



SPRING
2025

JOURNAL

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STASHING SNOW

The start of next season's terrain park hibernates over the summer at Trollhaugen, WI. The handful of ski areas now experimenting with snow farming are uncovering all kinds of advantages to rolling out a base on demand. PG 34

Ski Resorts and Recreation

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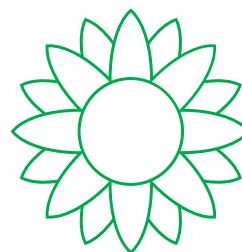


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Trollhaugen's snow saving system involves
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process they've been dialing in since 2021.

Photo: Marsha Hovey

How We Talk About Our Industry & Why It Matters

|| BY MIKE REITZELL, NSAA PRESIDENT & CEO



Leading NSAA requires me to constantly take a step back and look at the bigger picture — not just the operations, the weather patterns, or the season's numbers, but the story we are telling about skiing and snowboarding. Stories matter. They shape expectations, influence participation

and determine how people feel when they step onto our mountains for the first time ... or the thousandth time.

At the heart of that storytelling is how we talk about skiing and snowboarding, how the public hears what we say and our constant battle with perception. Admittedly, this is out of my comfort zone. As a former attorney representing the industry, my instinct tells me we should always immediately inform everyone that skiing and snowboarding are dangerous. But that's not exactly a way to draw someone in.

The Tension Between Reality & Perception

Inside the industry, we live in the reality of skiing and snowboarding every day. We understand the risks, the responsibilities, the operational complexities, and the deep commitment our teams make to safety and the guest experience. But when people encounter our sports, particularly those for the first time, they don't start with reality — they start with perception. And perception, as we all know, doesn't have to be accurate to be powerful.

Several years ago, I listened to a father speak on losing his child who died after falling from a chairlift. His reflections were both measured and heartbreaking, but one comment stood out: "I thought skiing was like Disneyland."

To him, chairlifts were rides. The mountain was a controlled environment. Safety felt automated. He assumed the experience was designed to protect his child at every moment, particularly on lifts.

For those of us in the industry, the Disneyland assumption, as we'll call it, is surprising. Of course it's not Disneyland. You've been, right? You don't get to strap on a pair of skis or a snowboard and slide down the Matterhorn. You wait in lines, you put on a seatbelt, and the rides stop. But to many families new to snowsports, this assumption is completely reasonable because their perception is built on other environments they know.

The Disneyland assumption serves as a reminder that we must, to some extent, meet guests where they are, not where we wish they were. And that begins by understanding how they see skiing and snowboarding.

Standing in Their Boots

Consider the experience of a first timer approaching a chairlift. They aren't thinking about the standards, inspections, training hours or engineering redundancies we rely on. They're most likely thinking something far simpler:

"How do I get on and off this thing, it never stops?" Or "This will take me safely to the top."

And those assumptions are not unreasonable. Education and safe transportation are our responsibilities. The guest has a responsibility, too — knowing how to load, ride and unload safely. Those skills aren't instinctive. They must be taught.

This is where our communication matters most. Do we begin by warning guests about every possible risk? Or do we start by welcoming them, celebrating the joy and wonder of the sport, and then giving them the knowledge they need to participate safely? The sequencing is crucial. Draw them in and then prepare them. When we lead with fear, we may lose people before they take their first turn. When we lead with invitation, we create a foundation for learning.

Perception, as we all know, doesn't have to be accurate to be powerful.

Families Need to Feel They Belong

One of the most encouraging realities in our industry is that families make up a significant portion of our participants (over 40%). Parents want their children outside in winter to learn resilience, adventure and joy. They want shared memories, shared challenges and shared accomplishments.

For those families to remain engaged, they must feel confident and safe. And that confidence is built not only through infrastructure, training and on-mountain practices, but through the way we communicate. If our tone feels exclusive or technical, guests may question whether they belong. If we

speak in ways that recognize their perspective, validate their experience and anticipate their questions, we lower barriers that many don't even realize are there. It even comes down to the words we choose to use.

In a recent conversation with a leader who's well versed in the guest experience, he noted something subtle but important: We constantly refer to skiing and snowboarding as sports. To the industry, that makes perfect sense. But does it resonate with the people we hope to attract? He did not think so.

Some potential participants — especially adults who didn't grow up on snow — may not see themselves as sporty. They may feel intimidated by a word that suggests competition, athleticism or expertise. But many of them will happily join an activity. They'll go tubing, play in the snow or take a scenic lift ride. They'll sign their children up for a lesson; they simply need a way in.

If we broaden our language and invite people into activities first, we open a gateway. From activities comes experience. From experience comes confidence. And confidence is often what leads people to try and continue skiing or snowboarding. This isn't semantics, it's strategy that's about widening the entrance so that more people see winter recreation as something for them.

The questions weren't grounded in the operational realities of how the industry functions or the collaborative relationships that exist. They reflected instead what the media sees from the outside — narratives shaped by social media, headlines or a lack of context.

Perception Also Shapes Media Narratives

This tension between perception and reality hit home recently during an interview with Bloomberg TV for a story that aired in January. Ahead of the interview, I prepared for a wide range of substantive questions about the industry: operations, workforce, safety, sustainability, economic trends, the full spectrum (they didn't exactly narrow down their subjects). Once the interview began, almost every question centered on perception, not reality:

- + What does the public think about consolidation?
- + What do people think about mega passes?
- + What do independent ski areas think about corporate ownership?

The questions weren't grounded in the operational realities of how the industry functions or the collaborative relationships

that exist. They reflected instead what the media sees from the outside — narratives shaped by social media, headlines or a lack of context. I answered with facts, but the conversation kept circling back to perception.

So, what will it take to ensure the public hears the reality of who we are? It will take coordinated, consistent, proactive communication. Not just when a headline emerges, but all year long. Not only in crisis, but in everyday storytelling.

WHEN WE SPEAK WITH THE MEDIA, OUR MESSAGE SHOULD REST ON THREE ESSENTIALS:

- 1. Clarity:** Answer directly, avoid jargon and translate complexity into everyday language.
- 2. Transparency:** Acknowledge challenges honestly without letting them define the narrative.
- 3. Human context:** Explain not just the *what*, but the *why*, and always through the lens of real people and real experiences. We are a people-driven industry, so we have the stories to tell.

Too often, non-endemic media frames questions around assumptions. And that's typically because their experience with skiing and snowboarding is limited. Our job is not to dismiss those assumptions, but to reframe them and offer a grounded, factual picture that expands the narrative rather than reacting to it.

Drawing People in & Setting Them up for Success

Ultimately, our goal is straightforward: We want more people to experience winter in a way that is joyful, empowering and safe. To make that happen, we cannot present snowsports as either dangerously extreme or simplistically foolproof. They are neither, existing in the space between exhilarating, challenging, rewarding and absolutely accessible with the right knowledge and support.

If we can tell that story more clearly and consistently — to our guests, to the media and to one another — we will not only reshape perception, but also strengthen the gateway to skiing and snowboarding for generations to come. 🏔️



Apply For NSAA's 2026 Awards: Deadline Around the Corner

Awards season is upon us, and NSAA will be using its digital forms again this year to streamline and automate the application process. Member ski areas that are in good standing (dues paid in full through 2026) can submit applications for sustainability, safety, marketing and/or conversion campaigns at nsaa.org/awards.

New Award Alert: This season, ski areas have a new safety category option to earn recognition. The Lift Safety Program category will highlight efforts to maximize safety for chairlift riders, whether it's reminders and reinforcement to lower the restraint bar and raise it at the right time, ensuring guests can load and unload surface lifts properly, or maintaining maze and line structure so that unseated passenger incidents become even less likely.



Applicants should submit each campaign only once. For instance, if your safety effort falls into both lift safety and guest safety categories, select the best fit and submit only for that category. Campaigns that are submitted across multiple categories will only be considered for one category, selected at the judges' discretion.

Deadline: March 20th, 2026. Visit nsaa.org/awards to apply, review the full category descriptions, check out awards submission tips and take a look at winning campaigns from previous years.

New Padding & Collision Awareness Signs

NSAA's Risk and Education Committee has adopted new, industry-wide warning signs for marking and padding. There are two options to choose from, both of which provide similar language and imagery.

NSAA unveiled the new signage during its Fall Education Seminars. Designed to warn and inform, these signs remind skiers and riders that any padding or marking devices indicate a potential hazard or obstacle and further emphasize that these devices can offer only limited protection. While collisions with man-made objects have long been recognized as an inherent risk of the sport, the new signs complement Your Responsibility Code, reminding all skiers and riders that it is their responsibility to stay in control and avoid man-made objects.

NSAA has provided the industry's major sign manufacturers and suppliers with the art files needed to produce the signage, including Inter-Mtn Enterprises, Reliable Racing, Fall Line, World Cup Supply and Alpine Media. For those working with a preferred sign manufacturer or in-house team, NSAA can provide the art files to use for printed signage.

While the actual physical size of the signage may vary, **please do not change any of the language, color or layout of these new signs.** By adopting this standardized signage across

the industry, it will become familiar at both local ski areas and destination resorts, similar to when the industry adopted the Park SMART and freestyle terrain

signage that is now part of the safety landscape.

Ski areas may determine the best locations for this new signage and imagery, such as lift towers, sandwich boards in the base area, point-of-sale, rental shops and ski schools. The artwork is also compatible for a wide range of uses, including electronic displays on websites and safety pages, as well as electronic trail maps and resort smartphone apps. Scan the QR code for access to the artwork, and reach out to Dave Byrd, NSAA director of risk and regulatory affairs dbyrd@nsaa.org, with questions.



Scan the QR code or visit nsaa.org/WebResources for access to the tools and resources mentioned here.

Don't Miss the Chance for a 2026 Sustainable Slopes Grant

Now in its 17th year, NSAA's Sustainable Slopes Grant Program offers three opportunities for NSAA members to get help funding their sustainability efforts: The HKD-sponsored Herman K. Dupré Sustainable Snowmaking Grant provides energy efficient snowmaking equipment via an in-kind grant of five HKD Impulse high efficiency snowmaking guns or like snowmaking equipment. The estimated value of this grant is approximately \$30,000. Recipients of the cash grant are typically awarded around \$5,000 toward their sustainability initiative. The newer PepsiCo-sponsored recycling grant returns this year, awarded for a project that's focused on recycling and waste reduction.

Past grant recipients completed projects with many positive benefits, including more efficient snowmaking, increased protection of habitats and watersheds, reductions in waste and resource usage, on-site renewable energy generation, partnerships with sustainability consultants, and receiving significant ROI as a direct result of their work. These grants can also help ski areas earn Sustainability Badges and meet Climate Challenge targets.

The deadline is March 20, 2026. Apply online today!

Applicants must be a current ski area member of NSAA that has endorsed the Sustainable Slopes program. Visit nsaa.org > *Sustainability* > *Sustainable Slopes* > *Grant Program* for more details and to apply.

NSAA in NYC for Climate Week 2025

NSAA attended Climate Week 2025, which took place late September in New York City and centered around the theme: *Power On*, including over 1,000 global, national and local events focused on climate solutions. Despite occurring against a shifting policy backdrop, this year's Climate Week highlighted the importance of working together to maintain momentum, and many sessions struck a tone of measured optimism, acknowledging challenges while focusing on achievable solutions.

The ski industry was well represented in a panel session, *Skiing & Sustainability: Achieving Scope 1 & 2 Net-Zero Emissions*. Tom Bradley, VP of sustainability at Boyne Resorts, and Josh Keniston, SVP for Operations at Dartmouth College representing Dartmouth Skiway, spoke to sustainability related challenges, impactful initiatives and ideas for future potential innovations within the ski industry. Additional sessions on maintaining clean energy goals in

the current policy environment, collaborative corporate climate advocacy for clean energy and transportation, and policies and technologies for modernizing the U.S. electric grid all provided education and inspiration. NSAA and other ski industry sustainability leaders were there to learn and collaborate with partners like Ceres, America Is All In and many more throughout the week. ▶



Skiing & Sustainability panel session during Climate Week 2025

DATE KEEPER

2026 NSAA & Affiliated Events

Associated Meetings

Lift Maintenance Seminar

April 13–16 Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort, MA

PNSAA Mountain Works

April 21–23 Bend, OR

SAVMI Conference and Trade Show

May 11–14 Grand Junction, CO

Rocky Mountain Lift Association

May 18–21 Salt Lake City, UT

MSAA Summer Meeting & Trade Show

August 16–18 Boyne Falls, MI

National Convention and Tradeshow

May 4–7 Omni La Costa Resort & Spa, Carlsbad, CA

Downhill Bike Park Summit

June 22–24 Giants Ridge, MN

Mountain Technology Symposium

October 6–8 Hood River Inn, OR



Mountain Technology Symposium: Live Art & Looking Ahead

During last year's Mountain Technology Symposium, held in the fall at Camelback Resort, PA, an attendee favorite session made artwork of IT. Terry LeBan of Breakthrough Visuals managed to merge left and right brain as he diagrammed the dialogue happening in the room, creating a visual story of the event's opening blue sky session — an ideal-state, no bad ideas brainstorm on a tech-forward future ski industry. LeBan captured the conversation across three panels, led by SNOW Partners' Joe Hession and InTouch Technology Group's Tim Thodey and Casey Parliament, and then attendees came up with their own priorities that ranged from the practical (get rid of printers and create ski clubs for young people) to the abstract and aspirational (get them to the slopes faster, make it effortless).

This year's Mountain Technology Symposium is slated for October 6–8, and will be taking place at Hood River Inn, OR. We hope to see you there!

Boundary Breakers: Orgs That Inspire Us

Boundary Breakers shines a spotlight on inspiring organizations in or adjacent to our industry that share NSAA's goal of expanding outdoor access, moving the needle on growth, sustainability and/or safety. These operations caught our attention for doing something cool, unique or thought provoking in the wider outdoor community.

Lucky to Ride (luckytoride.org) is a Denver-based non-profit dedicated to empowering youth from under-resourced communities through equitable access to cycling and the outdoors. Anchored by Lucky Bikes Re-Cyclery — a community-centered bike shop that services and sells affordable, used bikes — this organization runs an impressive number of programs that each serve a distinct population and purpose.

Geared at ages 10 and up, the Ride Program offers after-school and full day mountain bike outings for small groups, who learn basic MTB skills, bike safety and techniques. For the middle and high school set, the Learn to Earn program breaks biking down from a STEM perspective, teaching participants how it works, how to make repairs and how to ride safely. Once this five-day course is complete, graduates receive their own bike, a new helmet, lock and tool kit. Youth@Work is a three-month paid internship program, followed by a one-year apprenticeship option. For ages 14–22, participants gain retail and service training working at Lucky Bikes Re-Cyclery while also learning social and emotional skills. Finally, the organization's Southwest Denver Mountain Bike Team gives high schoolers the chance to develop and hone mountain bike skills and, for those interested, compete in Colorado High School Cycling League races. All bikes, gear and coaching are provided for these weekly practices and race trainings.

2026 Annual Ceres LEAD

The 2026 Ceres' LEAD (Lawmaker Education and Advocacy Days) on a Clean Economy event will take place March 17–19 in Washington, D.C. This is a big-tent opportunity for business leaders to connect directly with federal policymakers on unleashing clean, affordable, homegrown energy and transportation solutions. This productive advocacy event gives participating ski areas the chance to show elected officials why clean energy and transportation solutions matter across the country. NSAA will be in attendance this year.

Ceres also recently shared a new resource: the Ceres State Policy Bill Tracker. This helpful tool follows climate legislation that Ceres is monitoring nationwide, including policies in which ski areas may be interested. Scan the QR code to access the tracker and register for the 2026 Ceres LEAD.

Conservative Climate Summit

Last October, NSAA attended the Conservative Climate Summit in Salt Lake City, Utah. This was the fourth annual iteration of the event, organized by Senator John Curtis (R-UT). The summit brought together a range of speakers and topics related to climate, including forest health, energy and permitting reform.

A notable highlight of the summit was the focus on the Fix Our Forests Act (H.R. 471, S. 1462), which is closely aligned with the ski industry's past advocacy work. For background, this bipartisan bill, which passed the House in late January 2025 and has been introduced in the Senate, is aimed at improving forest health and increasing resilience to wildfires by expediting environmental analyses and increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration projects. Based on this recent discussion during the conference, it's possible that we could see future progress on this bill. 📌

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ACROSS THE BOARD

Lori Phillips

GM at Ski Big Bear, PA || BY HEATHER B. FRIED

Small ski areas are having a moment, according to Lori Phillips, GM at Ski Big Bear, PA, who represents the Mid-Atlantic region on NSAA's board of directors. In fact, she's been working to make sure of that, taking pride in advocating on behalf of fellow small ski areas.

"I probably am the smallest ski area at the table, but I may have the biggest mouth," she laughed. "When I was asked to join the NSAA board, I knew that I had a responsibility to contribute to the conversations. Not only I, but many of us, are speaking up about the impact small ski areas have on the industry. They are creating a lot of skiers and a lot of employees."

With that impact as their platform, Phillips and others on NSAA's Small Ski Areas Committee are also making their needs known, flipping the moment to momentum. After a recent board meeting where she brought up opportunities to share resources, for example, representatives from a few bigger operations approached Phillips.

"Larger conglomerates are trying to work better with their neighbors," she explained, adding that in Pennsylvania, they've been pushing for a shared Facebook marketplace among ski areas. "If somebody has ... a tube lane shaper that they're no longer going to use, call up a smaller ski area. Chances are we haven't bought one."



Lori Phillips loves introducing and converting new guests into lovers of the sport. Even if they only visit Ski Big Bear, the love is the same.



Beyond the boneyard, bigger ski areas can also lend their purchasing power to bring economies of scale to their smaller brethren. For instance, Phillips would welcome the kind of relationship where Ski Big Bear was invited to add a few tower pads onto an existing order that her team can then go pick up.

"That's huge for a place like [this] because I get a price based on the few that I'm able to buy," she said. "Whereas somebody who's buying a whole bunch, if I can add a few more to their order, the price comes down considerably."

Just putting these thoughts and ideas out there has helped move the needle for small ski areas already, according to Phillips, who also mentioned Indy Pass as playing a role in driving a more collaborative ski industry community.

"Independent resorts have figured out, 'Oh yeah, if we do unite, we do have some impact here,'" she said. "I think we've been trying to operate so alone for so long that we failed to make use of the ways we can unite our voice and have a bigger impact."

BRIDGING THE CHASM

At 26 skiable acres, 650 vertical feet, three magic carpets and four double chairs serving 18 trails, Ski Big Bear is a small ski area that's having a moment of its own right now, turning 50 this season. But what's perhaps an even more impressive milestone to celebrate is their leadership's longevity.

"We have been very fortunate to have successfully operated under the same management team for over 25 of those 50 years," reported Phillips, who spent 18 years as assistant GM before moving into the top spot in 2019.

With planned succession like hers always in mind during trainings, hiring and promotion decisions, Phillips admitted that it's challenging to keep people at a smaller mountain given the expanse of opportunities that beckon from bigger ski areas. But therein lies another great value in small ski areas — sparking a love for this industry that manifests dedicated, lifelong employees.





Phillips' favorite ski area is the one she's currently skiing, but she does make it out to Utah — where she got her start in the ski industry — every spring for simultaneous skiing and market research.



In addition to leading Ski Big Bear and sitting on NSAA's board, Phillips serves as president of the Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Association (PORA) — which was recently rebranded as such from the state's ski-specific association.

“We are very proud to talk about staff that grew up at Ski Big Bear and now work at so many much larger mountains, including Stowe, Mammoth, Powder Mountain, Boyne Resorts, and have even guided on Denali and Grand Teton,” she said. “We continue to look for those with the energy and unique talents to be able to develop at Ski Big Bear, but also those that perhaps are bringing experiences from larger mountains to help make us better.”

Phillips was of the latter, having worked at Snowbird, UT, before an opportunity to join Ski Big Bear and move back to her home state presented itself. Bridging that chasm between opposite sides of the country and ski area size spectrum has given her a unique look at snowsports' duality.

“It is an interesting perspective to see an industry that is so well known and respected such that it is in Utah, and then also see it from a small independent mountain in Pennsylvania where the general public is shocked to learn that there are more than 20 ski areas in the state,” Phillips said.

What also comes as a surprise to the average person is Pennsylvania's \$17 billion outdoor recreation economy. In addition to leading Ski Big Bear and sitting on NSAA's board, Phillips serves as president of the Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Association (PORA). The organization was recently rebranded as such from the state's ski-specific association to reflect members' expansion into four-season destinations and the overall strength of outdoor rec.

“Many get their first experience skiing, hiking, boating, hunting and climbing in the mountains of Pennsylvania,” explained Phillips. “Our proximity to many East Coast metro areas positions PA as a convenient first introduction to many outdoor sports that develop into the loves that feed the economies of other states across the nation.”

PORA is steadily building its advocacy in Pennsylvania, helping to bring a much needed “unified voice to better impact

legislation, tourism dollars and workforce development within PA,” added Phillips, who also mentioned some growing pains as they work to balance the state's greater recreation industry while staying true to the organization's roots.

“Change is hard. There is always concern that the ski specific messaging becomes diluted with an expansion like this,” she pointed out. “But the board of directors is very conscious of our history as the former ski trade association, and we will continue to advocate for the common issues across all outdoor rec while also supporting our ski area members.”

