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Issuing Backcountry Permits

For safety, persons going into the Kachina Peaks Wilderness from Snowbowl in winter need a briefing and a permit. Provide these items on weekend mornings from the warmth of Agassiz Lodge. For more, click on [backcountry permits](#).

Issuing Backcountry Permits (via link)

6 November 2009

On October 22nd, the Forest Service asked Friends of Northern Arizona Forests for assistance in issuing backcountry permits at the Arizona Snowbowl after the ski area opens for the winter season. Each person who wishes to ski, snowboard, snowshoe, or alpine climb into the Kachina Peaks Wilderness from the Snowbowl or the Snowbowl Road must obtain a (free) backcountry permit. The goal of the permit system is to make the public aware of the hazards of traveling beyond groomed trails at high altitude and in potentially severe winter conditions and to educate them in Wilderness preparedness and avalanche safety.

The permits themselves are issued by two-person teams from the comfort of Agassiz Lodge between the hours of 9:00 and 11:30 a.m. on weekends. Each person who seeks a permit receives a briefing on winter Wilderness preparedness and avalanche safety. A written list of talking points and some literature to hand out enable even new volunteers to perform the briefing competently. More than 700 of the season-long permits have been issued during each of the last few winters.

Qualifications

Any FoNAF member may issue permits, but preference will be given to those who ski or snowshoe and have some winter backcountry experience (so that questions can be answered more authoritatively). Unless you have issued backcountry permits before, you will need to spend a morning working with an experienced person before you take on the job yourself (as a full-fledged member of a two-person team). To make training a productive process, we ask that you be prepared to serve subsequently for three or more mornings during the ski season (provided that you find the job something that you want to do).

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Scheduling

The schedule for who works when will probably be available on-line. Signing up will be easy, and if you need to cancel, there will be someone whom you can call or send an email.

Getting to Snowbowl

If you have a government driver's license, then you may use a Forest Service truck (from the Peaks R.S.) to drive to Snowbowl. Otherwise, you'll need to use your own vehicle and observe whatever regulations about four-wheel drive or chains are in effect for the Snowbowl road.

Additional benefits

Alas, issuing permits in the morning does not give you free skiing privileges in the afternoon. There is, however, the possibility of assisting the Forest Service Snow Ranger patrol, either within the ski area or in the backcountry. The options that are open depend, in part, on your experience and comfort level.

Coordinator

FoNAF is also looking for a member to coordinate this project. You would *not* need experience with issuing the permits. Rather, you just need to be an "organized" person, someone who can assist with scheduling, will call someone on a contact list when difficult questions arise, can provide liaison with the Forest Service, will help draft more notices like this one, and so on.

Your next step

Folks who have issued permits in the past have enjoyed their conversations with the public. It's warm inside, and you are helping folks have safe winter trips into our wonderful backcountry.

To volunteer or to get more information, please email or phone any one of the following persons.

Ralph Baierlein	Ralph.Baierlein@nau.edu	526-6725
Jim and Pat McGeorge	mcgeorge1@juno.com	714-1371
Brian Tritle	btritle@fs.fed.us	527-8201
Justin Loxley	jdloxley@fs.fed.us	527-8213

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Jim and Pat McGeorge have spent many hours issuing permits and can tell you, first hand, what it's like.

Brian Tritle is the Snow Ranger and hence the Forest Service person in charge of the entire operation.

Justin Loxley is the Volunteer Coordinator for the Peaks & Mormon Lake Ranger Districts.

The Forest Service describes the backcountry permit and its purpose on its website. The most reliable route: go to www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/ and look for "permits."