

# Lawsuit filed in snowmaking plan

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Jun. 24--Three tribes, an activist group and two environmental groups filed a lawsuit against the Forest Service Thursday and asked for an injunction to prevent snowmaking with reclaimed wastewater at Arizona Snowbowl.

Snowbowl can begin engineering and construction of a water line at the end of this month to take water from Flagstaff up to the ski area unless a judge grants the injunction to delay it.

The groups accused the Forest Service of violating the National Environmental Policy Act, abandoning its trust responsibility to Native Americans and violating four other federal laws or policies pertaining to the environment or religious freedom.

Harv Forsgren, the regional forester in Albuquerque, upheld a local decision two weeks ago that would allow snowmaking with reclaimed wastewater at the ski area located on the San Francisco Peaks.

The courtroom has now become the last remaining option for those who oppose snowmaking.

The Navajo Nation, Sierra Club, White Mountain Apache Nation, Yavapai Apache Nation, Tucson's Center for Biological Diversity and the Flagstaff Activist Network filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Phoenix.

The Forest Service declined comment on the lawsuit.

The Hopi and Hualapai tribes have also vowed to sue in the past. Thirteen tribes consider the San Francisco Peaks a sacred or religious site.

Snowmaking is vital to keeping a ski area economically viable on the Peaks, Snowbowl owners and managers have said, recruiting spokesmen in Congress and the state legislature to help make their case.

More than 2,000 people and a few groups, some from as far away as Switzerland, originally commented on the proposal to use reclaimed wastewater to make snow and upgrade the ski area with new chairlifts, lodges, parking lots and a sledding area.

Environmental groups and Northern Arizona University biochemist Prof. Paul Torrence have charged that the Forest Service didn't properly consider all impacts to the environment, as required under federal law, before giving the Snowbowl the go-ahead to put reclaimed wastewater on the Peaks.

"Once you understand what's in the water, it's just not rainwater coming down on the area. It's a lot of chemicals," Torrence said.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality has approved such water for use in snowmaking, though it isn't held to the same standards as drinking water, and such water would have to be tested for pathogens and disinfected.

Ultimately, the Forest Service has said in its planning documents that potential impacts on plants and people from some of the chemicals potentially present in the water and snow are not yet known.