With a half-foot of fresh snow on the ground and their 50th anniversary season upon them, Phillips took the rapid-fire hot seat to reveal the majestic creatures she's lucky to encounter there regularly, and let us in on what else makes small ski areas like Ski Big Bear influential well beyond their stature.

RAPID-FIRE

Favorite ski area(s) besides your own? Whatever one I am skiing, and I especially love to ski an area that is new to me.

Ski area(s) on your bucket list? Big Sky and Sun Valley in the U.S. I would also really like to ski Japan and New Zealand.

Average number of ski days per season? Not enough. This is embarrassing and something that I am always working on. I plead the fifth :)

Fondest memory on skis/a board? Cat skiing at Mustang Powder with some of my closest ski buddies — it was a bucket list trip that we did three years in a row.

Favorite part of the job and one thing you would skip if you could? I love introducing people to the sport and giving them an amazing experience that converts them into lovers of the sport. Even if they only ski Ski Big Bear, the love is the same. And, on the staff side, I love to see people develop their own leadership skills and surprise themselves with the confidence that they learn. ►

I would love to remove the stress of weather and infrastructure, but you have to know the bad to appreciate the good.

What are you most excited about right now? As I write this, we got our first storm of the winter, which brought 6" of snow.

What keeps you up at night? Figuring out how small ski areas like us will continue to operate with affordable tickets when costs seem to have no ceiling.

Proudest work or moment from your time on the NSAA board of directors?

It was when people came up to me after I spoke about what smaller areas need. I had representatives of larger organizations say that they heard me and that they wanted to work toward solutions, and smaller independents thanked me for saying it. I'm pretty sure that I represent the smallest ski area on the board; there is a certain amount of imposter syndrome, so I was glad that I was able to contribute.

In another life/alternate universe, I would work as a ...

This is my alternate universe — I can't believe the opportunities and experiences that have been brought to me through the ski industry.

Besides skiing, I would rather be ... Hiking, sailing, white water rafting.

I have a love/hate relationship with ... Numbers.

My superlative is ... Most likely to be dancing if there's live music.

Ski Big Bear is small but mighty because ... Of the people who work there. Many don't ski or board but have learned what a wonderful family activity it is, and they all work really hard to give our customers the best experience.

Noteworthy animal encounter(s) on the hill? Ski Big Bear sits near the confluence of the Delaware and Lackawaxen Rivers, and so we have many bald eagles that winter in the area because of the fishing available. The lodge and offices are at the summit, so it is incredible to regularly see bald eagles perched or soaring over the mountain as you look out over the Delaware River Valley.

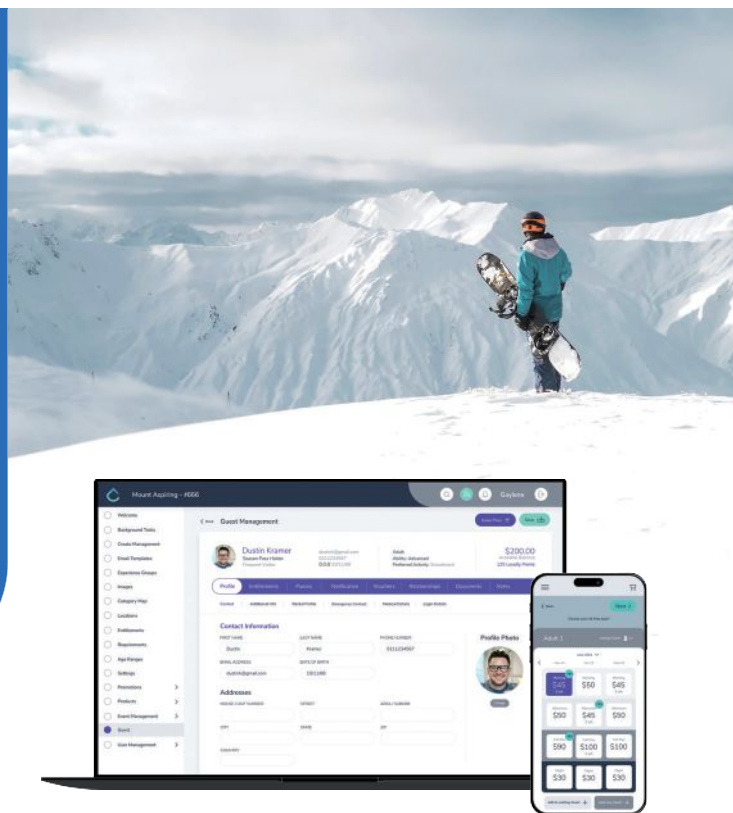
Anything to add that your ski industry colleagues might not know about you/your ski area? Not a secret, but just want to highlight staff that work at smaller mountains. Their job descriptions tend to be less about working one position in a single department. We cross-train so many of our employees to be ski instructors and rental techs, snowmakers and lift mechanics, lift operators and board instructors, etc. Small areas are a great place to learn a lot about the industry in a short amount of time. There are many knowledgeable, self-made professionals that will never be highlighted in NSAA Journal, but we see you! Thanks for all you do for the industry. 🙏

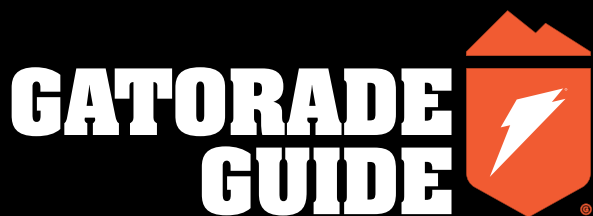


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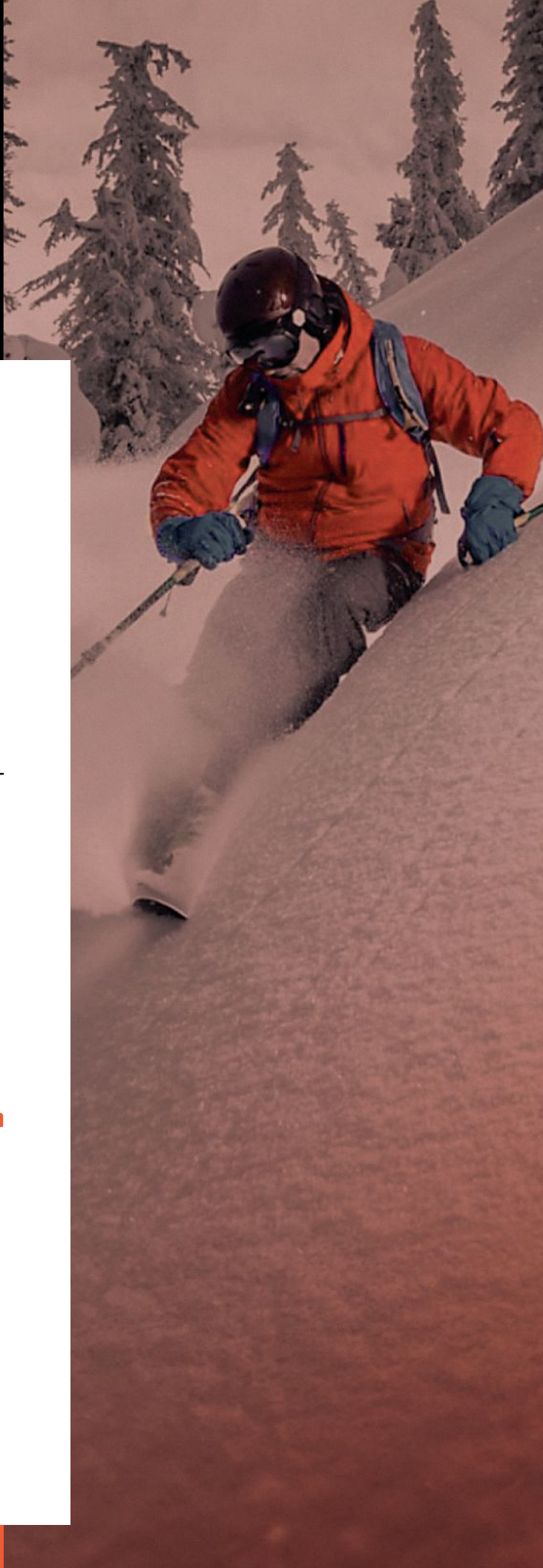
This year, Gatorade and the Gatorade Sports Science Institute are launching a first-of-its-kind Hydration at Elevation learning module for resorts that covers:

- The science behind hydration
- Hydration needs for athletic performance
- Understanding how electrolytes help hydration
- Impact of cold weather and altitude on hydration

Before your next mountain excursion, master mountain hydration to help fuel your journey and achieve peak performance.



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ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

U.S. ski areas recorded 61.6 million visits in 2024–25, the second highest total on record and 6.6% above the 10-year average. Longer operating seasons, strong regional performances, and steady participation across all market types underscore the continued strength and stability of the U.S. ski industry. These results reflect a sustained enthusiasm for snowsports and the enduring appeal of outdoor recreation nationwide.

10.7

MILLION PARTICIPANTS

3rd highest on record, exceeding 5-year average

3.2%

WAGE GROWTH YOY

SKI AREA OPENINGS

New ski area in 2024-25:
+ Gateway Parks Eaglewood, UT.

10 ski areas reopened following closure in prior season(s):
+ Cloudmont Ski & Golf, AL

+ Covington Township Ski Area, MI

+ Deer Mountain Ski Resort, SD

+ Gateway Parks Eaglewood, UT

+ Hard'ack, Inc. Recreation Area, VT

+ Hatley Pointe Mountain Resort, NC

+ Norway Mountain, MI

+ Petoskey Winter Sports Park, MI

+ Sleepy Hollow Sports Park, Inc., IA

+ Tower Mountain Ski Hill, MI

+ Warner Canyon Ski Area, OR



61.6

MILLION SKIER VISITS

2nd highest total on record, the three-year rolling average remained above 60 million visits for the first time

\$624.4M

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES

3rd highest, 35% on new & upgraded lifts

\$60B

GROSS ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DOWNHILL SNOWSPORTS

533,000

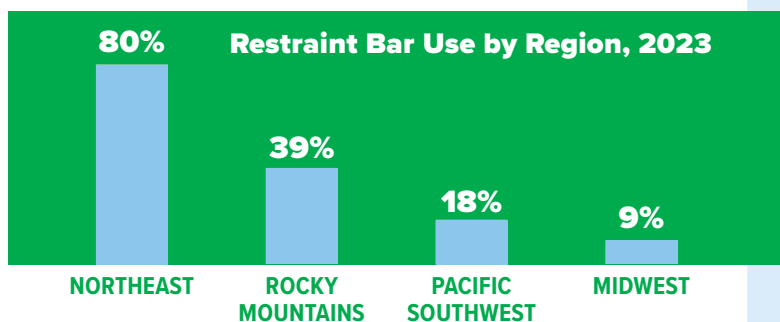
SKI & SNOWBOARD JOBS

Mindsets, Habits & Beliefs Behind Bar Down Behavior

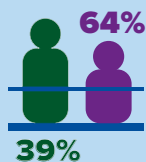
|| BY JIMMY HOWE, RESEARCH ANALYST; LUCY HARBOR, DIRECTOR OF OUTDOOR RECREATION RESEARCH;
SARAH LEVIN, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, RRC ASSOCIATES

Following ongoing discussions about improving on-mountain safety, the conversation surrounding restraint bar usage in the U.S. has taken on higher importance. As industry professionals and readers of the NSAA Journal, you're likely aware of the growing focus on the issue, including NSAA President Mike Reitzell's recent call for a culture shift toward more consistent restraint bar use in North America. To support ski areas in this effort, NSAA is developing a forthcoming Restraint Bar Toolkit, aimed at helping resorts encourage and standardize restraint bar use nationwide.

RRC Associates is partnering with NSAA on this initiative by exploring the attitudes and behaviors that shape decisions to use (or not use) restraint bars. While existing research in this area is limited, industry discussions, both in person and online, offer valuable insight into how habits and culture can change. By analyzing that research alongside online discussions, this targeted study aims to inform the development of the Restraint Bar Toolkit and ensure its recommendations reflect guests' real-world behavior and perceptions. Ultimately, the goal is to share practical information that supports a safer, more educated snowsports experience.



“Most lifts in Michigan where I’m from don’t even have a safety bar. So it’s simply not something I ever really think about using unless someone else puts it down.”*



Restraint bar use increased from 38.6% to 63.7% when children were present on the lift.

Existing Restraint Bar Efforts & Usage Data

NSAA is not the first organization to seek increased restraint bar usage among ski area guests. Technical Safety BC, a Canadian organization responsible for overseeing safety compliance in British Columbia, partnered with Sun Peaks Resort during the 2023–24 season. They tested whether strategically placed, highly visible signage could improve the habits of guests' restraint bar use, with a focus on the timing of bar lowering and raising in particular. Signs were designed to grab skiers and riders' attention at the exact time the bar should be raised, after the last tower where fall heights are limited to less than 3 meters. The findings were impressive, with proper restraint bar unloading behavior increasing from 20% to 65% following the introduction of brightly colored signage. Technical Safety BC estimated this change reduced overall exposure to fall risk greater than 3 meters by 85%, demonstrating that simple, well-designed interventions can produce meaningful safety outcomes.

Closer to home, a 2023 observational study — Factors that Influence Chairlift Restrain Bar Use — documented wide variations in restraint bar usage across U.S. ski areas. The study found the following rates of chairlift rides with restraint bars lowered at the time of observation:

- + **NORTHEAST:** 80.4% of chairs had restraint bars lowered
- + **ROCKY MOUNTAINS:** 39.2% of chairs had restraint bars lowered
- + **PACIFIC SOUTHWEST:** 17.9% of chairs had restraint bars lowered
- + **MIDWEST:** 9.4% of chairs had restraint bars lowered

The results of this study also indicated substantial differences in restraint bar use depending on a variety of additional factors. The presence of children on a lift made a major difference, increasing restraint bar use from 38.6% (adults only) to 63.7% when children were present. Equipment type also played a role as 28.2% of snowboarder-only chairs used a bar compared to 46.7% of skier-only chairs. Fixed-grip chairlift bar use was 47.3% while detachable lift restraint bar use was only 36.8%.

*Quotations throughout this article are original comments from Reddit users.



Understanding the Mindsets of Restraint Bar Use

While both above studies addressed or captured how often restraint bars are used, less research has been done to understand why guests choose to use or not use the restraint bar. What really goes into the restraint bar decision-making process when we hop on a lift? Are users worried about social perceptions? Do they understand the safety benefits to using a restraint bar? Or is it simply a habit to lower the restraint bar or leave it up?

To explore these questions, we looked beyond traditional survey research. RRC analyzed qualitative data from public online discussions to gain insight into the mindset of guests and their restraint bar decision-making. Because this qualitative data doesn't exist in a typical research study yet, the next best option is to seek information from the places where skiers and riders openly debate industry topics — social media. Reddit, one of the largest online forums, proved especially useful. Within its skiing and snowboarding subreddits, we identified 20 relevant discussions posted between 2011 and 2025. These threads formed the backbone of our analysis, supplemented by select posts on other social media platforms.

Reddit conversations were scraped for comments using the platform's API, then processed with various AI models to consolidate commentary into 6,808 distinct comments that expressed a stance or opinion on restraint bar use. Throughout the process, RRC's researchers manually reviewed and verified the AI results to ensure accurate categorization and avoid potential hallucination errors.

What the Socials Say

Reddit Results: Reasons for Using the Restraint Bar

Safety emerged as the leading motivation for restraint bar use, accounting for 39% of comments and 46% of upvotes (i.e., approval from other Reddit users). Cultural norms and personal habits followed at 21%, while comfort represented 15% of use-related comments. Cultural norms are commonly defined as the unwritten rules that are accepted by a culture, society, place or group. References to policy, law or automatic bar mechanisms accounted for 16% of upvotes, suggesting that consistent operational practices can effectively encourage safety behavior.

**“Everyone ready for the bar?” Pause.
Bar comes down. End of debate.”**

Interestingly, protecting children ranked only fifth among stated reasons for use, despite the previously mentioned observational data showing a notable increase in restraint bar use when children are present. This discrepancy may reflect a difference between perceived motivations expressed online and real-world behavioral triggers when actually riding a chairlift. This is likely also swayed by the demographics of Reddit users, who tend to be slightly younger and may not be as likely to have children as compared to non-Reddit users. ►

“I’m an adult, but I am kid-height so the bar is going down. My legs aren’t long enough for my back to be against the seat so we’re gonna be putting it down.”



Other Online Chatter

The recent increase in attention around restraint bar usage has sparked conversations across other social media platforms as well. Facebook posts from Ski Magazine, Unofficial Networks, Outside and Powderhounds garnered more than 3,000 comments, alongside related blog content from sources like the Storm Skiing Journal and Snowjournal 2.0. Sentiments mirrored those found on Reddit, with many commenters citing safety as the primary reason for using the bar, and non-use stemming from habits formed at resorts where restraint bars historically were not available.

A poll that Powder conducted via its website and Instagram toward the end of last year simply asked readers: Do you use the bar on chairlifts? It garnered close to 9,000 votes that broke down, somewhat surprisingly, heavily favoring yes at almost 70%; with 17% responding no; 9% admitting “not as much as I should”; and the remainder with an indifferent “who cares?” Interestingly, the team at Powder noted that the number of those who said they do use the restraint bar “seems inflated based on our experiences,” positing that either “people lied because they didn’t want to admit that they don’t use the bar as much as they should” or “the poll was skewed towards East Coast skiers.” Poll respondents also shared horror stories justifying their persistent restraint bar use, and why footrests often bring complexity and controversy to the picture.

Other conversations focused on confusion around terminology, whether to call the device a “comfort,” “safety,” or “restraint” bar, and how each label can shape perceptions. Commenters also frequently mentioned the timing or speed at which bars are lowered, sometimes leading to inadvertent bumps or pinches. Experiences like this can influence users’ preference and whether they choose to use the restraint bar themselves or feel comfortable asking others to lower it.

While these comments do not point to a single reason for keeping the bar up or putting it down, they highlight the small but meaningful nuances that should be considered when delivering a consistent and effective national message encouraging restraint bar use. ▶



Reddit Results: Reasons for Not Using the Restraint Bar

While the distribution of comments and upvotes was relatively consistent among restraint bar users, a greater discrepancy appeared when considering the rationale from non-users. Comment shares suggest that not using a restraint bar stems primarily from cultural norms, habits or preferences (34%), followed by reduced comfort or convenience (19%), perceived injury risk (19%), and perceptions that the bar is unnecessary or provides limited safety benefit (17%). Nearly half (47%) of upvotes reiterate that bar non-use first comes from cultural norms, habits or preferences, followed by increased injury risk (13%) and reduced comfort or convenience (12%).

“In my opinion, it’s overkill, but nice for peace of mind. Coming from a mountain with only 5 chairs and all of them being double chairs rather than quads etc., it’s not essential. Just pop a squat, don’t mess around on the chair and you’re good.”

These findings suggest that for this online audience, restraint bar non-use is less about active opposition and more about common practice and patterns. At some resorts, not using the bar has become a norm passed along by peers, rather than an informed choice based on safety. Social pressure in either direction tends to dictate future behavior, as guests may feel like one way or the other is the acceptable choice at that ski area.

“As someone who prefers to leave it up, I don’t mind when someone asks to put it down. The only time I get annoyed is when someone puts it down without either asking or giving me a heads up.”



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Small Changes Add up to Big Shifts

Findings highlight several important considerations in the development of the Restraint Bar Toolkit.

1. Impact of Cultural Norms & Habit

The largest share of non-users appears to forgo restraint bar use because of norms, habits or personal preference rather than deliberate opposition. It's possible these individuals could be responsive to similar efforts to those of Technical Safety BC, which utilized strategically placed, highly visible signage to increase restraint bar use. As with many recreational behaviors, shifting perceptions of what is normal or cool can be one of the most effective ways to influence users. A good example of success in this area is helmet usage. For a long time, helmets may not have been perceived favorably, especially by younger generations. Now, helmets are widely adopted and even preferred because of improvements in technical design, comfort and the benefit provided, and thanks to influencer, employee and athlete modeling. The overall percentage of skiers and riders wearing helmets increased from 25% in the 2002–03 season to an all-time, national high of 91% in the 2024–25 season.

2. Language Shapes Perception

Standardizing the industry around the term “restraint bar” will emphasize purpose and clarity. Alternatives like “comfort bar” can unintentionally downplay safety and reinforce resistance among riders who find it uncomfortable. Aligning terminology with intent will help educate guests and reiterate the purpose of consistent restraint bar use. In short, the language used in communication should imply why users should continue or change their behavior.

The results from this targeted study set the foundation for several initial strategies within the Restraint Bar Toolkit. Ultimately, the online discourse around restraint bar usage indicates that a plurality of non-users is not rejecting safety but simply doing what they've always done. Few respondents indicated that bar use reduced overall comfort or convenience, and even fewer felt that it negatively affected their social image. For the larger share of non-users driven from habit, consistent reminders may be as effective and implementable as they were for Technical Safety BC at Sun Peaks Resort. More consideration will likely need to be directed toward those who misunderstand the purpose of the restraint bar (potentially due to terminology) and/or underestimate the safety benefits it provides.



3. Education & Transparency

About one-third of non-users cited beliefs that restraint bars increase injury risk or offer little safety benefit. Examples included being trapped on a de-roped chair or the possibility of sliding out beneath a lowered bar. Education on the proven safety benefits of restraint bars, combined with the low probability risks associated with chairlift use, will likely be an important component of the Toolkit.

