Federal shutdown doesn't threaten ski season

By Steven K. Paulson, AP

DENVER — A group representing the nation's ski industry said Monday it expects no major impact on this year's ski season because of federal furloughs, even though about a third of the more than 350 resorts are located on federal land regulated by the U.S. Forest Service.

Michael Berry, spokesman for the National Ski Areas Association, said most expansion projects and construction that require federal approval have been completed as opening days approach in the $6 billion a year industry. Delays could occur as a result of other projects in the pipeline, he said.

Berry said he talked with Forest Service chief Tom Tidwell to clarify how the shutdown would affect the 121 ski areas operating on federal land and was assured resort leases are not immediately affected.

"The fact of the matter is, this will have no impact on ski area operations. Having said that, there are certain things in progress, and Forest Service furloughs may slow things like that down," he said.

The federal government regulates expansion projects, environmental reviews and lease agreements that are subject to public review.

The ski association sent a memo last week to all ski areas operating with a special use permit on public lands administered by the Forest Service, advising them about the federal agency's decision.

"Ski areas may continue to operate, as the improvements are

not government-owned. Privately owned improvements are not to be affected by the shutdown," the memo said.

The ski areas were advised that the U.S. Forest Service will work with areas that are under construction on a case-by-case basis if an agency inspection or other action is needed.

Jeff Hanley, spokesman for Aspen Skiing Co. in Colorado, said hiring is under way and this year's projects have been completed.

"We're fired up and ready to go," he said.

However, the shutdown could affect plans by the company to create a better exit route off Burnt Mountain into the Snowmass Ski Area, which has already been tentatively approved. The project is now in a 45-day public comment period, which still has to be reviewed by the government before construction can begin next year.

He said because of the shutdown, he doesn't know where members of the public should go to turn in their comments.

"Right now, we have no property or anything impacted, but we don't know what we might see in the future. Hopefully, this won't last too long," Hanley said.