



**Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education
USFS Project on Recreational Permitting
*Background and Recent Updates***

The outfitter-guide permitting process for our National Forests can be overly complicated and serve as a barrier to accessing our public lands. But, we hope to see that change in the near future. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has made recent shifts to better streamline and expedite the recreational permitting process. Together with the Coalition for Outdoor Access (COA) and the American Alpine Club (AAC), AORE is launching a grassroots effort to partner with regional Forest Service staff as they navigate these positive changes. The following provides further background on USFS' recent permitting transformations.

Through the USFS Chief's June 2016 guidance, the USFS is committed to a moving away from overregulation and towards an attitude of "yes." Recent USFS efforts include:

- Better accommodating educational organizations, school groups and youth groups that seek access.
- Clarifying and simplifying policies for when special use permits are required for temporary and priority outfitted activities.
- Quickly processing activities that have nominal effects on the land, resources, or programs.
- Establishing a consistent approach to the tools used in the permit decision making process—needs assessments, capacity studies, and NEPA analyses—and conducting them only when necessary.
- Discussions about future development of an accessible online permit application system for a simplified and centralized system.
- Hiring staff to train permit administrators to eliminate the backlog and support and sustain process improvements.
- Developing more meaningful relationships with the public to better understand their needs.
- Reconsidering permitting moratoriums where appropriate.
- Developing standardized national training for staff on special use permitting.

Better public engagement and a streamlined permitting system will enable more people to enjoy our national forests via a facilitated experience. We are eager to support the advancement of these changes so that AORE member programs have access to the permits they need to teach their participants how to safely and responsibly enjoy our public lands.

Andy Nelson
Access Committee Chair
Association of Outdoor Recreation & Education
Andy.Nelson@colostate.edu