4. Communication on the Chair

Setting expectations for when a restraint bar should be lowered, as well as when to anticipate others lowering it, may help address frustrations with inconsistent behavior. In the absence of automatic lowering systems, which have yet to gain prevalence in the U.S., clear communication and predictable norms will remain key to establishing more consistent use across the industry.

These comments hint at the nuance required to effectively drive behavior change across the industry and underscore how education and standardized language will be essential to a successful bar down uptake, beyond increased signage alone. Fortunately, changing cultural norms is not an impossible task. With a focused communication approach, reshaping expectations to make restraint bar use an intentional safety practice, rather than an afterthought, is possible. 📢



Scan the QR code or visit nsaa.org/WebResources for access to these studies, the Powder poll, and to revisit the NSAA Journal fall 2025 coverage.

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MAY 4-7, 2026

A Strategic Reset

Get Ready for the 2026 NSAA National Convention & Tradeshow

|| BY EARL SALINE, NSAA DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

After a challenging winter season, the ski industry's most important gathering returns with a renewed focus on leadership, strategy and the future of the customer experience. Ski area leaders, operators and suppliers will come together May 4–7, 2026, at the Omni La Costa Resort & Spa in Carlsbad, CA, for the NSAA National Convention & Tradeshow — a post-season opportunity to reconnect, reflect and chart a path forward.

Designed for area leadership teams, especially CEOs, GMs and others across operations, risk, marketing, sustainability and technology, the National Convention delivers high-level insight alongside practical takeaways that support both near-term decision-making and long-term business resilience.

Strategic Conversations That Matter

The 2026 program will center on improving the customer journey and strengthening leadership at every level of ski area operations. Through industry-focused keynotes, including a panel discussion with prominent leaders, and a slate of education sessions, attendees will explore how evolving guest expectations, workforce challenges, technology and risk

considerations intersect, and how strong leadership can align these forces into sustainable success.

Additional content will address critical priorities, including risk management, sustainability, technology adoption, and workforce and ski area innovations, with an emphasis on peer learning and real-world application. The National Convention also provides an opportunity to recognize excellence across the industry. Annual awards will honor outstanding achievements in safety, marketing and sustainability, along with the presentation of the Conversion Cup, celebrating innovation and growth across ski areas of all sizes.

The NSAA Tradeshow remains a cornerstone of the event, bringing together leading suppliers and partners in an environment designed for meaningful connection. More than a showcase of products, the tradeshow is a solutions-oriented space where ski areas can explore emerging technologies, discover new approaches and strengthen the relationships that support their operations year-round.

A Setting Built for Connection

Set just inland from the Southern California coast, the Omni La Costa Resort & Spa offers a relaxed, post-season environment ideal for conversation and collaboration. Between sessions and meetings, attendees will have time to reconnect with peers, reflect on lessons from the past season, and look ahead with clarity and purpose.

Early registration and lodging fills up fast. Make plans now to secure your place at the 2026 NSAA National Convention & Tradeshow and ensure your leadership team is part of the industry's most important strategic conversation. Registration and housing details will be available at nsaa.org/national. 📍





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nsaa.org/awards



2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT

NSAA is committed to finding pathways to a *sustainable and resilient future* for skiing.

Our sustainability programming is guided by three pillars:

1

ADVOCACY

Advocate to policymakers for climate solutions

2

MITIGATION

Give the ski industry the tools to mitigate current climate impacts

3

RESILIENCE

Guide the ski industry to take action to be resilient into the future

Photo: RE WIKSTROM

Letter from our President

With the health of our mountain landscapes inextricably linked to the ski experience, our industry has long been committed to finding pathways toward a sustainable and resilient future for the sport we love. That commitment held true in the 2024-25 season, which was one for the books—ending as the second highest season on record with 61.6 million skier visits.

Across our slopes and beyond, the outdoor recreation industry continued to thrive, contributing \$1.2 trillion in economic output to the U.S. economy (Bureau of Economic Analysis), with downhill snowports generating nearly \$60 billion annually. This continued success and growth underscores not only the strength and vitality of our industry, but also our shared commitment and responsibility to ensure a thriving future for snowsports for generations to come.



Ski areas remain vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and inconsistent snowfall pose growing challenges to our industry and the mainly rural communities it supports. In response, the ski industry continues to reduce its environmental footprint, invest in operational improvements that strengthen our resilience, and use our collective voice to engage policymakers and inspire guests to act.

While national priorities on climate policy may shift from one administration to the next, our industry's focus does not. We believe that meaningful progress often begins within our own communities and businesses. Through programs like the Climate Challenge and Sustainable Slopes, we continue to lead by example—advancing real solutions and demonstrating that sustainability and economic vitality go hand in hand.

This annual report highlights NSAA's sustainability efforts and celebrates the impactful work happening across the ski industry as we continue to advance and collaborate on initiatives that drive meaningful progress nationwide. Across the country, ski areas are investing in cutting-edge snowmaking technologies, bolstering climate resilience strategies, and participating in industry wide programs like the Climate Challenge, which saw its highest participation to date.

Our passion for protecting natural resources through forward-thinking stewardship and sustainability—spanning social, economic, and environmental dimensions—remains central to NSAA's mission and values. Led by our Director of Sustainability, Courtney LaBrie, we are proud to continue serving as a trusted resource for all ski areas on their sustainability journeys.

Sincerely,

Michael Reitzell
NSAA President & CEO



Scan or visit
nsaa.org/WebResources
for the full report.

Getting Started with Sustainability

Starting your sustainability journey can feel overwhelming, especially with time constraints and limited capital resources being common challenges to climate action. To help, NSAA has provided a range of no-cost and low-cost initiatives, offering ski areas a practical guide to sustainability along with a checklist to kickstart meaningful action.

Ski areas can access this resource at
[nsaa.org > sustainability > Get Started Here!](https://nsaa.org/sustainability/Get-Started-Here)

Sustainability & Climate Industry Fact Sheet

The Sustainability & Climate Industry Fact Sheet highlights some quick ski industry sustainability facts as well as an overview of NSAA's different sustainability programs and reports.

This can be accessed at [nsaa.org > Industry Stats > Sustainability and Climate \(2025\)](https://nsaa.org/Industry-Stats/Sustainability-and-Climates-2025)

Inspiration, Momentum & Collaboration

Highlights from the MT2030 Climate Summit

|| BY COURTNEY LABRIE, NSAA DIRECTOR OF SUSTAINABILITY



A pre-MT2030 gathering at A-Basin fostered meaningful connections with ski area attendee peers before the larger conference.

The 2025 Mountain Towns 2030 Climate Summit took place last fall in Breckenridge, CO, with an assembly of stakeholders, including leaders from ski areas, municipalities, nonprofits, businesses and local governments coming together to address the urgent climate challenges facing mountain communities. This season also featured the second year of a special sustainability focused pre-Summit gathering, designed to foster meaningful connections with ski area attendee peers before the larger conference.

NSAA organized this kickoff in partnership with SAM, MT2030, Vail Resorts and Arapahoe Basin Ski Area, which hosted the event. More than 60 ski area attendees (up from 45 last year) took a scenic chairlift ride into the snow dusted mountains and up to A-Basin's Black Mountain Lodge. There, Helena Robinowitz, sustainability specialist at A-Basin, gave an overview of the ski area's ongoing wetland restoration project while pointing out highlights located near the lift.

Alan Henceroth, president and CEO of A-Basin, welcomed his fellow ski area guests and reiterated their commitment to sustainability leadership. Following that, Mike Nathan, sustainability manager at A-Basin, moderated an interactive panel discussion focused on hands-on stewardship, public lands access, connecting ski area staff and guests with the natural world, and building sustainable ethos through those actions. Representatives from Vail Resorts, Sun Valley and Alta Ski Area shared specific projects and key takeaways around these themes. Attendees from across regions, including some international voices, contributed thoughtful reflections on the challenges and opportunities ahead, reinforcing the ski industry's shared resolve to sustain progress on environmental initiatives despite the various headwinds we may all face. The

panel discussion was followed by a lively networking hour, sponsored by Brendle Group, PepsiCo and SE Group.

This opening session embodied the Sustainable Slopes pledge to prioritize collaboration over competition. It also set the tone for the program ahead, reinforcing the essential role ski areas play in driving climate progress while fostering connections that carried into the broader conference. The Summit itself featured a variety of presentations and workshops designed to accelerate progress on the emissions-reducing solutions being deployed in mountain, resort and rural communities of every size. It included sessions on renewable energy, biochar, wildfire resilience, transportation solutions and many other useful topics.

Over the two full days of the conference, the programming was filled with inspiring, real-world examples of ski industry leadership, offering both motivation and practical takeaways for action. For example, sustainability representatives from Bridger Bowl, A-Basin and Eldora took the main stage to share examples of how communities and ski areas can work together to steward forests, watersheds and wildlife habitats while strengthening resilience to a changing climate. In a session with other mountain community stakeholders, Steamboat Ski & Resort shared strategies for planning and investing in energy resilience. Offering advice to a full room, representatives from A-Basin, Mt. Rose – Ski Tahoe and Aspen One spoke on the importance of bipartisan climate advocacy within the ski industry. NSAA partner Ceres moderated the session, highlighting the ample opportunity for action and that now is the time to step up, share your story and help shape the policies that impact our mountains and communities.



Mike Nathan helped kick off a special sustainability focused opening session, drawing more than 60 ski area attendees, up from 45 last year.



Representatives from A-Basin, Mt. Rose – Ski Tahoe and Aspen One spoke on the importance of bipartisan climate advocacy within the ski industry to a full room, with NSAA partner Ceres moderating the panel.

On day two, Vail Resorts presented an interactive workshop on food rescue and sustainability in mountain towns, showcasing collaborative approaches to building a more resilient, sustainable food system. Additionally, Deer Valley Resort presented on how their Climate Action Plan empowers staff and cultivates a sustainability-forward culture, driving the resort's climate goals from within.

The MT2030 Summit inspired an overall sense of innovation and shared purpose, empowering participants to take meaningful sustainability actions within their communities.

"The MT2030 Summit brings together all the relevant players in my sustainability world, and it's really become a highlight of my year," said A-Basin's Nathan. "I get to mingle not only with ski area colleagues, but also with elected officials, municipalities and NGOs doing the same hard work we are at A-Basin. And engagement from ski areas has really grown. Our group sent a clear message to resort leaders and elected officials that the ski industry is committed to doing the difficult and impactful work that protects the places we love while empowering those who love it most — our guests, local communities and our staff. I can't wait for next year in Sun Valley!"

Attendees left the arrival day event and Summit with fresh ideas, new partnerships and a strengthened resolve to protect the mountain environments we all love and depend on. As Dominique Giroux, sustainability manager for Vail Resorts put it: "The MT2030 ski area arrival day was a powerful reminder that real progress happens when we show up, share ideas and build connections. Sustainability and resilience in the face of climate

change aren't things we tackle alone, they're initiatives we move forward together with energy, creativity and teamwork."

NSAA extends a big thanks to Arapahoe Basin Ski Area for hosting the group, as well as panelists from Sun Valley Resort, Vail Resorts and Alta Ski Area for sharing their insights. Thanks also to PepsiCo, Brendle Group and SE Group for their sponsorships. We're already looking forward to the next MT2030, slated for Sun Valley, ID, October 13–14, 2026.

Wetland Restoration at A-Basin

Overall, Arapahoe Basin Ski Area has restored 4,300 square feet of wetland to mitigate the 383 square feet of disturbance from the new Molly Hogan lift. Including both the upland and stream work, the total restored area is around 8,000 square feet.



Helena Robinowitz showcased A-Basin's ongoing wetland restoration project.

2022: A-Basin started by grading the wetland, building the stream and removing the concrete from the old Norway bottom terminal. The team engaged in willow sprigging — an erosion control technique — and planting, and irrigated and seeded with a USFS-created wetland and upland seed mix. All work was completed with the supervision of Peak Ecological Services.

2023: The ski area sprigged over 1,300 willows and engaged in revegetation, weeding, irrigation and compost adding. They also decided to de-compact the service road leading to the wetland due to extremely dry soil. The soil was incredibly tough and rocky, so they used a machine already on-site to loosen it. Compost, more native seed mix and hydromulch was then added, making it much easier to add sprigs to this zone in 2025.

2024: They sprigged 150 willows mostly on the streambed after Peak Ecological Services and the USFS determined that the Norway Wetland area had a 75% success rate. The team also irrigated and weeded the wetland.

2025: A-Basin continued to irrigate the wetland zone and sprigged around 200 willows on the service road with the help of volunteers that came out for the ski area's first-ever community wetland restoration event.

As a bonus, Robinowitz shared that overall, this project has also been solid for employee engagement, with regular help from the ski area's green team. 🌱

One Person's Trash is an Award Win For A-Basin

|| BY HEATHER B. FRIED

Per the mountain's mantra, Arapahoe Basin Ski Area looms legendary for a number of reasons. Their environmental work has recently become one of them. This Colorado ski area achieved both 100% renewable electricity and carbon neutrality in 2023. One of the next big goals in their crosshairs is 75% waste diversion. While that target remains on the horizon for now, the progress they've made so far — 185,000 pounds of waste kept from the landfill through recycling and composting in 2024 alone — earned A-Basin the Colorado Green Business Network's (CGBN) 24k Gold Award.

Here, the ski area's sustainability gurus share how they chose this project from heaps of environmental efforts, why this award hits different, and that a candy wrapper here and TV remote battery there add up to nothing in terms of weight, but a lot with regard to behavioral change.

Dirty Hands = Clean Landscape

Reducing waste to landfill may sound deceptively simple. But there were perhaps as many reasons why this project made the most sense for a winning application as pounds of trash diverted. For one, waste is something everybody touches, according to Mike Nathan, A-Basin's sustainability manager.

"The waste program is such a tangible example of how we actually engage both staff and guests on sustainability," he explained. "Renewable energy, or some of the behind-the-scenes water things we do, we know have huge environmental implications, and they're really important. But they could more or less exist in a vacuum, either with some contract we sign or some piece of equipment that we commit to buying. But waste involves every single staff member and a lot of our guests every single day."

Helena Robinowitz, sustainability specialist, can attest.

"Most of the questions I get asked about sustainability are about waste," she said. "It's like, 'Hey, is this recyclable? Where do I bring this? What happens to this bottle when it gets recycled?' So, it's been a great way for us to ... create those one-on-one relationships with folks to then expand to other sustainability initiatives like transportation or energy, water efficiency. It's a relationship builder that is important for our work here."

With a project this visible, Robinowitz added, guests also appreciate efforts they can clearly see. Whether that's via social media, on-site signage or food sorting at restaurants, it's meaningful that the team is willing to get their hands dirty. It also strikes down distrust around greenwashing, with younger



A-Basin's Mike Nathan, Helena Robinowitz and Tony Cammarata proudly accepting their 24k Gold Award on behalf of the team.

generations especially wary of instances where a touted "value system doesn't necessarily percolate within ... operations," said Robinowitz. She also brought up the related issue of building trust for recycling in general, a topic that can tend to fall flat among skeptics.

"We're lucky that our recycling facility is like 10 minutes away from us, so we've been able to run tours and really show folks, your water bottles go from here to become insulation in Patagonia jackets — we actually have awareness and knowledge about the purchasers," said Robinowitz.

She also likes to help people understand, ultimately, why this matters. Their nearby landfill, for instance, currently operates on one-fourth of its leased land. But once it hits capacity — forecasted for 2078 — an area in Summit County that's currently home to mountain biking trails, an archery range and a disc golf course could be at risk. The later that happens, "the more land and time we're going to have available for this," Robinowitz offered.

Finding tangible touchpoints, like the reality that trash may one day overtake trails, makes waste diversion more impactful for their community. But even with reminders like these and the ski area's strong culture of sustainability — with buy-in from the top down and passion oozing across their front lines — constant communication and reinforcement remain vital.

Weight that Scales

"The ski industry can be very crazy — people can feel underpaid and overworked and just really cold all the time," said Robinowitz,



Signage is an important way to signal to guests and staff that sustainability efforts are a priority. Keep it consistent, clear and bilingual.

who added that the last thing they want to deal with in moments like these is a ripe compost bin. “If you’re making the ask ... focus on the reciprocal nature of it: ‘I know this is a lot. Here’s how we’re going to help. Here’s why it matters for you and for the resort and for this community.’ Messaging is important too. Instead of just forcing it down people’s throats, you need a lot more collaboration.”

For Nathan and Robinowitz, that starts with supporting their team through sustainability training at new hire orientation. Staff learn about major initiatives and also get a tour of all the ski area’s various waste disposal sites behind their A-frame lodge in the base area so that they can see, firsthand, where and why cardboard goes here, while hard-to-recycle items go there. The education continues with signage, monthly employee sustainability newsletters, HR’s employee housing orientation, and throughout different departmental trainings.

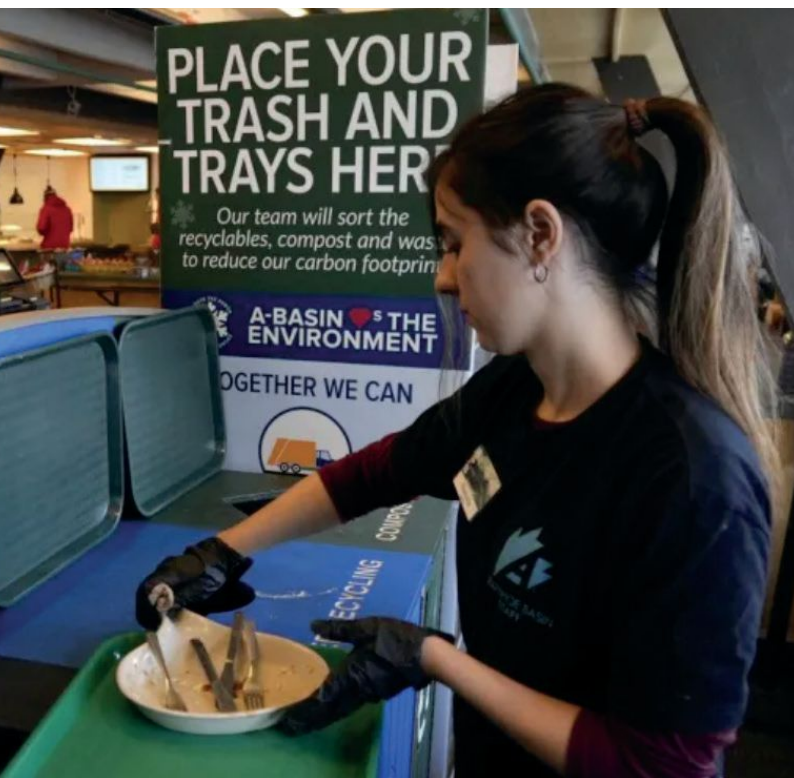
“It starts very high level and very broad with everybody as a new hire or at a returning orientation, and then we just dive down more specifically to areas and critical people or teams that have unique or specific questions,” Nathan said. “Bar staff learns a lot more about where glass goes than a guest service agent. Guest services learns a lot more about how we can recycle plastic cards and our pass media than a ski patroller.”

While this sustainable knowledge and expectation share is on its way to becoming institutionalized across every department, comms channel and season, many employees come to A-Basin with this intrinsic ethos already intact. Even so, the team likes to recognize and reward these efforts



— especially when there’s a new ask that may be perceived as or actually result in more work — with incentives like prizes for carpooling. Their A-mazing program, a peer-nominated system, rewards champions who go above and beyond with a bonus.

“Meg, one of our lift mechanics ... came up to me autonomously, like, ‘Our recycling bin is just this random other trash can that’s black, and people get confused all the time. Can we just get a better bin for this, and a better compost bin that fits on the back of a snowmobile? And I’d love to get involved in the hard-to-recycle program,’” recalled Robinowitz of a colleague who was an obvious choice for the \$200 bonus. “She single-handedly started that program and therefore gained a lot of additional engagement from some of her other staff.” ▶



The same went for Leah, a ski patroller who regularly texts Robinowitz when their battery receptacle is full. That battery, by the way, or the candy wrapper that goes in the bin next to it

don't add up to much in the grand scheme of nearly 200,000 pounds. But from Nathan's perspective, leaning "into all these weird employee waste streams," carries a different kind of weight that scales.

"If we can get our employees to become zealots ... then, when they're actually at their job here at the ski area, and there's hundreds of pounds of compost from the mid-mountain lodge, we just think that the dots are going to be that much more connected," he said. "That material and that person who's handling it is going to be much more likely to know the right place where it goes, be a little more motivated just to do it and potentially get your hands dirty because, again, they've been collecting stuff at home ... or they've been to the landfill with us on a tour we've led.

"So all of that ... normalizes the behavior of looking for and knowing there's another place for the material to go," Nathan went on.

Waste Not

It's small, incremental wins like these that will kickstart their next round of steady growth toward that 75% waste goal. Once peaking at nearly 70%, A-Basin typically hovers closer to 60% landfill diversion after having picked their bounty of low-hanging fruit. ▶

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The candy wrapper and TV remote add up to nothing in terms of weight, but a lot in terms of behavior change.

“All the easy stuff got done, and now we’ve been very stagnant,” Nathan said. Still, the ski area has come a long way. “When we first laid out that goal and first really started tracking, we were more down in like the 30% range. Summit County’s overall rate is about 22%; Colorado’s, I believe to be about 34%.”

