National
Forest
Homeowners

Advocacy, Education & Stewardship
Strengthening the Cabin Program

Summary of the

USDA Forest Service National Fee Retention Action Plan

The Recreation Residence National Fee Retention Action Plan was issued by the Forest Service Washington Office (WO) in November 2024. It incorporates many of the suggestions made by NFH for the expenditure of these funds. Overall, NFH leadership is encouraged, optimistic and supportive of the Plan.

This NFH summary is primarily direct quotes (*in italics)* from the Plan. Underlining added for emphasis.

Introduction

The Cabin Fee Act authorizes the FS to retain annual land use fees and transfer fees (fees) associated with recreation residences starting December 19, 2024, without further appropriation.

This Plan is intended to guide agency administrators and authorized officers in their decision-making processes as well as highlight those items to anticipate for accomplishment reporting to ensure accountability and transparency to meet leaders' intent.

Use of Funds

The WO will retain 3% of the fees and the National Billing Team retains 5% of the total fees *to perform recreation special use billing that would otherwise be the responsibility of the field. ... the remaining balance (92%) will be provided to the Regions with the expectation that the Region will retain 5% and invest the remaining 87% to the Forests/Ranger Districts.* Transfer fees account ... *for approximately $400k/year across the agency with 100% going back to the Forest performing the work...*

Every level of the agency will be accountable to the interests of those permit holders paying fees and intent of the Act when determining how the funds are used. To the maximum extent possible, while ensuring equity and accountability, the goal is to invest locally where the fees were generated.

Funds may be used for a range of agency expenses, starting with special use permit administrator salary, and then once fully staffed/funded to capacity - contracts, grants, agreements, or supplies that directly support the program. Funds are permanent, not appropriated funds. And ... *funds may accumulate so we can be strategic about specific investments.*

Local Administration

The Plan seeks to avoid multiple work responsibilities for the SUP administrator *and establish a program of work that enables the administrator to <u>focus on special uses</u> work.*

The funds may be used to facilitate oversight and management of recreation residences or the broader recreation program, with special use administration and management of <u>the recreation residence program being the priority.</u>

Priorities

*Fund, hire or place and train **staff to administer recreation residence special use permits** as well as program managers for the recreation residence program. Put **"boots on the ground"** as intended by the CFA. Funding/hiring and training staff to directly* support *<u>administering the recreation residence program is the top priority.</u>*

Every unit should have a permit administrator or be actively prioritizing filling that position. Staff hired/funded should focus on special use administration so that they become proficient as opposed to working in a variety of program areas with multiple collateral duties.

Hiring new or funding existing regional staff, such as a regional recreation residence program manager, recreation residence focused heritage (Architectural Historian), landscape architect, engineering staff member, or other supporting staff remains a top priority at this level and at the discretion of the Regional Forester.

Expectations/Desired Outcomes

*1. ... the **intent** is that each unit with recreation residences (rec res) has position(s) filled so rec res **permits are authorized** in a timely manner and will **not linger or accumulate creating backlog** the following field season. Be organized to **respond to requests from permit holders** for hazard tree removal, treating slash piles, rebuild assessments, exterior structural maintenance/improvements (when needed).*

2. Conduct activities that benefit the management of the recreation residence tract or recreation program. Investments should be on the managing unit, preferably near those recreation residence tracts and communities where the fees are generated.

3. Permit holders and FS staff must see meaningful improvements that demonstrate the agency is appropriately investing in those areas where the funds are generated as intended by the CFA.

4. FS administrative workload is based on number of authorizations and not just fees generated and each permit holder, regardless of fees paid, should have a FS permit administrator <u>with customer service standards.</u>

The Washington Office

... will proceed to provide program oversight and guidance to improve customer service, consistency, and operations.

Following lists some of the 'deliverables' the Plan expects the WO to produce in 2025, under the direction of Elrand Denson, Director, Lands, Minerals and Geology Management.

Deliverables in 2025:

- *Operation & Maintenance Plan templates that may be attached to the special use permit (<u>and developed in coordination with permit holders</u>)*
- *Playbook for renewal process. Develop mapping standards and instructions/template.*
- *New Permit Holder Guide (<u>coordinate with NFH</u>)*
- *Attend annual NFH conference*
- *Continue to meet with NFH on approximately a monthly basis.*

Future Deliverables:

- *Facilitate reviews of Trusts by establishing a streamlined process to directly support the field.*
- *Develop guide for what to do after a cabin is destroyed or partially destroyed by fire, hurricane, flood.*