December 27, 2018

Senator Cory Gardner
Senator Michael Bennet
Representative Diana DeGette
Representative Doug Lamborn
Representative Scott Tipton
Representative-Elect Joe Neguse

Dear Colorado Delegation,

The Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) represents 40 municipalities, counties and resort associations that are largely dependent on the ski industry and tourism. CAST engages on issues of importance to its members and provides a forum for networking and information sharing around those issues. The organization uses the strength of the coalition to seek support for policy or legislation that will benefit and sustain mountain communities. It was founded on the premise that mountain resort communities face challenges and issues that are unique and different than those in the larger towns and cities along Colorado’s Front Range.

CAST has followed the Ski Area Fee Retention bill with great interest and we welcomed the opportunity to discuss the Act with Senator Bennet’s staff at our August 2018 meeting in Mt. Crested Butte. Senator Gardner’s staff was unable to attend due to a conflicting official event, but they requested we share the results of that discussion.

In short, CAST members would like to see a broader scope to this Act. The criteria currently included in the bill are narrowly defined and we would like to see trail maintenance and the U.S. Forest Services enforcement also benefit from the retention of ski area fees. Ski areas within the White River National Forest and on other national forests in Colorado draw millions of visitors each year, whom then also recreate heavily on the surrounding forest outside the ski area boundaries. Visitors, including families, retirees and Millennials, are likely to visit a ski area for part of their visit, but also spend time engaging in activities such as cross-country skiing, snowmobiling or snowshoeing on our public lands. The White River National Forest is the most visited forest in the country with over 10 million visitors a year, but lacks the funding to adequately manage the heavy recreational use and the much needed wildfire mitigation work that is critical to proactively protecting communities adjacent to U.S. Forest Service land.
As a result of inadequate funding and an increase in visitors, a number of CAST members are currently having to supplement their local USFS ranger district budgets with local dollars to address critical needs. For example, in Summit County, the fire districts, municipalities, and Summit County Government all contributed $130,000 this past summer to fund four full-time seasonal U.S. Forest Service wildfire mitigation patrols. This local investment also supported the local Sheriff’s Department backcountry patrol officers overtime pay to help identify unattended campfires, educate hikers and campers on campfire rules and regulations and manage dispersed camping violations. Vail and Eagle County are planning to set aside as much as $120,000 next summer to pay for USFS employees to monitor trails and campgrounds and to enforce backcountry rules. For years, Pitkin and Garfield Counties have funded efforts such as supplemental staffing for managing popular USFS trails, fire treatments and prescribed fires. These are just a few examples that demonstrate how local communities are coming together to help manage the greater regional impacts of ski resorts within our communities and the greater impacts to our local trails, parking areas, roads, law enforcement services, medical and social service needs.

We respectfully request that you consider dedicating any fees retained from ski area permit fees to support a broader scope of USFS needs. CAST would welcome the opportunity for further dialog on the Ski Area Fee Retention Act, and is happy to provide additional information if needed. Thank you for your ongoing support of the public lands that are so critical to our Colorado resort communities.

Sincerely,

Greg Clifton, CAST President