As the team keeps reducing, recycling and composting their way to 75%, Nathan acknowledged that other ski areas looking to cut back needn’t pinpoint such an aggressive goal out of the gates. With many businesses in rural areas still not recycling or composting at all, a simple focus on that first stream is a great starting point. Along the way, cultivating the team’s natural passion for protecting the places they love to recreate, and identifying those champions, serves to multiply the efforts of your sustainability staff.

Externally, many rich resources are out there for the tapping.

“We’ve worked with the Colorado Green Business Network,” explained Robinowitz. “STOKE Certified, which is this ski and surf area entity to help rate, but also provide a tangible road map for sustainability and equity initiatives, has also been really helpful. Our local nonprofit High Country Conservation Center also has a program similar to that. Obviously, we live in a blue state, in a blue county where there is still some funding for this type of work, but I would recommend ski areas and businesses to not be afraid to ask for help.”

That includes reaching out to her and Nathan, who’ve advised fellow ski areas on aspects like signage — something Robinowitz stressed as particularly important. Her recommendation? Keep it consistent, clear and bilingual.

“People may have the best intent, but ... both employees and guests [come] from around the country and around the world. Different things are recyclable and compostable in

different places,” she said, adding that having team members on hand to answer questions is another good idea, where possible. “Sometimes, good intent can actually lead to a lot of contamination.”

Heaps of Influence

For all this attention paid to the nuance, amounting to big picture progress, Arapahoe Basin took home the 24-Karat Gold trophy last year. CGBN’s most prestigious honor, the award is peer reviewed and selected from among Gold Certified Organizations — the highest level of recognition — who submit a project.

A regular recipient of NSAA’s Golden Eagle Awards, A-Basin has a reputation as a ski industry sustainability standout. But this honor, while limited to Colorado, grows their scope of influence beyond the snowsports and outdoor industry spaces.

“There’s a lot of really innovative and impactful businesses in Colorado doing cool environmental work,” said Nathan. “We’re a big fish in a small pond up here. But when you expand the boundaries of that pond to the whole state, and to all the industries and tech and finance ... that aspect of this award in particular was cool.”

Robinowitz agreed. For her, the award brought on a renewed sense of hope and empowerment in the face of sustainability efforts that can sometimes feel frustrating from inside their ski area bubble.

“It was a good time to really feel proud of our work ... and to understand that we do deal with a lot of guests and employees and a very transient base of folks that come through here,” Robinowitz reflected. “And that our best is pretty good right now.”

CGBN’s annual Recognition Event, where A-Basin took the stage to receive their award, reminded Nathan of their team’s advocacy work — surrounded by big, heavy hitting corporations, yet all eyes and ears in their direction. In that regard and so many others, snowsports have an outsized voice and an outstanding platform in rooting for the environment.

“Those elected people and the policymakers ... they just want to talk about skiing or beer or both,” he laughed. “People think we’re cool. I think when people can talk about sustainability ... through the lens of any unique or fun or weird or different business, it just sort of helps to turn the temperature down in the room.

“People want to live vicariously through us,” Nathan continued. “People want to spend time outside.” 🏔️



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CORN HARVEST

Ski Areas Farming for Snow

|| BY CARL SHANE

Adam Mahler, mountain manager for Trollhaugen Ski Resort, Wis., used to be a dumpster diver. It's not as bad as it sounds, though. He and his colleagues were all professionals and, when they dove, it was for shaved ice, not garbage.

At the time, Mahler and his gang weren't much different than street riders who, in the 1990s, used to hunt for snow behind hockey rinks when nature hadn't given them the playground they needed for urban boarding. With permission to retrieve it, Mahler et al were hunting down snow from rinks in Minnesota's Twin Cities for a good that was greater than their small group — building Trollhaugen's October rail jam event.

"We'd spend weeks driving an hour one way just to get Zamboni shavings from hockey rinks," said Mahler, who'd rent a few dump trailers, hitch them to some pickup trucks and search for the chewed-up layer of ice left in a pile to slowly melt. "We had Excel spreadsheets of ice times from all the surrounding arenas, and we would basically just chase it and then load up a truck, drive it back, unload it by hand."

The crew stockpiled their thrifted collection in a shaded area near the base of the mountain, which sits at an elevation of about 920 feet. They'd cover the shavings with tarps, adding to the pile until they had enough snow just to open up one feature.

"The very first event we did with this was literally one box with a two-foot-wide path of snow, and the run in and the

run out," said Mahler, who added that while it was a huge time drain, it worked. "We did that for darn near 15 years, hauling it in like that."

About five years ago, when the rail jam had become a key element of their official winter season kickoff, Open Haugen, Mahler asked his fellow dumpster divers a question that would change everything for the small ski area: Why don't we try saving last year's snow? Mahler had been reading about how resorts in Scandinavia and Europe were snow farming. In Finland specifically, resorts had adopted a new system of pushing snow into piles, covering those piles up with sawdust, then saving the snow for the start of the following season.

"I was just like, 'You guys, at the end of the year, the snow on our trails, it just melts away. We just let it go, we don't do anything with it,'" Mahler recalled. "Let's pile it up, cover it with hay and go from there and see what happens."

And just like that, in 2021, Trollhaugen began farming snow.

A VIABLE OPTION

That first pile built in late March 2021, just before the mountain shut down for the season, was about 80 feet long, 15 feet high and 40 feet wide. Over it, they threw a 200-by-200-foot tarp gifted from a nearby minor league team. Seven months later, despite summer temperatures that occasionally rose into



Sun Peaks' snow pile before and after.

the high 80s and even 90s, rainstorms, windstorms and high humidity, only 50% of the snow pile had melted.

Since then, Trollhaugen has tuned its system — one part trial and error, one part research and better science. Now they create an ice cap over the top of the pile to hold in the cold and protect it from the most destructive element of all. Rain that gets under the pile destroys it from the bottom up.

“We throw salt on the top of the pile before we cover it with hay. It melts and freezes that top layer kind of like when you make homemade ice cream,” he said of the ice cap.

Jeremy Cooper, vice president of mountain sports development at Boyne Resorts, Mich., has been keeping an eye on what Mahler’s been doing at Trollhaugen.

“When you see it happen, you’re like, ‘Wow, this is a viable option. It works.’ If this is happening in Wisconsin, we can do this at any of our resorts. I think as more people dive into it and see success stories out of it ... I see it growing,” said Cooper, who views snow farming as a solution to the ongoing struggle of shrinking snowmaking windows, especially during those big pre-holiday push periods. “Demand is as high as it’s ever been to get on the hill. So I think anything we can do to get that guest experience out there we should do, and if that means saving snow ... that might be our next frontier.”

It’s a frontier Boyne crossed for the first time last season, launching a snow farming experiment at Big Sky Resort, Mont., in the spring of 2025.

“I wouldn’t say our execution matched the level of some resorts that have been saving snow for years, but we still retained more than half of our snowpack,” said Cooper. “Hay and wood chips weren’t an option for us, so we had to find a solution that fit our environment and our operations — and it worked. I’m confident snow preservation is the future, and we need to be thinking about next year while this year is still unfolding.”

SNOW TRIFECTA

By definition, snow farming or snow storage is the practice of stockpiling snow — pushing it into a mound to store it and often, but not always, covering it with some kind of insulation. Equally varied is how the stored snow is used. Some ski areas push it out for the summer, some for the fall and some save it for the following season.

A newer trend, only a few dozen ski resorts globally are currently farming snow. Many have leaned into it as part of a new trifecta: natural snow, man-made snow, stored snow. Together, the trifecta is helping with the challenge of a mounting opening day pressure point. October and November are the least efficient times to make snow and exactly when most mountains need coverage ahead of their season start date.

For those mountains on the FIS World Cup alpine ski calendar, a season that begins in October and ends in March, the pressure is even greater. Many are calling it untenable, echoing a call for schedule adjustments. More and more, races in Europe and North America are canceled each year because of poor snow conditions and warm temperatures.

Races aren’t being canceled at Finland’s Levi Ski Resort, however, where they’ve been snow farming since 2015 to build the racecourse. It’s been so successful there, in fact, that the mountain launched The Levi Glacier Project in 2022 to secure snow while also optimizing energy consumption, effectively building a permanent glacier. But Levi’s not the first. Copper Mountain in Colorado has been snow farming since 2009, and in Europe, Austria’s Kitzbuhel, like Levi, took it up in 2015, while a cross-country ski course in Davos started experimenting with snow storing more than 15 years ago.

For those investing in the practice, strategies and methods vary. Each is designed to create the system best suited for a particular climate, altitude and terrain, as well as the mountain’s ►



The transformation from haystack to terrain park in preparation for Open Haugen. The rail jam's 20th anniversary had enough snow to make it a two-day event for the first time ever.

motivations, including what their customers want. For Mammoth, it's a longer season; for Copper, it's the Woodward Summer Camp; at Sun Peaks Resort in British Columbia, which snow farmed for the first time last season, it's about attracting junior race teams for early season training.

And then there's combatting climate change.

"We definitely know winters are going to start later, perhaps be warmer and be more challenging," said Brad Wilson, GM of Idaho's Bogus Basin, which launched its snow farming operation at the end of the 2024-25 season. "We're always looking for innovative ways to blunt the impact of climate change."

INNOVATIVE, BUT NOT NEW

For thousands of years, in eras well before modern refrigeration, different forms of ice and snow farming were used to cool food and houses. Harvested off mountains and even from deserts where water froze overnight, snow and ice would be stored underground. In Ancient Persia, a large storage chamber called a yakhchāl was used; its cone-shaped roof allowed warm air to rise and escape from the top.

Fast forward to the 19th century, and farmed ice became a commercial enterprise in the United States. Entrepreneurs in New England leaned into their frigid winters and, by the 1860s, they'd transformed the produce and meat industries. Chunks of ice cut from lakes and ponds were shipped far and wide — locally by rail and overseas by barge.

History suggests what the ski industry is now discovering: So long as snow is insulated, it can resist heat.

The insulation used today often reflects the organic materials available in a particular area — sawdust, wood chips, straw, etc. Trollhaugen covers its pile with hay because it's easy



to source from nearby farms. At Copper, with a base at 9,712 feet where average summer temperatures are in the low 70s with nights in the 40s, snow is simply piled to about 50 feet and never covered.

Others have invested in new technology to help preserve their snow.

PILE ON: A HIGH TECH BLANKET

In the early aughts, Mikko Martikainen, a snow storage pioneer, had a mission to apply the ancient strategy of snow farming to the mass market with a cooling blanket. His idea for snow farming and his technology were initially met with ridicule. It's reported that the manager of Finland's largest chain of ski resorts, Mikko Lönnström, thought "he was maybe sick in the head."

A lot has changed since then. In 2005, Martikainen launched Snow Secure and its polystyrene blanket. Between 2-2.8 inches thick and designed to fit snugly over mounds of snow, the blanket unfolds like an accordion and attaches at the seams with large strips of Velcro to become a giant dome. Company-run tests report that even when the external temperature climbs to 111 F, under the mat temperatures maintain a max of 37.5 F.

Levi has been using Snow Secure since 2019. Last season, the blanket made its debut in North America at Bogus Basin, Sun Peaks and Tyrol Basin, Wis. While Ski Apache in New Mexico and Soldier Hollow in Utah purchased the blanket in 2025, according to Martikainen, neither had enough snow last season to pilot their blankets. They are expected to start this spring.

Watching the blanket's success unfold in Scandinavia, especially at World Cup venues, Bogus Basin's Wilson has adopted the new trifecta, blanket and all. A new snowmaking system that debuted in 2019 allowed them to consistently ►

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open for Thanksgiving regardless of natural snowfall. But snowmaking “is just a part of the puzzle,” he said. Last year, the mountain’s \$120,000 investment in the Snow Secure pilot program was twofold: to have snow available early in the season as a base for the first snow, and to save water.

Snow Secure guided Wilson and team through the farming process, helping them define the scope for the pile, offering tips on how to groom it and what it should look like before covering it. With the groomers already pushing snow, they needed to “just redistribute some labor and to get that stuff pushed around, but it wasn’t substantial. It probably took three or four days to push the pile into the shape that it needed to be,” Wilson explained, adding that by mid-April, the blanket covered a 120-foot wide, 300-foot long, 30-foot tall pile.

“No pun intended, but the upstream consequences of having that pile of snow in place so you don’t have to duplicate your efforts the following year is a water savings, an energy savings and labor savings,” Wilson continued, estimating the water equivalent of their pile at 3.5 million gallons. “We have a limited amount of water available for snowmaking. So anytime we can save that amount of water is a huge benefit.”

Corralling the water by storing it could also be a benefit to the ranchers downstream, with whom Bogus has an agreement through the state water district. By saving it, rather than

opening the proverbial faucet all the way and flooding the ranches with snowmelt in the spring, snow farming keeps the water at a steady trickle through the summer when the creeks are usually dried out.

“So the longer we can keep that stream running, the better off the downstream users are,” said Wilson.

WATER RIGHTS & WRONGS

While snowmaking technology saves both energy and water, a mountain’s ability to store snow until the start of the next season often depends on water rights.

“Snow farming can be used when permitted,” said Geraldine Link, director of public policy for NSAA. “Water usage is highly regulated, especially regarding the storage and diversion of water resources. In some cases, a water decree or contract may require that a certain percentage of the water used for snowmaking be returned to the watershed as spring runoff. If snow is stored, it may be prevented from melting and returning to the watershed, which can conflict with the terms of decrees or contracts. As a result, snow farming is not commonly used in areas with such restrictions.”

Where regulations allow, snow farming could perhaps be the answer to water rights issues, according to Boyne Resorts’ Cooper. ▶

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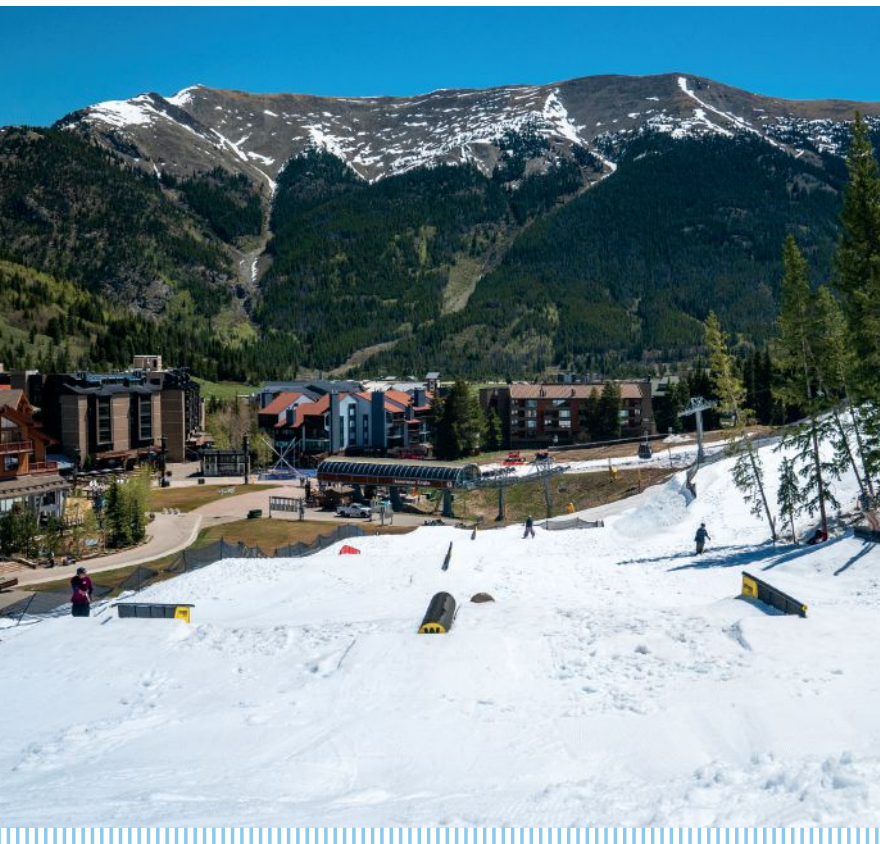
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Copper Mountain has been snow farming since 2009 and uses their stash for its Woodward Summer Camp. The process varies from season to season based on snowfall, but has worked so well for Copper that they've added the Summer Hike Park at Center Village.

"If you have a project that comes up that requires an additional three or four million gallons of man-made snow, where do you cut from? You have to make some really tough decisions," he pointed out. "So to be able to store it year to year is another option that I don't think we, as an industry, have explored deeply enough."

The operator does have some mountains with water rights conflicts; Big Sky isn't one of them.

"We [had] one little area with some man-made snow that we saved from last year, tarped it up and we tr[ie]d some different things," Cooper said.

Their focus is the terrain park, which demands bigger quantities of snow. Boyne Resorts is also considering snow farming at Brighton where "we spend the last efforts of snowmaking every year to build out our larger jump line," he added. "Typically, we have three jumps in a row there. What if we pushed them all at the end of the year into one pile and covered it? What do we got to lose?"

It's some of what Copper Mountain has been doing for more than 15 years — pushing snow from Woodward Mountain Parks to build their Woodward Copper Summer Camp rail park. Halfway up the mountain, the green hillside boasts a large white stripe that Noah Schwander, director of Woodward, called "Our own glacier."

"It's gonna be 75 and sunny today on the snow," Schwander said as kids in shorts and T-shirts rode a 1,000-foot conveyor up the side of it.

It's the final week of Woodward Summer Camp that runs from mid-May through mid-August. Construction began in April when groomers, using GPS technology to measure snow depth, pushed snow from the surrounding 15 acres into a 50-foot high, 1,000-foot long glacier. It takes four cats about four weeks of 20-hour days to build it.

"It's real farming. This is self-sustaining, 5 acres, 25-feet thick. This is a real amount of snow," said Schwander, who added that each year, the process looks a little different based on snowfall. "[2025] was a great snow year, but [that] spring, it stopped snowing early, and it kind of started to melt early. So we actually had to do more farming than we did the year before."

By the time camp closes in August, the glacier has lost half its girth. It's then pushed onto a racecourse for summer race practice. When that's all over, it's flattened completely and left to melt, "to make sure that the water bar is in the right place, that it's going to where it's originally intended," said Schwander.

Snow farming has worked so well for Copper that they've added another summer site to "supply what people want [since] we have the snow," he went on. The Summer Hike Park brings snow to Center Village where the Wrecktangle obstacle course and ticket office for the Rocky Mountain Coaster sit. And in 2024, Copper debuted their Summer Rail Jam Series, also at Center Village.



A success by most measures, Bogus Basin's pilot also revealed an important learning they'll apply next season: Wait until at least November to uncover the pile, regardless of early snowfall.

THE GREAT REVEAL

On October 9, 2025, Bogus Basin uncovered their snow pile. The weather forecast drove timing: before the first snowfall of the season so there'd be no precipitation on top, but after nighttime temperatures had dropped to freezing, according to Wilson.

Last summer was a warm one. While temps on the mountain averaged about 77 F, there were hot days that rose into the 90s. Visually, the mound of snow was still nearly as big as it had been in April when the pile was first pushed. A solar-powered thermometer at the top kept tabs on the health of the snow beneath the insulated panels. On average, temperatures remained at 37.2 F, even though the surface temperature reached 119 F on July 1st.

Excitement was in the air as the crew of about 15 people stood on the pile and, one by one, pulled off each section of blanket, folding the pieces back into their original accordion shape. A hard shell of dirty ice that caked the pile looked like the cover remained on, "But the inside is still nice, white, winter snow," said Wilson.

With 80% of the snow pile remaining intact, the ultimate question — can you really store snow for an entire summer and use it again? — appeared to have a resolution.

"The answer is yes," said Wilson without hesitation. With less of a snowmaking need, Bogus also cut its early season water and electricity consumption by 70%. "I see this both

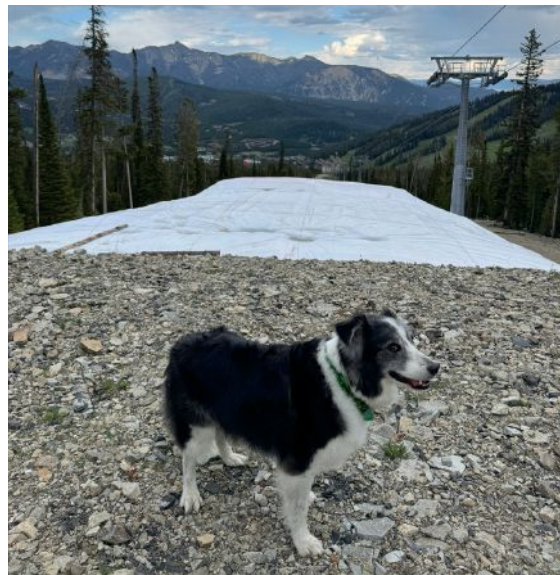
environmentally and economically as the next innovation for the North American ski industry."

That said, there's a learning curve. The urgency behind uncovering the pile in early October applies more to ski areas where the first snow is followed by a long-term freeze, which can damage the blanket. That's not the case at Bogus Basin, where early snowfall tends to melt away quickly — especially during a warm fall like last year's. By the time the team pushed out the pile six weeks later, it was down to about 50%. While that was still enough snow for the ski area's early Thanksgiving weekend opening, offering a 300-foot carpet and terrain park for guests, the team plans to wait until at least early November for next season's unveiling.

