

# Aspen Daily News

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## Powder hounds, SkiCo strike deal

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The two main parties in a dispute over access to 400 acres of prime ski terrain on the back of Aspen Mountain have reached an informal agreement that could finally resolve the decades-old controversy.

In essence, the agreement would see the Aspen Skiing Co. and a collective of local skiers share parts of the disputed terrain this winter, although final say on who can use the winter playground rests with the U.S. Forest Service.

"We've agreed to share some of that terrain," said Aspen Mountain Manager Steve Sewell.

The source of debate is an area called Richmond Ridge, leading from the top of the gondola down the back of Aspen Mountain. The land has been skied by locals for many years but last winter, at SkiCo's behest, the Forest Service started to enforce an earlier rule that bans private snowmobiles and so effectively renders the terrain inaccessible to the average user.

SkiCo, however, is still able to access the area with motorized vehicles. It has a special permit from the Forest Service to run Aspen Mountain Powder Tours, where users pay up to \$295 for a day's frolicking in powder.

Powder to the People spokesman and founder Michael Sladdin said he was pleased with the agreement with Sewell. The two sides agreed that Powder to the People members could use snowmobiles on a snow-access route known as MacFarlane's, while staying off other parts of the Richmond Ridge area.

Powder to the People will also be allowed to keep their sleds in a special parking area on the top of Aspen Mountain, provided they are clearly identified as belonging to the group and owners do not transport gasoline via the gondola.

The two sides also agreed that SkiCo would help with Powder to the People if any of its members ran into trouble in the area and needed rescuing.

Sladdin must now apply for a special-use permit from the Forest Service. Although he was unavailable for comment Wednesday, Bill Westbrook, Aspen/Sopris district ranger for the White River National Forest, has previously intimated that a permit would be more likely if Powder to the People could broker an agreement with SkiCo.

Sladdin said the agreement would hopefully be just a first step for his group and he would continue to push for access to the whole area.

"It's a steep and exposed bowl area and it houses some of the finest snow in the valley," said Sladdin of the disputed terrain. "It's a cold area that doesn't get a ton of sun, so it stays colder longer. It stays nice and fresh and champagne and light."