

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0301

June 22, 2018

The Honorable Vicki Christiansen
Interim Chief
USDA Forest Service
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building
201 14th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Chief Christiansen:

We write to request your attention regarding the recent and total shutdown of summer recreational operations at the Arizona Snowbowl ski resort when its permit area was abruptly included in a closure notice by the Southwestern Region of the United States Forest Service (USFS) just a few days before what was expected to be a busy Memorial Day weekend. The closure has languished for nearly a month now, forcing significant layoffs, costing businesses hundreds of thousands of dollars and wreaking havoc on the local economy. Accordingly, we ask that the agency immediately provide a detailed briefing to signers of this letter and their staff justifying this closure, or immediately reopen the Arizona Snowbowl ski resort and allow the for planned summer operations to resume.

The apparent reason for the closure provided to Snowbowl operators Mountain Capital Partners (MCP) by USFS during a meeting convened at MCP's request is that USFS is concerned that if a fire were to start along Highway 180 or below the ski area, by a vehicle or otherwise, then the fire could spread to the ski resort and overwhelm its emergency and evacuation procedures.

The ski area in question is located approximately 6 miles away from the road and at an elevation of 3,000+ feet higher than the road itself, in one of the wettest areas of the State of Arizona. When coupled with the fact that ski areas in National Forests that are in similar situations as Snowbowl *vis a vis* altitude and wildfire threat routinely stay open even as large, active forest fires rage nearby, we are obliged to determine why USFS has taken the unprecedented action of abruptly closing the ski area for reason of a hypothetical rather than actual threat – and with only minimal notice and no consultation provided to resort operators.

Accordingly, we write you to urge in the strongest terms to comply with MCP's June 11, 2018 request to Regional Forester Cal Joyner and provide them with all information and modeling relied upon in making the determination to close Snowbowl on the basis of the hypothetical threat. Doing so could help substantiate the USFS's claims of catastrophic, closure-justifying danger, and is clearly in the interest of public transparency in order that the bases of the action can be independently verified. Immediate release of this information is critical in order to assist with mitigating the abruptness of the action and the clear harm that it has caused to working families, MCP, tourism and recreation in the area.

Finally, and as indicated to Regional Forester Cal Joyner in the aforementioned letter, MCP is actively in the process of examining how to modify its existent emergency and evacuation procedures so as to ameliorate the USFS's remote concern that the ski area is under imminent threat. In order to devise evacuation procedures which are responsive to that concern, MCP must know what the concern in fact is. And, if there is indeed so significant a threat that immediate shutdown is necessary, MCP will require this information in order than it can devise procedures that are most conducive to public safety during this and future seasons.

To that end, we expect that USFS will engage in the most basic of good-faith and transparent policymaking by clearly defining its determinations and submitting them to MCP along with its underlying data and study which informed such determinations. Clearly, the necessity that USFS do so is advanced on multiple distinct fronts, any one of which would be sufficient to require such disclosure.

It is in part the mission of the USFS to provide for the public safety as regards to wildfire and similar hazards. However, this obligation entails a further duty to demonstrate that its policy decisions which disrupt private operations and imperil the jobs of families who rely on recreational areas remaining open are sound, and not reliant upon unverified speculation or a principle of overprotection. If the possibility of wildfire or other public hazard alone were the criteria for shutting down recreational areas, it is likely no such areas within our National Forest System would be open tomorrow, nor for the next decade, nor the rest of the century. Ultimately, USFS serves the public, and must adequately notify and consult that public when it infringes on private operations in their interest. In this case, we find it has not done so, and must take immediate action to mitigate that failure.

Conversely, if the USFS cannot show that maintaining summer operations at the Arizona Snowbowl ski resort is vulnerable to wildfire that would be started 6 miles away and 3,000+ feet lower than the resort itself as they have claimed, then the resort should reopen immediately.

Again, we ask that the agency immediately provide a detailed briefing to signers of this letter and that staff justify this closure or immediately reopen the Arizona Snowbowl ski resort and allow the company to resume its planned summer operations. We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



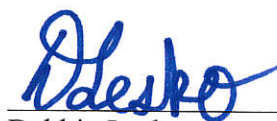
Rob Bishop
Member of Congress



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress



Martha McSally
Member of Congress



Debbie Lesko
Member of Congress



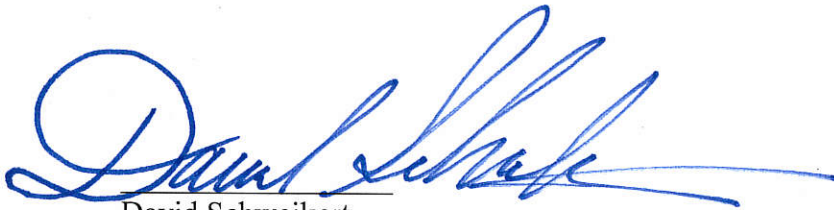
Steve Pearce
Member of Congress

Pete Sessions

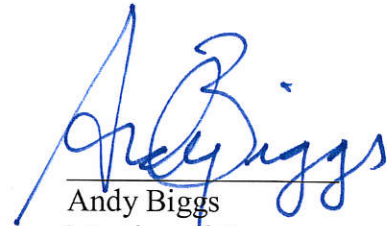
Pete Sessions
Member of Congress



John Curtis
Member of Congress



David Schweikert
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress

Cc: Cal Joyner, Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, U.S. Forest Service
Laura Jo West, Supervisor, Coconino National Forest