Another learning that came out of this pilot? "There's no such thing as too much snow," Wilson added. Accordingly, he expects to purchase as many as five more systems next year to save up to 30 acre-feet of snow.

At Sun Peaks, Tim Foster, chief of mountain operations, is also leveraging the trifecta. Despite their snowmaking system, the mountain has struggled for years with adequate coverage on the bottom third of the racecourse they open each November for early season junior training. The first ski area in Canada to use Snow Secure, the mountain invested \$180,000 in 18 mats at the end of the 2024-25 season.

They pushed the snow to the Nancy Greene International Race Centre from a 12-acre swath on Todd Mountain and built a 35-foot tall, 100-foot wide, 300-foot long pile that covered ►



Turns out, snow piles are also beloved by hot dogs in the summertime. Tad pictured at Trollhaugen and Sundance pictured at Big Sky.

9 to 10 acres — the largest Snow Secure storage pile in North America, according to the company. As spring turned into summer and the sides began to melt, Foster kept a close eye on the pile, watching it morph from a dome shape into “more like a loaf of bread,” he said, also monitoring its temperature weekly.

“It [was] quite interesting to see that it [was] very close to zero Celsius under the tarps,” he explained. “Most every day, on the warmer days, it [would] pop up a little bit, a degree above zero or freezing, but the majority of the time it stay[ed] below that.”

The highest recorded outdoor temperature on the mountain over the summer was 98.6 F; underneath the tarp on that same day, he clocked 39.2 F. Sun Peaks’ reveal day was October 8, 2025. Foster was expecting a 30% loss of snow and was “extremely satisfied” with the result: only a 20% loss, just like Bogus Basin.

A month later, Sun Peaks was able to open their training facilities for junior racers who came in from all over western Canada and the U.S. Over the past few years, getting snow coverage for the early training season was a constant stressor for Foster. The event is not only an economic boost to the mountain, but the whole community. If hundreds of athletes and coaches don’t show up because there’s no snow, small businesses, hotels and restaurants suffer — justifying their investment in Snow Secure.

“We calculated and we felt the risk was acceptable, and that if it was successful, it would provide certainty that you didn’t have to worry about snow anymore,” he said, appreciating exactly that when they pulled back the blankets. “I was like, *OK, this is a thing.*”

When other mountains saw what Sun Peaks was doing, they initially looked on with curiosity, raised eyebrows and casual questions.

“But as soon as we actually got through to the fall and there’s this giant pile of snow sitting there ... the phone started ringing, and the site visits started happening, and people were all of a sudden saying ‘Wow, this actually did work!’” reported Foster, who added that as part of their pilot, the mountain made snow only at the top of the race training course, saving about 1.5 to 2.5 million gallons of water. “Managing that resource is an important one. [Our goal] is using less water to accomplish the same amount of snow ... that the resort needs to operate.”

Back at Trollhaugen, Mahler continues to grow its snow farming operation. Last season, they pushed more snow than ever, building their biggest pile yet at 200 feet long, 30 feet high, 80 feet wide.

“It look[ed] like a pyramid with no peak,” said Mahler, who moved it to a new location near their rope tow. “Now, we’ve got this snow already spread out on this run that’s going to make our lives easier with the snowmaking.”

The day before Open Haugen, held annually the first weekend in October, the snow was pushed out for the rail jam event’s 20th anniversary.

“It couldn’t have gone any better. The snow held great,” said Mahler of the occasion that drew 350 competitors with enough snow to make it a two-day event for the first time ever.

“I don’t know where this is going to take us. If this is ... what we’re going to do from now on. I don’t see why we wouldn’t,” he continued, adding with a laugh that “When we share videos on our social media of the pile, other mountain managers are like, ‘I can’t believe you’re doing this and we’re not.’” ❧



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|| BY HEATHER B. FRIED

SNOWMAKER EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Where Light Bulb Meets Wet Bulb

It's late January 2025, the height of the season between big ski holidays. A power pricing surge in Maine has Sunday River and Sugarloaf snowmaking operations on a temporary freeze. Meanwhile, fellow Boyne Resorts ski area Loon Mountain, N.H., is still running their guns and could use some help after recently losing some tenured snowmakers. The solution to both issues? Send snowmaking reinforcements from Maine over to New Hampshire — a move that may have just laid the groundwork for an ongoing opportunity among not just Boyne properties, but industry wide.

SNOWMAKING SUPPORT MISSION

“To have some resources coming from another ski area ... was advantageous on a number of levels,” according to Alan Wickstrom, vice president of operations for Loon Mountain Resort, who mentioned the sheer ability to get tasks done quicker as the first advantage. “The other is networking and job knowledge sharing — really got the teams excited about being with each other.”

In seizing this snowmaker support mission, the Loon team welcomed their counterparts in separate, two-day shifts — a Sunday River session and a Sugarloaf session. Apart from the symbiotic upsides that helped all three teams in the moment, Brendan Ryan, VP of snow surface management across Boyne Resorts at the time, noted a number of takeaways and benefits, some of them unanticipated.

“Folks that spend a lot of their career at one resort don’t necessarily get that perspective,” he said of sharing in-person insights across teams. “Obviously, I can come in and say, ‘Hey, there’s a better way of doing this,’ but having our teams ... developing that organically is so much more impactful.”

Heavily focused on the team, this informal and evolving exchange opportunity has been a great complement to the company’s monthly snowmaking best practice call that tackles the technical side. In-person exposure to other ski area cultures, for instance, brought to light practical discussions around things like the number of team members needed for each task, and the deeply existential ponderings of how one defines snow quality.

The various methods to manufacture a slippery surface are almost snowflake like in their variance, depending on everything from altitude, weather and humidity to water



TSV's snowmaking season wraps up in January.

The value of unifying the Boyne team through an exchange experience outweighs any potential downsides.



rights, resources, acreage and vertical coverage, to name a few. Accordingly, while their teams had a good dialogue on producing snow effectively and efficiently, snow quality remains a popular yet hotly contested topic.

“It’s not just subjective in terms of you’re out there checking the snow quality at any given point in time, but also ... the objective and how we’re trying to operate,” reported Ryan, whose favorite aspect of snowmaking is creating something that wouldn’t otherwise exist, with every ski area bringing its own unique science to the equation. “There were some really good, detailed conversations that continue to happen of different opinions on snow quality and how ... there’s such an opportunity to more effectively snow plan. And then making sure that you’ve got effective communication ... so that the GM all the way down to the ops team is rowing in the same direction.”

From Wickstrom’s end of the exchange, aside from getting into the minutia of methods for storage, rolling hoses and other operational best practices, communication was the most enlightening learning among participants. In particular, ensuring team members have an understanding of their role and how to perform it efficiently *ahead* of a gun run, or communicative planning as Wickstrom put it, was a big takeaway.

Boyne’s New England teams recently forged a similar opportunity for cultural and technical exchange among employees. Piggybacking off Sugarloaf’s long-standing Snowmakers Ball, the first ever Snowmaking Olympics took place there last spring. An idea inspired by Windham, 20 snowmakers from the three ski areas competed on cross-resort teams in six events, with HKD in the mix as a Boyne-wide supplier of stick guns.

“So it was in the shop, rebuilding valves and heads, and then very publicly testing them and seeing which ones failed and which ones didn’t,” reported Ryan of the first amusing event. “We then knotted a whole bunch of hoses ... you have to unknot the hoses and set up a gun and strip them and roll them back up. We then did 50-foot hose bowling. We had a tripod gun setup, and it was to get the end of the hose as close to the center of the gun as you could.”

For the final event, the teams went toe-to-toe navigating a slalom course on butt sleds or shovels. Before they made their way down for the day, the head of snow surfaces for Sugarloaf got a call over the radio with another chance for these Olympians to collaborate.

“Talk about a cool outcome,” remembered Ryan of the request to go help out the terrain park crew. “[We] hiked across the mountain, and we showed up with eight guys from across the network, and we wound up setting a whole bunch of rails as a collective Boyne New England team super fast.”

Apart from the official main events — the brand new Olympics and the 40-year Snowmakers Ball tradition — the



For ski areas ready to broaden their snowmakers’ horizons but don’t have an exchange partner in mind, reaching out to your manufacturer is a great first step. In the past, Boyne brought groups to HKD HQ for training.

teams took the chance to bond during ski-arounds, meals and touring Sugarloaf’s pump houses and facilities. In the past, Boyne brought groups to HKD HQ for training, which Ryan described as both technical and fun. While he still values that opportunity, these exchange events offer a less structured environment that makes way for organic connections and high-impact dialogues.

“We had a really productive conversation about snowmaking welding standards, and what does it mean to be certified,” Ryan explained. “That’s a whole separate deep dive of, someone who has a 6G pipe cert with no field experience is maybe not the best person to be welding in a technical spot on the hill if they haven’t worked in that environment. So we had a solid hour-and-a-half conversation with the snowmaking leadership, a couple of our corporate team members and the head of mountain operations in New England [on] what is the right mix here to ensure we’re getting a high quality product. Really, this topic is nuanced, but it’s a step in the right direction that benefited from the experience of a broader group.”

Wickstrom (who had yet to tell the boss that Loon will be hosting the next Snowmaking Olympics) also appreciated the space for discussion around resource sharing with regard to *who has this piece of equipment or that part up for grabs?*

OPPS FOR OPS

As Boyne’s exchange platform continues to take shape and evolve, Ryan hopes to include more staff across the enterprise. As part of that, he’d like to bring Midwest snowmakers, who fire up their guns a bit later than their counterparts, out to New England ahead of ski season in the future. In addition to sharing perspectives, strengthening their team and investing ►



A collective Boyne New England team lending a hand to set rails in the terrain park.



Vicente Fernandez (left) and Miguel Gonzales visiting Loon Mountain.

in snowmaking careers, Ryan expects this cross-regional visit to put a fine point on their similarities and differences.

“It’s amazing, we use a lot of the same technology, but the water is warmer in Michigan, the air is more moist ... and it’s a bit harder at times to make snow. Some of the technology that works great out here, we’ve had to modify as we’ve brought it to Michigan,” he said, also mentioning physical footprint as another factor. “Both Michigan ski areas have 500ish feet of vertical, so coming to see three sets of booster pump houses at Sunday River to be able to get the water to the top is a different animal.”

For Steve Hoxie, VP of mountain operations at Taos Ski Valley, N.M., getting his snowmakers out to experience a stark contrast to the desert Southwest was precisely the point. The ski area’s snowmaking season ends in January. Last year after they wrapped, two of his snowmaking managers — Miguel Gonzales and Vicente Fernandez — visited Loon and Stowe Mountain Resort, Vt.

Water rights are one major difference between regions and a limiting factor in Taos’ territory, where the topic can be sensitive and presents unique challenges for snowmaking operations. That was especially true last season, when the ski area saw one of its lowest snowpacks in history, according to

Hoxie. Setting that limitation aside “in the hopes of spurring new ideas and innovations,” was Hoxie’s vision, and he drew inspiration from another department for their exchange field trip.

“Ski patrols throughout the country have had a robust professional patrol exchange program for decades,” he explained. “Our patrol usually hosts two to four professional exchanges per season and has benefited immensely from the sharing of ideas and seeing how other resorts perform their daily duties. This got us thinking about how departments like snowmaking and lift maintenance could also benefit from a similar professional exchange experience.”

Hoxie also appreciated giving his crew, who were born and bred on TSV’s system, the opportunity to experience other setups and strategies, like making snow during the day on slopes where people are actively skiing. At the same time, his snowmakers got to see the birthplace of technologies behind their HKD Impulse tower guns. While one of the biggest take-aways from the exchange was validation for the strength of TSV’s snowmaking program, both Gonzales and Fernandez went home with tangible techniques to try out.

“We saw some methods of removing condensation from the air lines by strategically placed water collectors inside ▶

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Water rights are a major region differentiator and a limiting factor in Taos' territory, where the topic can be sensitive and presents unique challenges for snowmaking operations.

their facilities,” Fernandez explained. “Also, by integrating automatic valve actuators that can be controlled from a remote command station ... [they] would remove the need of having to preemptively valve each location manually before a startup.”

Similarly, Gonzales found it interesting that Loon purges their water intake after shutdowns with compressed air, while Stowe is installing snowmaking pipes above ground after noticing that buried pipe rots quicker. Also on the equipment front, “It’s important we evaluate how many Larchmont hydrants we still have in service,” Gonzales added. “Loon has replaced every Larchmont they own. It’s something we have been doing slowly, but I believe now it’s a lot more important to resolve even sooner than we originally planned.”

On the staffing side, experimenting with shift timing may serve to level up efficiency.

“Loon has adjusted their night and day crews to start and stay later in the evening and morning,” said Gonzales. “So in a sense, things will be smoother for startups and shutdowns if night crews and day crews are not swapping places during critical temperature drops or spikes.”

TSV’s shifts used to start at 7 a.m. and end at 7 p.m., times that are considered a golden hour, according to Gonzales. As a

result of this observation, the team moved shift changes to 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. this season.

“One last interesting fact we learned from Loon,” Gonzales continued. “Water is most dense at 4 degrees Celsius.”

Water was perhaps the biggest eye-opener of all for TSV’s voyaging snowmakers. While they didn’t let this massive regional resource chasm disrupt their learning experience, water can’t help but flow into any snowmaking conversation or context at some point.

Fernandez mentioned that the ski areas they visited “operate without any cap on annual water usage and have a very robust series of reservoirs of water to feed from ... that are integrated with the town at the base of the ski mountain. This allows for shared use of the water, whether it be for snowmaking, other recreation as well as fire mitigation.”

Likewise, “the amount of cooperation between the resorts and the village municipalities,” stood out to Gonzales. “Both villages recognized the importance of snowmaking and contributed a huge amount of resources to both Stowe and Loon.”

That said, Fernandez also acknowledged that snowmakers in the East deal with just as many challenges. All of these tidbits added up to a trip that was more than worth taking.

“I feel that the exposure we got by being toured around another resort’s snowmaking system while they were under operations was tremendously beneficial,” concluded Fernandez. “Learning and sharing tips and tricks and discussing how we each deal with challenges in the snowmaking world is a huge benefit. My hope is that more ski resorts support this snowmaking operations exchange concept and jump on the bandwagon. I would love to host, tour around and teach snowmakers from other resorts how we make magic happen here at Taos.”

CAUTIONARY ADVICE & RESOUNDING UPSIDE

Hoxie also hopes to see more of these exchanges happen across the industry. For ski areas ready to broaden their snowmakers’ horizons but don’t have an exchange partner in mind, reaching out to your manufacturer is a great first step. The Taos/Loon/Stowe opportunity came through HKD Snowmakers’ Ken Mack, who used to serve as Loon’s snow surfaces manager and was able to make a logical connection among the resorts.

“[Loon and Stowe] had similar systems and similar processes,” explained Hoxie. “Since we’re pretty much compressor, pump driven air/water systems, it wouldn’t really behoove us to go visit a resort that has a ton of electrical infrastructure and uses fan guns all over the mountain.”

Along those lines, Ryan brought up manufacturer trainings as another chance to get the team together to learn. SMI Snow Makers’ annual service clinic, for instance, was most recently held at Sunday River, and Boyne brought teams from British Columbia, Utah, Michigan, Washington and New Hampshire

together ahead of the event, spending “an entire day as a team sharing knowledge and touring the new pump house being constructed at Sunday River,” reported Ryan.

Workers’ comp liability may be the next logical question when sending staff to tour around elsewhere, but our sources agree that it’s a non-issue. For any short-term exchange, employees would be considered on a work trip, clocked in at their ski area and therefore covered by insurance as usual. A bigger worry has to do with a different risk factor.

Even the most engaged, thoughtful team members are likely to compare salaries at some point (if not right out of the gates), according to Ryan. Still, he thinks that the gains in gathering cohorts outweigh this reality. Sure, wages and resources won’t always be apples to apples across regions and ski area sizes, but leaders who know these conversations will happen have an opportunity to proactively manage expectations and even embrace the discussions.

“It’s annoying on the wage side, but that moved us in a better direction, in my opinion,” said Ryan, who added that Boyne is adopting a unified and clearly defined tier system for snowmakers akin to what they have in place for lift maintenance. This pathway of mapping out incremental criteria and giving people better feedback lends to creating careers at Boyne’s mountains. “So that actually was a real shot in the arm towards that initiative. When Joe keeps asking for a raise, I now have something definitive to say. There’s an experience component, there’s a technical component, but there’s also leadership soft skills that are important in all of this if you want to move out of a technician or a journeyman role and into a leadership supervisory role. So we are continuing to try and be better on that front.”

Just as wage comparisons are a potential drawback to crossing ski area boundary lines, so too is the related risk of losing a team member who’s experienced greener pastures (or rather, whiter peaks), according to Hoxie. He mentioned quality of life and cool factor in addition to pay structure as potential head-turners. Those realizations, though, can go both ways — also giving employees a newfound appreciation for how great their home mountain is. Ultimately, Hoxie agreed with Ryan and Wickstrom that the value of giving the team an exchange experience is most definitely greater than the downsides.

“It’s those little nuggets that, once you piece them all together, can really change your operation over the course of several years,” he said of comparing strengths, weaknesses, strategies and techniques. “We cooperate together quite a bit through NSAA and Forest Service interactions ... but we’re also kind of guarded in a lot of ways. And maybe sometimes some of that guardedness doesn’t really benefit us as individual resorts. There’s a lot of benefit to cooperating with each other.”

Ryan thinks that’s true even for resorts that won’t have fully automated snowmaking for a while, if ever. Any opportunity to develop the humans who are driving your product is worth the investment, in his mind. The only caveat to that, so far, was a proposed Southern Hemisphere exchange. But Ryan’s hesitation there had to do with the greater strategy of transitioning away from big crews in the winter and skeleton crews come summer.

“The idea as we invest in these systems, and these teams operating the systems, is less overall team — higher paid, better trained, more buy-in type folks that are there on a year-round basis ... doing more of the capital maintenance. Not just nozzles and oil, but replacing pipe and rebuilding valve houses,” explained Ryan. “You don’t get that if you send your best few guys to the Southern Hemisphere in the summer.”

Related, Wickstrom hinted at another important point here: Certain employees will make better exchange program candidates than others. In many cases, it’s likely to be the tenured snowmakers who make this trip. To those veterans, Wickstrom had one piece of advice: Mind your managed criticism.

“It’s probably not productive to walk into somebody’s house and start commenting and being critical about something that they see,” Wickstrom said. “The value needs to be there for both sides. If you don’t see the value in going to look at somebody else’s program, don’t put yourself in that position.”

Wherever values, strategies and schedules *can* align, “it’s far more productive to get all these [employees] talking to each other than it is to keep them from talking to each other,” Wickstrom echoed, having seen “all of the ones that you would expect to stay engaged ... [get] something out of it that I think are far better off than if they didn’t [participate].” 🏔️



Teams made up of cross-Boyne members demonstrating their athleticism in the Snowmaking Olympics hose bowling event.

Connecting Classrooms to the Mountains

A New Pipeline for Resort Talent

|| BY TIFFANY WHITCOMB, FOUNDER OF THE PIPELINE PROJECT

The ski industry is standing beneath a loaded slope. Veteran staff are retiring, international hiring remains uncertain and operational gaps are widening. The warning signs are clear. Yet one of the most promising solutions — America's high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) students — has remained largely overlooked. To prevent a full-blown avalanche, the next generation of mountain professionals must be developed now before they graduate high school.

Students in welding, construction, EMT, health science, culinary arts and other hands-on programs align directly with the operational needs of ski resorts. They don't just learn foundational skills; they learn how to apply them in real-world settings. Many participate in senior year work-study programs that lead directly to employment, yet there's a disconnect from the fact that these skills could open doors to careers in the ski industry.

To understand why, it helps to take a closer look at CTEs: what they are and why they're such a powerful but underutilized resource for staffing a ski areas.

Millions of Skilled Team Members in the Making

CTE is a career-focused, applied approach to learning that equips high school and post-secondary students across the U.S. with both academic knowledge and technical skills. During the 2023–24 school year (the most recent for which federal data is available) 8.6 million secondary and nearly 3.5 million students at the postsecondary level were enrolled in CTE programs, according to the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network (cte.ed.gov).

Also referred to as career clusters, CTE programs range from advanced manufacturing to construction, entrepreneurship, hospitality, agriculture and many other focus areas, all of which can help fulfill open positions at ski areas. For more general information and to learn about the 14 federal career clusters, 72 sub-clusters and CTE leaders from each state, Advance CTE (careertech.org) and the Association for Career and Technical Education (acteonline.org) are great resources to explore.

