is not used on the highway.
Two axles free??? YOUUUUUUUU don't want to be special.

December 12, 2009 at 3:43 p.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[mtroach](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

Sneck, what about access to buff from the walden side? Is that a possibility, If sledders are comming from the front range, could east side access help with the overflow problem?

December 13, 2009 at 9:09 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[JustSomeJoe](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

Sorry Sledneck, I avoid snowmobile trails for obvious reasons, noise and two stroke fumes. I break trail or use someone else's skin track, well away from trals groomed by snow machines. The issue at the Buff lot is too many trucks with trailers. Why should someone else pay to expand that lot? If it was non-motorized use only then there wouldn't be a parking problem. If it was motorized use only then the problem would still exist.

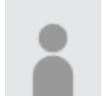
December 13, 2009 at 1:31 p.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



[bcpow](#) ([anonymous](#)) says...

Roach
Those sledders are mostly coming from 1-70 so the first thing they get to is rabbit ears. They could easily head towards the east side of buff but there is always more snow on the west side and nice powdertop roads to get you to the goods.

December 13, 2009 at 3:21 p.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



sledneck ([anonymous](#)) says...

Mtroat,

Comming from Walden or even Rabbit Ears will, Im guessing, still be no fee. However, you will probably have to have a permit to enter the backcountry ski area. The local snowmobile club grooms a trail from Rabbit Ears to Buff and also from the Grizzly Creek parking lot out of Walden so yes, that is no problem. The thought of getting front range users to go up towards Walden is not a bad idea. However, it is a lot farther (I think) than from Rabbit Ears.

JustSomeJoe,

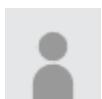
Thats fine that you don't use the trails. And I am all too familiar with the attitude of some who think their choice of recreation type should relieve them from fees of any kind. However, you park in the lot. Unless you can explain how YOUR vehicle does not take up space you are as much responsible for the over-crowding as anyone else. None of us are happy about this but the fee, if implemented, is going to be for everyone, like it or not. The other reason you pay is that you got \$\$\$ and the government wants it. Welcome to my world.

Lots of sledders use two axle vehicles too.

There is also a commercial snow-cat skiing operation based there that adds a fair amount of traffic.

The law says USFS must provide something for the fee. The question is what. They do not want to expand capacity and that is what the area needs. Once beyond the parking area there is ample room for everyone.

December 13, 2009 at 6:24 p.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



mtroat ([anonymous](#)) says...

I'm not sure that the walden side of Buff pass is any further from rabbit ears than Dry lake. If you take into account the time it takes to get through town. the downside is no services.

For the record, I'm a skier, but never goto Buff during the winter, there are so many other places that are not so crowed to goto, and I don't care for the attutude of the skiers, when it comes to sharing terrrain. A couple of years back, while the debate was raging about seperating Rabit Ears East/West, I gave up on the skiiers group because of a

statement made by the then Pres of the snowmobile club. I was at a meeting with reps of both the ski and the sno-mo group and we were discussing the conflicts that were happening on "little snowbird" and the sno'mo pres stated that we all need to share the great assets in our national forest, and not force the government to impact our recreation through fees and boundaries. He explained that many of the newer out of town sno-mo riders didn't know these historical boundaries and that education and signage could go a long way to ease conflicts. The skiers club disagreed and wanted sno'-mo's banned from all the areas that they had historically skied. I found myself agreeing with the sno-mo's and not the skiers, and backed out of the meeting to find areas where I could ski without involving myself into some political argument, and guess what, there's plenty of places to recreate in the Routt NF without conflict. I encourage everyone to get off the beaten path and away from those crowded parking lots and explore the rest of this great area, instead of keeping to the same old places and complaining about crowds.

I liken this debate to the Cyclist v Auto debate that comes every spring, sharing the assets of our great country should be a no-brainer, but it seems that some people need to be reminded that we all own these lands(and roads) and should learn to share what is ours.

December 14, 2009 at 7:58 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))



sledneck ([anonymous](#)) says...

The Walden side is not farther than Buff but it is farther than Rabbit Ears. Parking on RE and riding north to Buff is the norm. That is why I said ample parking there could help the ENTIRE situation. Even if we don't use Rabbit Ears we need to push for better parking there.

I share your view that there are better places than Buff for skiing. For sledding we need a substantial snowpack and buff gets that first and keeps it into May.

December 14, 2009 at 9:13 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))