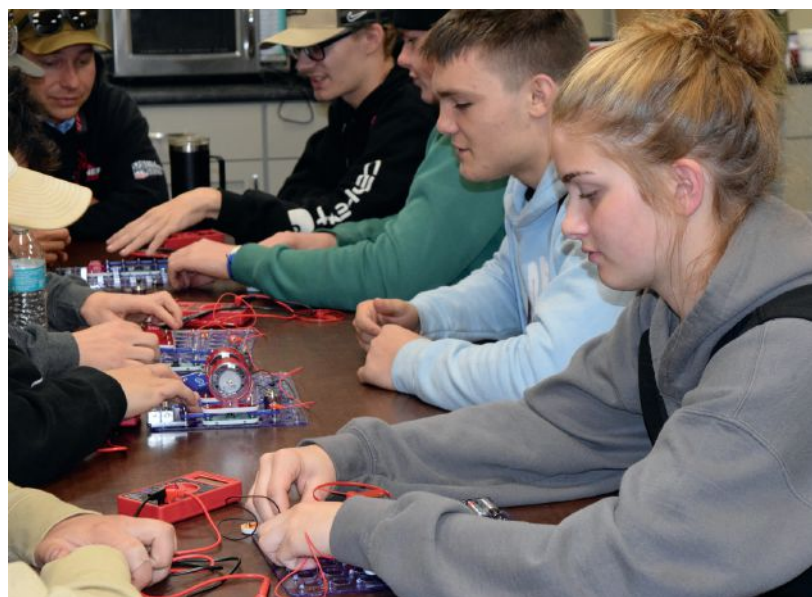
But CTE is more than technical training. These programs are built with input from local industries, include work-based learning and are designed to prepare students for lifelong careers. Most importantly, participating students are actively looking for opportunities to turn their skills into jobs. While ski areas across the country face urgent staffing needs —

particularly in lift maintenance and snowmaking — many students and teachers are unaware these jobs even exist, let alone that they represent sustainable and lifelong careers.

Here in New Hampshire alone, there are 28 CTE centers, several of which are beginning to recognize outdoor recreation as a priority within workforce development. However, during the 2024–25 school year, teachers leading CTE programs across the state — some who are season passholders living just 10 minutes from a ski resort — were surprised to learn about the breadth of roles required to operate a mountain. Students can't pursue careers they've never heard of, and teachers can't recommend opportunities they don't know exist.

Digging even further into the data at the race/ethnicity and special populations level, CTE partnerships can bring more than the opportunity to fill open positions. There's also potential to attract employees from marginalized communities, diversifying and therefore strengthening your workforce. For instance, more than 30% of high school CTE participants nationally were Hispanic/Latino, with 15% Black or African American, close to 5% Asian and more than 4% two or more races during the 2023–24 program year.

Among ski states, 51% of the CTE participants in Vermont come from economically disadvantaged families, while 33% have a disability. In Utah, those stats are 30% and 15%, respectively, and close to 9% of participants are English learners who could lend valuable language skills to teams serving international guests. Colorado's CTE participant base is 32% Hispanic/Latino, and in California that number is almost 60%.



Pipelining Skills to Jobs

Ski areas can take action now to build awareness among CTEs and incorporate this valuable source of skilled labor into your team's hiring process.

1. START WITH YOUR LOCAL CTE CENTER

Identify the closest CTE center. Review their programs, like automotive, welding, business or culinary, and consider where that training overlaps with your staffing needs.

2. MAKE THE CONNECTION

Reach out to the CTE director and program-related teachers. They're often eager to bring real-world opportunities to their students, they just need to know you're there.

3. SEND THE RIGHT PERSON

Choose someone personable and passionate who can genuinely connect with students. Bring short videos or visuals of your team in action. Show what life at the ski area looks like.

4. KEEP IT REAL

Forget the polished PowerPoint. Tell stories. Answer questions. Let students see how their classroom learning connects to real careers.

5. FOLLOW THROUGH

After your visit, ask teachers about student interest. Offer low-commitment next steps like resort tours or follow-up presentations. Relationships take time and consistency.

6. JOIN A PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC)

Most CTE programs have PACs that meet twice per year. Take part in one. It's a seat at the table to influence curriculum, share trends and connect with the next generation of workers.

7. LEVERAGE NATIONAL CTE ORGS

Programs like the aforementioned ACTE and Advance CTE, and state specific Department of Education CTE websites are useful tools to learn more about CTE resources.



The Pipeline Project recently launched a Ski Career Exploration Event at Pats Peak, NH, in partnership with Leitner-Poma of America and PRINOTH.

an automotive student who loves mechanical systems and wants to work outdoors. Without awareness, they may end up at a dealership or in a traditional shop. However, with the right exposure, that same student could work in ski area vehicle maintenance or become a lift mechanic, supporting some of the most critical machinery in the industry.

Through The Pipeline Project, these students can meet professionals working in mountain operations, food and beverage and other resort departments while participating in resort-based career events. The program begins in the classroom with both remote and in-person presentations and career fairs that introduce students and teachers to ski industry careers they may have never considered. As students near graduation, The Pipeline Project can use its member network to help them find a career that fits their skills and interest, whether at a nearby resort or across the country.

The response so far has been clear: At a Fall 2024 Career Expo in northern New Hampshire, 61% of middle and high school students who visited The Pipeline Project's booth expressed interest in exploring ski industry careers. That interest simply needs to be cultivated. Similarly, The Pipeline Project recently launched a Ski Career Exploration Event at Pats Peak, NH, in partnership with Leitner-Poma of America and PRINOTH. This interactive fall field trip allowed students to visit the ski area, meet professionals from multiple resorts across the state as well as industry suppliers, and get a firsthand look at life on the mountain through industry-led educational sessions.

"It was exciting to be part of the first of many events hosted by The Pipeline Project. The students and teachers ►

Ski-Centric CTE Connect

A newer resource that's focused specifically on the ski industry, The Pipeline Project bridges the gap between students and ski areas.

Imagine a student enrolled in a welding program at a local CTE center, learning skills essential to lift maintenance, terrain park feature fabrication or snowmaking. Now picture



Tiffany Whitcomb, founder of The Pipeline Project, makes intros during the first Ski Career Exploration Event.

were engaged throughout the day,” said Rachel Templar, PRINOTH marketing manager. “They had lots of questions about the groomers, and many of them expressed interest in learning more about becoming a technician. We’re looking forward to helping build the next generation of mountain ops professionals so our industry can thrive!”

The event attracted nine schools from across New Hampshire — representing a mixture of traditional high school, CTE and charter school students — and 16 ski resort/industry partners for a total of just over 100 attendees. Ski Vermont’s Molly Mahar was one of them, and she mentioned that in addition to the opportunity to meet ski industry staff, the mock interview session was particularly valuable, offering “a great skills builder for the students.”

Ivan Stanhope, maintenance manager for Dartmouth Skiway, NH, joined the event having attended a vocational program for construction while in high school that helped prepare him for his current role of more than 20 years. He appreciated the Q&A session, which gave ski area professionals a platform to share their own journey and experiences.

“Not all ski areas are the same, and this hopefully highlighted to the youth that there are many differences between each one, and many opportunities,” reflected Stanhope. “Bigger resorts are areas where a person can focus on a particular skill; at smaller areas, one needs to be more multi-skilled. For example, one friend and colleague is a civil engineer and in charge of all permits and planning at a large ski resort, where others I know that work at smaller mountains have their hands in every aspect.”

Survey results showed that 67% of students were somewhat or definitely interested in exploring more about ski careers, and 88% of students stated they definitely would recommend the event to their friends. The results from teachers and ski professionals reflect the same positive trend, indicating that events like this are much needed.



Mock interviews offered a particularly valuable skills builder for the students who attended the event.

Since the event, educational next steps have been created for students who expressed a desire to continue their learning and exploration of ski industry careers. The Pipeline Project sits down with teachers and students to discuss interest and skills, and develop a clear and structured path to joining the industry. That road map offers recommendations on coursework, along with connecting the student to their local resorts for work-based learning opportunities.

The organization also supports CTE teachers by aligning curriculum with ski industry pathways, offering instructional support and mentorship with career mapping that fits naturally into their programs. One teacher, for example, was born and raised in Alabama with an agricultural background. A never-ever skier, this teacher was out of her depth taking part in their school’s ski-based outdoor rec program. The Pipeline Project connected her to LVL UP Academy, which offers a wide range of topics she can use as inspiration for her curriculum, or if the resource is fully utilized, an assessment for students who gain an industry recognized credential.

Partnerships between The Pipeline Project and post-secondary institutions are currently forming to help shift the perspective of the ski bum mentality, demonstrating the professional aspect of ski industry careers via education certifications and degrees. Colorado Mountain College (CMC) and Oregon State University (OSU), for example, are reshaping their current course offerings for students within The Pipeline Project network. Whether it is having a student take OSU’s lift mechanic course or CMC’s intro to ski area operations, great opportunities abound for students.

Just as critical as the recruitment component, retention is another priority to ensure that these new hires don’t get lost in the chaos of the mountain. Upon joining a ski area, Pipeline graduates will be supported with mentorship, a safe ►



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outlet to reach out to, and professional development as well as the opportunity to explore other departments based on their interest and skills.

Just like new skiers and riders need help with a path into participation as they build their skills, so do future team members as they build their careers.

The Pipeline Project works as a member-based program, and ski areas that join gain access to the student network of graduates exploring this industry, as well as invitations to Pipeline events. We recommend that resorts work collaboratively on a statewide basis to help offset the costs and break down the common barriers that prevent awareness or consideration of ski industry careers for students entering the workforce.

Change Course Now

Though the stats have improved since last year, an average of 21.3 open positions remain per ski area, according to NSAA's latest National Wage and Salary Survey. Just like new skiers and riders need help with a path into participation as

they build their skills, so do future team members as they build their careers. Workforce conditions are shifting, but thankfully, skiing is one of the most unique and collaborative industries that exists.

Now it's time to bring that same energy to help solve staffing shortages. Building a pipeline of future ski industry professionals won't happen overnight. But with the collective effort of resorts, industry partners, trade associations, post-secondary institutions and community stakeholders, the course can be changed. More students can discover meaningful careers on the mountain, simultaneously strengthening our industry's future. 🏔️

Tiffany Whitcomb is a former high school CTE teacher with nearly 15 years of experience. She founded The Pipeline Project in 2024 as a broader strategy to create long-term relationships between students and the ski industry across the nation. It's a model designed to transform curiosity into career connections. Visit www.thepipelineproject.ski or contact her directly at tiffany@thepipelineproject.ski.



Scan the QR code or visit nsaa.org/WebResources to check out the stats, read more on the organizations mentioned here and see videos from recent Pipeline events.

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Widening the Gateway for Aspiring Managers

How women and men lead differently and why both matter.

|| BY LAURA MORIARTY, TAHOE TRAINING PARTNERS

Our industry has entered a transition. As senior leaders retire, the next generation of managers and supervisors are stepping forward. Yet the path to promotion remains narrow, putting the industry at risk of losing talent. Behind closed doors, leaders weigh three questions of potential candidates: *Can they do it? Will they do it? Will others follow them?* Often, these discussions also carry a subtle gender* undertone we don't talk about out loud.



Men and women tend to navigate the climb toward advancement in remarkably different ways. Men often lead with confidence, sometimes missing the subtler interpersonal cues that build trust. Women frequently sense those cues deeply, yet hesitate to assert themselves in systems that haven't always felt built for them. These aren't flaws or fixed traits; they're learned responses molded by an industry that has long rewarded horsepower over heart.

The good news is that the outdoor industry has made visible progress. Women now lead at every level. The C-suite is no longer off-limits, and there's a stronger blend of leadership strengths from both genders shaping the culture.

But the gateway can still be narrow. The bottleneck isn't just gender; it's that elusive *something* that makes someone the next

right person. You know it when you see it, but the question worth asking is: *What do those people have that others don't?*

Many leaders with tenure never ascend, despite being next in line. Advancement today is earned by cultivating executive presence: a combination of polish, perceived readiness and trust. It's how managers carry their influence and balance their natural style with the skills they're deliberately developing that don't come as easily — this is where growth happens.

Here, we'll examine career advancement from the employee's perspective, with scenarios and checklists that can be used to address common pitfalls for those who've been overlooked for promotion. A companion article to follow will focus on the leader's lens: how to notice potential early, challenge bias and intentionally prepare the next generation for growth.

Visibility & Credibility, Gifts & Gaps

A key area that quietly limits advancement is visibility. In fact, it was an aspiring female operations manager at a Rocky Mountain resort — frustrated from doing everything right yet feeling stalled — who inspired this article. Her dilemma offers a chance to reframe. Advancement isn't about trying harder; it's about trying differently: building visible sponsorship, asking how you're perceived, reviewing readiness criteria and cultivating allies. These steps widen the gateway for promotion.

It's easy to assume that good work will speak for itself. It rarely does. Visibility doesn't mean self-promotion; it means context-setting, helping others understand the impact and intent behind your work. Sometimes, it's appropriate to remind upline leaders of the value you've delivered and the insight you bring.

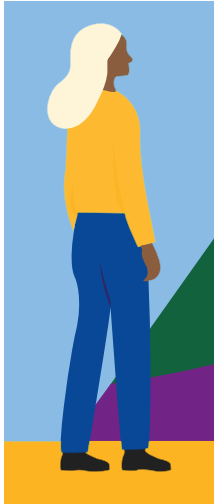
The following gender perspectives are shared separately not to draw lines, but to bring clarity. Women often lean on interpersonal strength, men on independence. Each approach carries both gifts and gaps.

Many women I work with know how to read a room, but they also take ownership for everyone's comfort in it. The instinct to be the peacekeeper can dilute influence. On the other hand, many men I work with are decisive and self-reliant; they move quickly and trust their instincts. But that same independence can sometimes keep them from seeking input or building alignment, leaving others feeling left out of the process.

The invitation here is to lead with both heart and horsepower, and for men and women to become greater allies to each other. What follows are mirrors, not judgments. Each section offers a self-audit followed by reflection tools to help leaders calibrate presence, balance and authority.

*While gender identity and expression exist on a spectrum, the data cited in this article comes from research comparing the experiences of women and men in the ski industry. For clarity, we use that language when discussing documented trends.

The Female Leadership Gap: When Strength Becomes Overextension



I've coached and worked alongside capable women who underestimate just how much credibility and quiet power they already hold. They're often the glue in a team — intuitive, collaborative, emotionally intelligent — but that same interpersonal strength can morph into overextension.

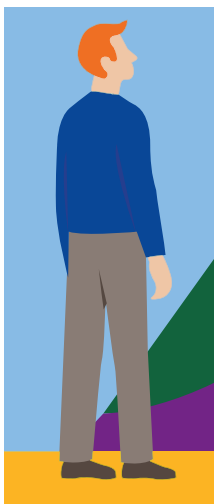
We see it on the mountain, in the lodge, in the office: women smoothing edges, absorbing tension, keeping things OK for everyone. It's admirable, but it's also exhausting. Many women in our industry don't hit a wall of competence;

they hit a wall of bandwidth. They're the first to volunteer, the last to leave, the ones others count on. But being indispensable isn't the same as being seen.

Another tendency is to over-prepare. Women often wait until they've got 95% of the qualifications before applying, while their male peers throw their hat in at 60% and learn as they go. The solution isn't to mimic bravado, it's to reclaim balance. Speak with conviction without over-explaining. Learn to let silence do some of the talking.

When women temper empathy with authority and men pair confidence with humility, something powerful happens. The conversations deepen. The team's bench gets deeper and more prepared.

The Male Leadership Gap: When Competence Outruns Maturity



Across resorts, I've seen countless talented men rise through every corner of the business until they hit a plateau. Many are builders by nature, whether they're repairing a lift, streamlining a process or improving the guest experience. Their pride in craftsmanship runs deep, and rightly so.

But sometimes that pride turns into resistance to grow beyond doing. The identity of being one of the guys — the best skier, the park legend, the one everyone trusts to get it done — can be hard to outgrow. Leadership requires a

different muscle: accountability, communication, composure.

I've coached more than a few young men who equate freedom with credibility: "I can ride whenever I want. I don't want a desk job. I don't need a title." They love the mountain

Female Gap Analysis Self-Audit

PURPOSE: To help women identify where over-reliance on relational, nurturing or approval-seeking patterns may limit authority or advancement, and to strengthen strategic voice and presence.

VOICE & AUTHORITY

- + **Reflection:** Do I soften my message to be liked rather than heard?
- + **Action:** Practice concise, bottom-line-first communication; speak without qualifiers or apologies.

BOUNDARIES & PRESENCE

- + **Reflection:** Do I overextend emotionally to manage everyone's comfort?
- + **Action:** Set time, energy and emotional limits; allow others to self-regulate.

STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE

- + **Reflection:** Do I hesitate to apply until I'm 100% ready?
- + **Action:** Apply at 70% readiness; seek mentoring for scope stretch.

CONFLICT COMFORT

- + **Reflection:** Do I avoid confrontation to preserve artificial harmony?
- + **Action:** Reframe conflict as collaboration and alignment.

DATA/EMPATHY BALANCE

- + **Reflection:** Do I rely mostly on intuition or relationships instead of metrics?
- + **Action:** Use both; lead with empathy, close with evidence.

VISIBILITY & SELF-PROMOTION

- + **Reflection:** Do I assume my work speaks for itself?
- + **Action:** Practice visible wins, storytelling and strategic advocacy.

lifestyle, that's why they're here. There's also a piece of identity work here. Many action-sports professionals have lived in perpetual youth. To lead, you must evolve from individual style to team rhythm.

Sarcasm, humor or detachment often mask uncertainty and even insecurity. Some men are wildly competent technically, but struggle to read a room, manage conflict or deliver feedback without edge or defensiveness. It's not a lack of intelligence, but emotional range.

Men in mountain ops may also tend to avoid formal management training, often because it's offered during critical ramp-up stages and they're pulled to meet deadlines. They've built expertise through technical experience, and that's powerful, but an expanded skill set is also necessary. Transitioning from being the one who does the work to the one who inspires and develops the people who carry it out requires humility and the ability to delegate. It isn't about surrendering your technical know-how, it's about rising high enough to see the horizon. ►

Male Gap Analysis Self-Audit

PURPOSE: To help men identify blind spots rooted in independence, ego or informality, and strengthen emotional intelligence, accountability and professional credibility as they mature from operator to leader.

PROFESSIONAL MATURITY

- + **Reflection:** Do I rely on sarcasm, humor or bravado to mask insecurity?
- + **Action:** Replace irony with curiosity; speak plainly and respectfully.

OWNERSHIP & RELIABILITY

- + **Reflection:** Do I prefer autonomy over accountability (no boss mindset)?
- + **Action:** Embrace responsibility as mastery, not constraint.

COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE

- + **Reflection:** Do I interrupt or dominate airtime?
- + **Action:** Practice active listening and concise input.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- + **Reflection:** Do I avoid feedback or emotional topics, writing it off as soft stuff?
- + **Action:** Develop emotional intelligence; recognize emotions in self and others.

TRANSITION FROM DOER TO LEADER

- + **Reflection:** Do I still identify as the best [fill in the blank] instead of a people-developer?
- + **Action:** Shift pride from personal skill to growing others' competence.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

- + **Reflection:** Do I treat attire, punctuality or reports casually because culture is informal?
- + **Action:** Model polish and dependability for younger staff.

The Shared Path:

Align, Amplify, Ascend Model

After seeing these patterns season after season, I've watched the most growth happen when men and women lean into each other's natural style as well as their own strengths. Here's what that looks like through the stories of Jess and Mark.

Jess's Story: A Step Back, Away & Up

It didn't happen overnight. There was no dramatic resignation or shake-up, just a quiet realization that somewhere along the way, Jess had lost her spark.

She was good at her job, reliable, steady, the one people turned to when things got messy. Her reviews were strong, her teams respected her, and her projects delivered. By every measure, she was succeeding. So why did she feel invisible?

As she explored the concept of perception versus intention, Jess began to see the subtle ways she diminished



her own authority. She realized the leadership journey wasn't about waiting to be noticed, but owning how you show up.

- + **ALIGN:** Her presence began to match her purpose. She noticed when her body language, tone and words sent mixed signals and recalibrated in real time.
- + **AMPLIFY:** She started using her voice with conviction instead of caution. She learned that influence doesn't come from volume; it comes from clarity.
- + **ASCEND:** When a stretch role opened at another resort, she took it. Months later, she was invited back to her former organization at a higher level. She didn't return to what she'd left, but as who she'd become.

Sometimes you have to step away in order to rise. Inside any organization, people are frequently seen through the lens of who they were, not who they're becoming. Growth can outpace the roles available — and even outpace others' ability to see your potential with fresh eyes. The move expanded her skills, her confidence and her visibility. Leaving wasn't a step away; it was a step up.

Inside any organization, people are frequently seen through the lens of who they were, not who they're becoming.

Mark's Story: Urgent to Thoughtful

Mark had always been quick to solve, quick to decide, quick to speak. His humor was sharp, his standards high, and his sarcasm — though meant to lighten tension — often left people second-guessing whether he was joking.▶

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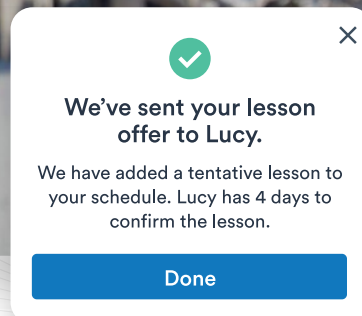
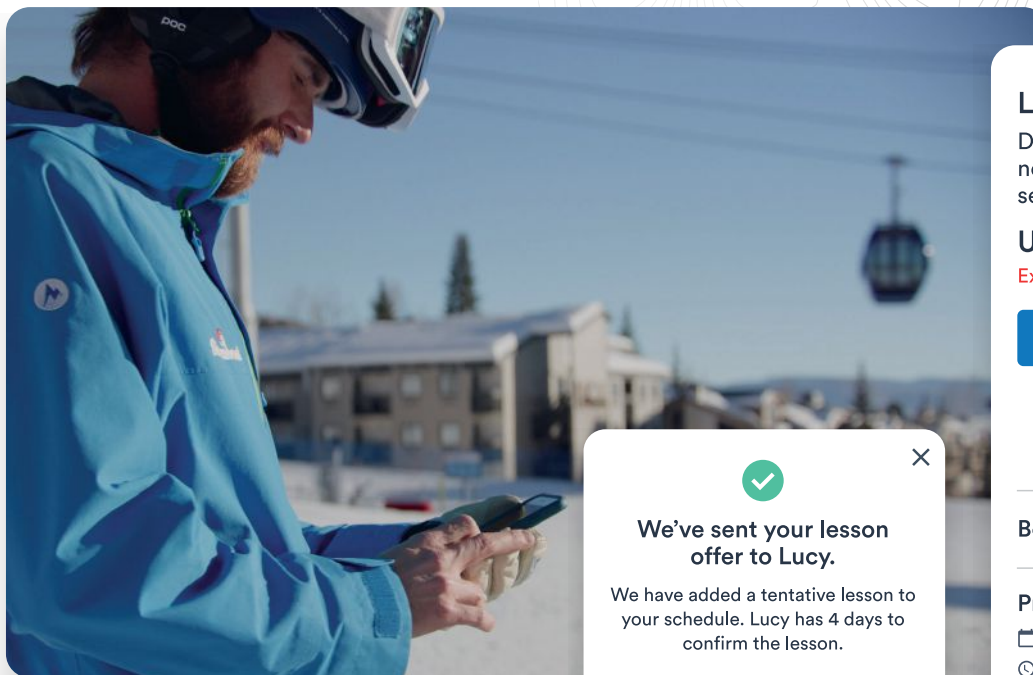
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He wasn't a bad leader, just an urgent one — the kind who thought decisiveness was leadership. On the mountain, that urgency read as confidence; in the conference room, it read as arrogance. A senior executive he respected finally said what others wouldn't: "Mark, you win the room, but sometimes you lose the team."

It landed. He realized he'd been spending energy proving himself instead of connecting with the leaders who could help him grow.

- + **ALIGN:** He matched his intent with his impact, slowing down just enough to ensure people heard what he meant, not just what he said.
- + **AMPLIFY:** He shifted from spotlighting himself to amplifying others' ideas. His team's engagement and trust grew.
- + **ASCEND:** When a senior opportunity opened, his name rose to the top. Not because he had the loudest voice in the room, but because he had learned to lead at a higher frequency.

Mark's growth reflected what many men in the industry experience: tremendous technical ability, capable decision-making and drive, but sometimes a gap between competence and maturity. Like Jess, his evolution wasn't about becoming someone else but expanding the version of himself that others could trust and follow.

The Shared Lesson

Jess and Mark came from opposite directions, but they reached the same summit. Jess found her power by aligning confidence with clarity. Mark found his influence by aligning urgency with empathy. Both learned to lead with purpose, presence and authenticity.

The invitation here is to lead with both heart and horsepower, and for men and women to become greater allies to each other.

Leadership isn't male or female — it's the alignment between who we are and how we show up. That's the real *it factor* behind promotion readiness, not gender, not luck, not even tenure. It's the integration of self-awareness, voice and stretch, the quiet confidence that makes a person the next right choice. 🦋

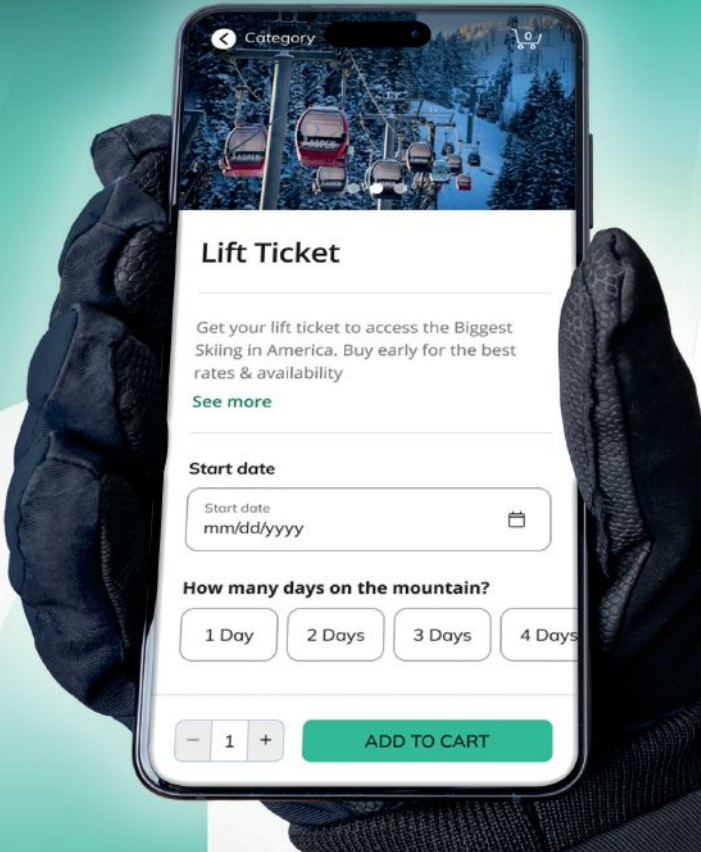
Laura Moriarty is the president of Tahoe Training Partners, a human resources and management training solutions consulting firm since 2008. She is the past vice president of HR for Booth Creek Resorts and has held senior leadership positions in the hotel, resort and gaming industries.

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Out of the Deep End

4 Ways to Activate New Leaders

|| BY PAUL THALLNER, CEO OF HIGH PEAKS GROUP & CO-CREATOR OF NEW LEADER ACTIVATION

Kari Brandt's first winter as a ski patrol director started strong. She had leadership experience and a master's degree in outdoor leadership development. She knew how to train people, build programs and get results. But within weeks, something wasn't working. Her team seemed frustrated. Work wasn't getting done. She'd finish the day wondering why people who used to respect her now seemed checked out.

Finally, she stopped guessing and just asked them: "What am I missing?"

Their answer was simple. "We don't want you to tell us to do things. We want you to ask us."

That conversation changed everything. Not because it gave her a new technique, but because it forced her to admit she'd been leading as someone she wasn't. She'd abandoned her natural style and adopted the harsh, prove-it mentality she saw around her in patrol culture. Her team didn't need toughness. They needed clarity, respect and a leader who showed up as herself.

This is the second in a series on leadership readiness in the ski industry. Part one laid out the problem: New leaders are routinely thrust into critical roles without the preparation or support needed to succeed during the compressed, high-stakes weeks that make or break a season. Here, we shift to solutions — not generic best practices, but the specific conversations leaders say would have made the biggest difference in their first 90 days.

Over the past two years developing the New Leader Activation program, I interviewed dozens of leaders and studied what separated successful transitions from failed ones. What follows draws on those conversations, combined with insights from ski industry professionals who lived these challenges firsthand.

The Pattern We Can't Seem to Break

Brandt, who went on to lead ski patrol at Diamond Peak Ski Resort, NV, for six years before recently stepping into the risk manager role at Sugar Bowl, CA, is unfortunately not unique in her experience. Across the ski industry, people get promoted because they're great at their jobs, then immediately face responsibilities completely unfamiliar to them.

Nick Gilbertson had been a standout lift operator before moving into maintenance, then management. When he became lifts manager at Arizona Snowbowl, now overseeing more than 120 people, he felt confident about the technical work. What made him nervous was that overnight, the job became as much



Kari Brandt learned that showing up as herself made her the kind of leader the team needed.

about people, safety and compliance as it was about equipment.

Abby Liddie moved from ski school instructor to supervisor to HR manager at Arizona Snowbowl in about four years. The steepest learning curve wasn't mastering new tasks, it was the shift from peer to leader. She had to learn the hard way that letting small things slide escalates fast when you don't yet understand how early choices shape team behavior.

The leaders who succeed aren't necessarily the ones with the most training. They're the ones who had the right conversations early enough to build a foundation.

Emily Baum, who works on the people team at Arizona Snowbowl's parent company, Mountain Capital Partners, has watched this play out in every department. Standout performers get promoted and suddenly they're managing people, navigating employment law, making decisions that affect culture. The problem isn't lack of potential. It's that the structure surrounding their transition leaves too many answers unclear.

In a seasonal business, this isn't just inefficient, it's devastating. A new supervisor who takes three months to find their footing may spend the entire winter season struggling to get oriented. By the time they understand the systems and establish credibility, the lifts are winding down.



Brandt now understands that people work harder when they feel valued instead of constantly trying to prove they belong.

Conversations, Not Curricula

The solution isn't another training module. It's earlier, better conversations that help leaders figure out who they are, what they own and what high performing looks like before the season kicks into high gear.

Most leadership development focuses on skills: how to give feedback, run meetings, manage conflict. Those skills matter. But they break under pressure if a leader doesn't know who they are or what they're responsible for. The leaders who succeed aren't necessarily the ones with the most training. They're the ones who had the right conversations early enough to build a foundation.

The first 90 days aren't a grace period. For ski areas, they're the entire game. Leaders either get activated during that window or spend the rest of the season reacting. The question is: what conversations create that traction?

The four themes that emerged from interviews with ski industry leaders align with findings from our broader research. These are the conversations that new leaders identified as either contributing to their success, or missing altogether — something they needed and didn't get.

CONVERSATION 1

Who Are You as a Leader?

Brandt came into patrol leadership with more experience than most. She'd developed an outdoor leadership program for her master's thesis, training students with zero camping experience to become trip leaders in 11 weeks. She knew how to lead. Still, she looked around at the culture and thought she needed to match it.

"I tried to mimic the leaders that I saw in the industry, which is a lot more harsh, more of like a fire department type of leadership," she said.

Patrol had an *earn it* culture where you had to prove you belong every single day. Brandt thought it was her responsibility to uphold that. She led with rigidity and occasionally yelled. She became someone she wasn't. Her team reacted exactly the way you'd expect. They disengaged. Work didn't get done. The frustration built on both sides. When she finally asked what she was missing, her team's feedback that they preferred requests to commands sparked a bigger realization: The culture she thought she had to preserve was actually burning people out.

"Coming to work every day feeling like you have to earn your place there, that's a really shitty way to show up to work," she said.

She shifted her approach and emphasized that everyone brought value. Contribution mattered more than endurance. Engagement improved. The team stopped performing toughness and started focusing on guests.

Identity isn't soft leadership theory. It's the thing that determines whether everything else works. When leaders lean into who they are — their strengths, their values, how they'll show up when things get hard — they make clearer decisions, build trust faster and weather ambiguity with more confidence than leaders who jump straight to tactics.

Baum put it this way: Leaders need to know their strengths first, then figure out how those strengths serve the team. Too many leaders focus only on weaknesses, trying to fix the bottom line. But capitalizing on strengths lifts the front line. That's where real performance comes from.

When my team started researching what makes leadership transitions work, identity kept surfacing as the foundation. Presence precedes performance.

CONVERSATION 2

What Decisions Are Yours?

One of the most common struggles new leaders described was uncertainty about what they actually owned. What decisions were theirs to make? What boundaries were they expected to uphold? Which expectations mattered most?

Liddie learned this through trial and error. Early in her leadership journey, she tolerated people showing up late and slight policy violations because she wasn't sure how much ►



Nick Gilbertson and Abby Liddie both ascended to leadership roles at Arizona Snowbowl with valuable coaching from HR.

authority she had. But those small things compounded.

“Letting something slip, even though it seems super minor, can end up having bigger consequences,” said Liddie, who found that by the time she recognized the pattern, behavior had drifted. Pulling it back felt 10 times harder than setting the expectation clearly from the start.

Culture moves fast, and new leaders shape it whether they realize it or not. The question is whether they’re shaping it intentionally or just inheriting the patterns around them.

Gilbertson’s experience was similar. He knew lift maintenance inside and out, but when he became lifts manager, the scope changed. Suddenly, he was responsible for employment law, safety compliance and performance management. He leaned heavily on Baum for coaching, and on his mountain operations director, who’s leadership he aspires to emulate, for operational guidance.

“Between both of them, it really set me up for success,” he said.

But he had to seek that clarity out. It wasn’t handed to him.

“Leadership is like an apprenticeship; your development is dependent on the effort that you put into it,” Gilbertson offered,

adding that reading leadership books and listening to podcasts also helped him build confidence.

New leaders don’t need permission to lead. They need clear responsibilities. A concise list of decision rights, non-negotiables and priorities prevents drift and helps leaders feel grounded in their authority. Without that, they either overreach and step on toes, or underreach and lose credibility.

This is where tools matter. A stakeholder map, for instance, shows who leaders need to align with and influence. A 90-day plan breaks the overwhelming first months into concrete objectives. Operating principles give leaders a framework for making decisions under pressure.

In our work with new leaders, we found that tools work best when built during those critical first weeks, not handed over as templates. A stakeholder map means nothing until a leader is actually navigating those relationships. A 90-day plan gains traction when it’s tied to real decisions, not theoretical milestones. The goal is applied work, not homework.

CONVERSATION 3 **What Does Good Look Like Here?**

Culture moves fast, and new leaders shape it whether they realize it or not. The question is whether they’re shaping it intentionally or just inheriting the patterns around them. ►



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Nick Gilbertson was a standout lift operator before moving into maintenance, then management.

Brandt's story illustrates this perfectly. Pressure to preserve the prove-yourself mentality conflicted with her values, and her team felt the disconnect immediately. Her turning point came when she stopped trying to uphold legacy norms and started asking what the team actually needed. When she made that shift, engagement improved and performance followed.

Gilbertson pointed to a related challenge: generational gaps. At his resort, the age difference between him and mountain operations leadership was as large as 25 to 30 years. Culture often gets transmitted through informal mentorship, and when those generational bridges don't exist, new leaders have a hard time deciphering what to keep and what to retire.

Baum sees this across departments. Leaders need early conversations about what's essential to the organization's identity, what's evolving as the business grows and what habits are no longer serving the team. Without those conversations, leaders either cling to outdated norms or abandon everything, including what's actually working.

Culture isn't abstract. It's the behavior leaders model every day — how they respond to mistakes, what they celebrate, what they let slide. New leaders benefit from explicit conversations that make culture legible: Here's what matters. Here's what we're changing. Here's what you're responsible for reinforcing.

CONVERSATION 4

Who's Coaching You Through This?

The leaders who found their footing fastest all had one thing in common: Someone was coaching them through their transition in real time. Coaching goes beyond giving advice. It's responsive support that helps leaders process their specific challenges, their blind spots, the decisions in front of them.

Baum ran individual coaching sessions with managers at Snowbowl. She met with each person one-on-one, tailoring



Emily Baum, who works on the people team at Mountain Capital Partners, figured out another way to continue serving the company's leadership when time would no longer allow for one-on-one support.

the conversations to what each leader was facing because Gilbertson's challenges are distinct from Liddie's.

"It's probably not the most efficient way to do it," she admitted.

But it worked. Gilbertson found those weekly sessions "instrumental." Liddie credited coaching for helping her grow into the role. The difference wasn't having someone to give them the answer, but someone to help them think through decisions.

Most resorts don't have someone like Baum who can dedicate adequate time to individual coaching. And even when they do, scaling that support across a growing leadership pipeline is a huge challenge. Case in point, Baum's own promotion to an enterprise-wide role left her with less time to provide this kind of individual support. But that didn't stop her from figuring out another way to continue serving the company's leadership at her new level.

Organizations know coaching works. The barrier is bandwidth and structure. That's the gap worth solving.

"I now provide that support by helping the HR folks within our collective," Baum explained. "In the last month that has been across the board, including an FMLA case, communication issues and brainstorming ideas for training/orientation."

Organizations know coaching works. The barrier is bandwidth and structure. That's the gap worth solving.

When we built New Leader Activation, this coaching gap became our central design challenge. We learned that regular coaching touchpoints — brief, focused, responsive to what's actually happening — create more traction than random check-ins or annual reviews. The dedicated space for one-on-one conversations matters because decisions compound fast in those first few months. ►

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The New Standard: What This Looks Like in Practice

These four conversations — identity, clarity, culture, coaching — aren't revolutionary. They're what leaders consistently say made the difference when they finally got their feet under them.

The ski industry has the stories. It has the evidence. What's missing isn't awareness, it's structure. Through our research and work with leaders across industries, we've learned that the 90-day transition window operates differently than traditional leadership development. It's not about building skills; it's about activation — helping leaders step into their identity, clarify their responsibilities, understand the culture they're shaping, and guiding them through decisions as they arise.

Brandt said it best: "People work harder when they feel valued. And when they aren't constantly trying to prove they belong, you get so much more out of them."

That's the shift. From leaders who survive to leaders who inspire momentum. From promotion as a leap of faith to activation as a system. The ski industry has everything it needs to make this happen. The question is whether we're willing to redesign the leadership journey so that the next generation gets the connection, clarity and confidence they need to be truly effective.

Some organizations are starting to formalize an updated leadership journey. Others are building it organically. In either case, any ski area can begin having these conversations tomorrow. Ask new leaders:

- + **Who are you? Not as a person, but as a leader.** What are your strengths, your values, your instincts under pressure?
- + **What decisions are yours to make? What boundaries do you own? What does success look like in the first three months?**
- + **What does good look like here? What should you preserve? What needs to change? How will you know if you're shaping culture well?**
- + **Who's coaching you through this? Who can you process decisions with, in real time, without judgment?**

The work isn't complicated. It's just intentional. And it starts with a conversation that needs to happen before the chaos of opening day, before the pressure of the holidays, before leaders start making it up as they go. 📌



The poster features a blurred background image of a mountain biker in a black jersey and helmet riding a yellow bike. The main title 'NSAA DOWNHILL BIKE PARK SUMMIT' is in large, bold, black letters with a blue outline. To the right, the dates 'JUNE 22 TO 24 | 2026' and location 'GIANTS RIDGE, MINNESOTA' are displayed. A circular gear-like logo in the center contains the text 'MUD SWEAT & GEARS' and 'NSAA DOWNHILL BIKE PARK SUMMIT • JUNE 22 - 24, 2026 • GIANTS RIDGE, MINNESOTA'. Logos for 'Giants Ridge', 'NSAA NATIONAL SKI AREAS ASSOCIATION', and 'gravity logic' are on the left. A 'TOPICS' section on the right lists: '> Trail Design', '> Park Layout', '> Bike School', '> Bike Patrol', '> Risk Management', '> Incident Investigation', and '> Bike Park Operations'.

NSAA DOWNHILL BIKE PARK SUMMIT

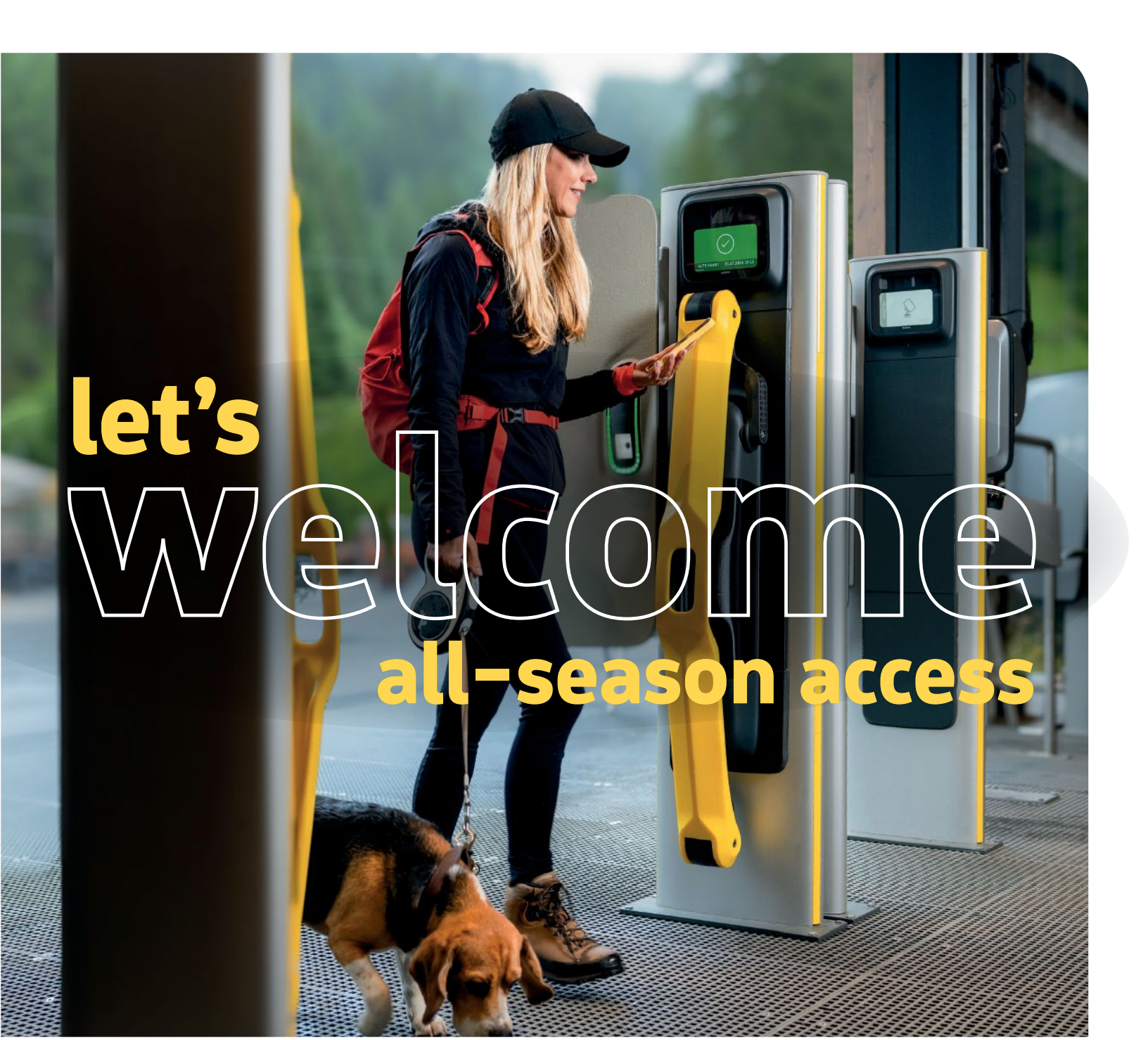
JUNE 22 TO 24 | 2026
GIANTS RIDGE, MINNESOTA

MUD SWEAT & GEARS
NSAA DOWNHILL BIKE PARK SUMMIT • JUNE 22 - 24, 2026 • GIANTS RIDGE, MINNESOTA

TOPICS

- > Trail Design
- > Park Layout
- > Bike School
- > Bike Patrol
- > Risk Management
- > Incident Investigation
- > Bike Park Operations

Giants Ridge
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People

**Rob Clark**

Axess, UT, announced **Rob Clark** as its new managing director – product and growth, North America. With 20 years of ski industry experience, Clark spent the last decade at Aspenware, serving as CEO from 2020–2023 and most recently as chief revenue officer.

**Lieutenant Governor Scott Bedke presenting the award to Brad Wilson**

Brad Wilson, GM of **Bogus Basin, ID**, was honored with the Governor's Lifetime Achievement in Recreation and Tourism Award. Under Wilson's leadership, annual visits have surged from 172,000 to more than 600,000, and Wilson ushered Bogus Basin through a period of transformative growth, reinvesting nearly \$70 million into projects. Beyond Bogus Basin, Wilson served as past president of both the Idaho Ski Areas Association and Visit Boise boards, and is currently a member of NSAA's board of directors.

**Jason Bays**

Camelback Resort, PA, named **Jason Bays** vice president and GM, and **Olivier Marc Glattfelder** resort manager. With an extensive hospitality background and a strong operational record, Bays was GM of Great Wolf Resorts, COO/GM of Mountain Creek Resort, and was previously with Camelback Resort as director of aquatics/

risk management (and worked there as both a lifeguard and ski instructor during his teenaged years). He began his career as director of operations for Jay Peak Resort. With over 30 years of industry experience, Glattfelder was most recently director of hotel operations for the Marriott Austin South. A native of Zurich, he is fluent in English, French, German and Spanish.

**Chris Setchell**

Gunstock Mountain Resort, NH, selected **Chris Setchell** as snowsports director. Setchell previously served as program director for Denmark's National U14/U16 alpine ski team, and director of ski and ride schools at Whakapapa and Afton Alps. Most recently, he served as the snowsports director at King Pine Ski Area.

**James H. Coleman**

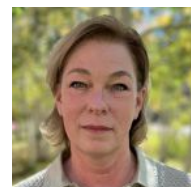
James H. Coleman, managing partner and CEO of **Mountain Capital Partners, CO**, was inducted into the New Mexico Ski Hall of Fame. Coleman has worked in ski resort operations for 24 years, with over 30 years of investment and development experience. Since becoming managing partner of Sipapu Ski and Summer Resort in 2000, he has expanded Mountain Capital Partners to include 17 resorts globally and offers free skiing to children 12 and under, free ski lessons to never-ever skiers of all ages, plus a GPA program that awards students with free season passes. Also honored last year were two Taos Ski Valley legends: **Doug DeCoursey** got the Lifetime Achievement Recognition and **Christof Brownell**

received the Distinguished Service Award. Related, **Ski New Mexico** named the following Best of the Best Awards:

- + Customer Service: **Kimberlee Kavasch**, Sandia Peak Ski Area and **Abby Souza**, Ski Santa Fe
- + Mountain Operations: **Ed L'Heureux**, Ski Santa Fe
- + Rental Shop: **Celia Martinez**, Ski Santa Fe
- + Ski & Snowboard Instructor: **Ross Burns**, Taos Ski Valley
- + Ski Patroller: **Nali Burke**, Sipapu Ski & Summer Area
- + Rising Star Award: **Luis Rodriguez**, Ski Santa Fe
- + Leadership Excellence Award: **Nicole Miller**, Taos Ski Valley

**Magnus Andersson**

Palisades Tahoe, CA, welcomed **Magnus Andersson** as alpine director. He brings over 15 years of World Cup experience, including a decade as head coach for Sweden and the U.S. Most recently, he led the U.S. Women's Team to podium finishes and top standings in Slalom and Giant Slalom and is widely respected for his World Cup, Nations Cup, and Olympic leadership.

**Kathy Hastings**

Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation (SSRC), CO, promoted **Kathy Hastings** to vice president of food and beverage. Hastings brings over 20 years of F&B leadership in destination hotels and resort environments. Prior to joining SSRC in 2019, she held director roles with Hyatt properties and served as the director of food and beverage for JW Marriott in Denver.

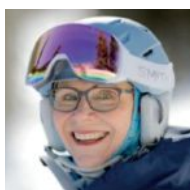
The U.S. National Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame, MI, announced the Class of 2025, outstanding individuals whose achievements have shaped and elevated skiing and snowboarding in America. Among the most recent honorees were:

+ **Chris Cushing**, of SE Group, UT, regarded as one of the world's foremost mountain planners, following in the footsteps of his father, Hall of Famer Joe Cushing. With over 200 ski area projects across five continents, Cushing also received NSAA's Industry Impact honor last year.



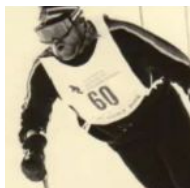
Chris Cushing

+ **Raelene Davis** introduced countless newcomers to skiing and riding as marketing chief of Ski Utah for 40 years. She championed the state's Passport Program for elementary aged students and Discover Winter for adults from diverse backgrounds.



Raelene Davis

+ **Douglas Pringle** launched 42 adaptive programs around America, helped lead Disabled Sports USA, grew the Ski Spectacular, served in the evolution of the Paralympics, and wrote the first curriculum on teaching the blind. He was inducted into the Adaptive Hall of Fame in 1997.



Douglas Pringle

Places



Volunteer archaeologist cataloging artifacts.

ROCKO MENZYK



Artifacts recovered from the historic Town of Alta site.

Alta Ski Area, UT, implemented several new projects over the summer, including the Supreme lift realignment. Alta also replaced outdated snowmaking water pipelines that pass through the historic Town of Alta, once a thriving mining town in the late 1800s. A backhoe dug a 10-foot-deep trench, uncovering thousands of artifacts, including hats, liquor bottles, pottery, corked champagne bottles, and the remains of a stone building foundation believed to be that of a two-story hotel. To share these discoveries with the public, Utah Cultural Site Stewardship and the Alta Environmental Center hosted an archaeological open house at the project site.

Alterra Mountain Company, CO, and Responder Alliance joined forces on a three-year training initiative to provide stress resilience training and incident support tools to Alterra destination patrol teams and heli-ski guides. These first responders will be working with Responder Alliance on skills for stress mitigation, including psychological first response for rescue, stress injury awareness and incident support. Alterra also announced its first ever health care program for seasonal employees, as well as investments in critical housing renovations, adding over 200 new beds through acquisitions and master leases, and facilitating ground-up development.

Related, the company made over \$400 million in capital investments, much of which was focused on the evolution of **Deer Valley Resort, UT,** including the debut of a 10-passenger gondola, six

additional new chairlifts, and nearly 80 new ski runs. Additional investments include multiple lift upgrades: the Rainier Express, Chinook and Green Valley lifts at **Crystal Mountain, WA,** the American Express Lift at **Stratton, VT,** the Summit Lift at **Sugarbush, VT,** and Morningside at **Steamboat, CO.**



Blue Mountain Resort, PA, installed two TechnoAlpin TT10 tower-mounted fan guns and two mobile, fully automated TR10 fan guns. Underground piping upgrades will further boost water flow and snowmaking capacity. In addition, 380 trail lights were upgraded to energy-efficient LEDs for night skiing.



Brundage Mountain Resort, ID, kicked off its 65th season with a new 1,800-square-foot emergency services building. The facility will house the resort's ambulance and fire engine, added in 2024 to support the independently operated Brundage Mountain Fire Protection Agency and Brundage Mountain Emergency Medical Service.

Ski California's member resorts prepped for the season with a variety of on- and off-mountain improvements. **China Peak** added a new deck at Mainstream Station, a new snack shack at Basecamp and made renovations ▶

ROCKO MENZYK



Matt Romanowitz hits a Broadway afternoon park session at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

in Sully's Pub. **Homewood Mountain Resort** reopened with grooming equipment upgrades and plans to install a new Doppelmayr Gondola to replace the Madden Chair. **Kirkwood** put a fresh exterior on the Timber Creek Base Lodge. **Lee Canyon** added a new moveable rope tow in the terrain park. **Mammoth Mountain** invested nearly \$9 million on snowmaking, new ski patrol infrastructure, a new Dual Zip Line and Sky Net Structure, and a new lobby and café at The Westin Monache. **Sierra-at-Tahoe** opened two new trails in West Bowl, added more learning terrain and expanded terrain park zones. **Sugar Bowl's** \$100 million development plan features a new Village Lodge Terrace, a modern locker facility, a reimagined culinary experience, and removal of outdated buildings to open more terrain. The ski area added four new snowcats and resort-wide snowmaking improvements, and phase two of Sugar Bowl Parks CA includes bigger rails, more jumps, new beginner features and an investment in earthwork. **Tahoe Donner Downhill Ski Resort** debuted a new ski lodge featuring level access to ski lifts, an enlarged sun deck, expansive indoor dining and a dedicated learning space for kids.



Camelback Resort, PA, upgraded the high-speed Stevenson Lift with enhanced mechanical and electrical systems. The ski area also improved snowmaking with new high-pressure feed and summit supply lines, and added 32 HKD Klik auto hydrants and 32 HKD Impulse stick guns.

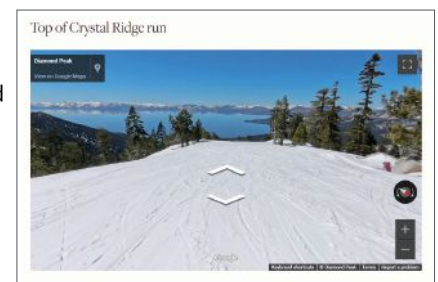


Purgatory Resort

Colorado Ski Country USA's member resorts slid into the 2025–26 season with many improvements. **Aspen Snowmass** debuted a high-speed six-pack replacing the Elk Camp quad, upgraded the Cirque platter to a double-capacity T-bar, and introduced an Elk Camp Restaurant upgrade with a new 120-seat deck expansion featuring umbrella-style retractable walls. **Copper Mountain** continued its multi-year snowmaking modernization, installing new fan guns and semi-automatic hydrants. **Granby Ranch** has a new intermediate zone, and Granby Connect — a \$2 shuttle linking the Amtrak station to the base lodge — makes it easier for visitors to arrive by train. **Monarch Mountain's** No Name Basin expansion adds 377 acres of intermediate and advanced terrain, a 50% increase in skiable acres. A new SkyTrac triple chair will serve the area for access to runs that now extend onto both sides of the Continental Divide. **Purgatory Resort, CO**, kicked off its 60th ski season with a series of improvements, including expanded snowmaking. The ski area also installed a Campbell Scientific SnowVue system that tracks 24-hour snow totals, storm totals and cumulative snowfall for real-time snow reporting. **Sunlight Mountain Resort** completed the largest capital project in its history, debuting new Primo and Segundo chairlifts. **Telluride** upgraded Lifts 5 and 12 and made major snowmaking infrastructure improvements.

Diamond Peak Ski

Resort, NV, is celebrating 60 years this season and has mapped all its ski trails with 360-degree imagery, integrated into Google Maps' Street View technology. Guests



can take a virtual tour down any run at Diamond Peak from their browser or smartphone. While this Street View technology does not provide real-time conditions, the imagery will help progressing skiers and snowboarders to scout new runs and get a sense of the terrain they can expect. ►

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Gunstock Mountain Resort, NH, refurbished the Panorama quad lift with upgrades to the communication lines and the computerized chair-spacing system. The haul rope was replaced on the Ramrod lift, and the Pistol lift gearbox was upgraded. Tiger, Pistol and Ramrod lift drive replacements were also completed. The ski area installed 24 new energy-efficient HKD Impulse tower guns and Klik hydrants and added two new grooming machines.

Ski Idaho's 19 member ski areas announced many upgrades for the 2025–26 season. **Bogus Basin Mountain Recreation Area** thinned undergrowth, opened up more gladed terrain, installed 10 new fixed-position snowguns and implemented SmartSnow 7 software and key pump upgrades, remodeled



Silver Mountain Resort

the Pioneer Lodge with a new elevator, and renovated locker rooms with a kitchenette-style food station. The mountain also upgraded and expanded lighting in the Pioneer Parking Lot, and acquired a mid-sized snowplow and a PistenBully 600 Winch Cat. **Lookout Pass Ski & Recreation Area** added two groomers to its fleet, a new and a gently used PRINOTH, installed a new locker room floor in the lodge, and expanded its lower parking lot. **Magic Mountain Ski Resort** added a second magic carpet to serve an expanded beginner area, and updated the Twilight Tubing Hill with a new beginner/child area. **Pebble Creek Ski Area** completed a major overhaul of the Aspen Beginner Lift, including the installation of a new control system, upgraded its snowmaking system, and purchased a new snowgun over the summer. **Rotarun Ski Area** installed a magic carpet that's free to all users. **Silver Mountain Resort** conducted extensive thinning, trimmed and gladed traverses, and upgraded signage to provide more accurate run status updates and links to forecasts at backcountry gates. **Soldier Mountain** improvements include a reforestation project with the USFS, expanded snowmaking, new restraint bars on chairlifts and other safety enhancements. For its 90th season, **Sun Valley Resort** added 90 acres of newly gladed terrain, developed through the Bald Mountain Forest Stewardship Project with the USFS, BLM and National Forest Foundation to reduce fire risk and improve forest health while providing heating firewood to local Indigenous communities. After the Rock Fire scorched part of the forest near its boundary, **Tamarack Resort** transformed upwards of 60 acres into terrain. The ski area also introduced a mobile DJ Snowcat, expansions to its upper and lower Village parking lots, and a new Aspen lot with 10 camping spots.

Jay Peak Resort, VT, invested more than \$1.5 million to upgrade the mountain's snowmaking system. The ski area installed 49 fixed-position snowmaking guns from HKD Snowmakers, and a portion of these are linked to Klik automated hydrants. Additional snowmaking upgrades include a new TechnoAlpin TR10 fan gun, plus new power infrastructure at both base areas. Jay Peak partnered with Efficiency Vermont to retrofit older snowguns with updated nozzles that use less energy and produce better snow. The ski area also added two new PRINOTH grooming machines;

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the same place.**

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the Eleven Patio @ Foundry; a new electric Zamboni for the Ice Haus Arena; and 10 new private cabanas at the Pump House Indoor Waterpark.

Keystone Resort's, CO, River Run Village debuted Kindred Resort, featuring ski-in, ski-out lodging; a year-round heated pool with patio cocktail service; four new dining options; valet parking; valet ski and bike storage; and a full-service spa. Kindred Resort will also be the new home base for Keystone Ski & Ride School, alongside a resort rental shop.



Loveland Ski Area, CO, debuted the new Lift 7, a Leitner-Poma, fixed-grip quad to replace the 42-year-old, fixed-grip, double chair. Loveland will intentionally load it with no more than three to provide additional space for beginners getting accustomed to loading and riding chairlifts. Adjacent to the lift is the Beginner Family Zone on the reimagined Zig-Zag Trail.



Mountain High Resorts, CA, increased snowmaking, with more than \$150,000 invested in new TechnoAlpin TT9 snowguns. The ski area also automated the snowmaking pumping system at its West Resort. A new Bison X Winch Cat from PRINOTH replaces Mountain High's 2011 version. The Discovery Chairlift was also restored and reopened, with repairs that included a new haul rope, refurbished lift shack, new chair pads and a new communication line.



Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe, NV, invested \$6 million ahead of this ski season, including the addition of the new Wildslide Tahoe Tubing Center. Featuring up to 20 snow tubing lanes that are 750-feet in length and served by a dual conveyor lift, the Wildslide Tahoe Tubing Center also has a new lodge, outdoor seating and a new 400-space parking lot. Continuing to improve its snowmaking system, Mt. Rose also invested in a third well connection and another fixed snowmaking tower gun.



COURTESY OF PALISADES TAHOE

Palisades Tahoe, CA, improved snowmaking with eight fully automated fan guns and three air compressors at Alpine. A new pipe and valve system was installed near the Palisades base area, and two wells were rehabilitated. The ski area also added a PistenBully 600E+ diesel-electric snowcat, and this season, all of Palisades Tahoe's snowcat fleet will operate on 100% renewable diesel.

Ragged Mountain Resort, NH, completed its sale to SF Mountain Co LLC, a group of local investors with lifelong ties to the mountain. The group includes experienced professionals from across the outdoor industry and business world who have pledged to preserve the resort's character while investing in its future as a year-round mountain

destination. Erik Barnes will continue as GM, and Pacific Group Resorts assisted with the transition.



Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation (SSRC), CO, formed a Mountain Safety Team (MST), consisting of both paid staff and volunteers, to promote safe practices and enhance safety presence on the mountain. In collaboration with Colorado Mountain College, the ski area also donated an old surface lift, Rough Rider, to the Leadville campus. This supports CMC Leadville's comprehensive Ski Area Operations program, as well as the launch of a Lift Maintenance Apprenticeship Program. ▶

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Sugarloaf, ME, opened a new lift-served bike park last summer with 18 trails. Significant investments in mountain infrastructure include a full haul rope replacement for the SuperQuad, and snowmaking crews also completed a three-year project to upgrade the mountain's main water line from 14 inches to 20 inches. Additional improvements include redeployed pipe, new tower guns and a fourth booster pump.

Sugar Mountain Ski Resort, NC, installed 20 new LED slope lights and added three new, fully automated SMI



Super Pole Cat snowmaking machines. Muralist Ashley Roberts was busy all summer and fall decorating the Summit Express parking garage.



Sunday River, ME, completed the Grand Junction Booster pump house. The ski area's snowmaking system pumps 11,500 gallons of water per minute, enough to fill Gillette Stadium in just over two

days, Fenway Park in under 17 hours, an Olympic-sized pool in less than an hour, or a standard bathtub in under half a second.

Partners



KATIE YOUNG

The National Brotherhood of Snowsports (NBS), IL, is hosting the 53rd annual NBS Summit at **Keystone Resort, CO**. Bringing together 60 member clubs and thousands of supporters from around the world, the NBS Summit week features skiing and riding alongside a full schedule of events. The 2026 Summit ►

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Penny Paris, Ski Saint-Bruno

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Clarke Chambers, Ober Adventure

"I challenged myself to sit down at a different table for each meal and just ask questions with new people. Each time I did this, I found groups of passionate people that were willing to help me gain knowledge about anything with mountain biking. Hands down this conference was the best I have ever experienced!"

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NBS Summit at Keystone

is expected to draw more than 1,800 participants following a record-setting 2025 event at Keystone. For the first time in the organization's history, the Summit will return to the same resort in consecutive years.

National Ski Patrol (NSP), CO, is the new title sponsor of the National Avalanche School (NAS). This sponsorship will give ski patrollers and other snow professionals access to the highest level of avalanche training and resources available. NSP was a founding partner of the National Avalanche Foundation (NAF), which funds the school, alongside NSAA and USFS. Last year, nine NSP patrollers were awarded scholarships to attend the NAS. The organization also announced a partnership with The Cody St. John Foundation (TCSJF) and Responder Alliance to equip professional patrollers with tools and training to manage stress, enhance team well-being, and build resilience.

Obits



Samuel George Bonasso

Samuel George Bonasso died last summer from complications of Parkinson's disease. He was 85 years old. A ski industry pioneer, Bonasso co-founded Ski Lift International (SLI) with Joe Sugarman in 1965. They went on to build 46 double chairlifts, including those at Catamount, Bryce Resort, June Mountain, Aspen Mountain, Telluride, 49 Degrees North, Heavenly, Blacktail Mountain and Ober Gatlinburg.

In 1969, he founded Alpha Associates, an architectural and engineering firm, and in 1973, SLI was purchased by Riblet Tramway Company. In addition to ski lifts and aerial tramways, Alpha's engineering included highways, real estate development and utilities. Bonasso was also one of the original engineers for NSAA's insurance plan manager, now MountainGuard, and a committee member and secretary for the 1983 revision of the ANSI B77 Code.

From 1998–2000, he served as West Virginia's sixth secretary of transportation, and in 2002, he was appointed a

deputy administrator at the U.S. Department of Transportation, a senior executive service role under the Bush administration. Alongside several other professional engineers, he was responsible for founding the North American section of the International Organization for Transportation by Rope (OITAF).

Ahead of his time as a professional engineer, entrepreneur and inventor, he was a good businessman and person whose impact on infrastructure, policy and civic life in West Virginia will long be remembered. Bonasso loved John Denver's "Take Me Home Country Roads," and was known to sing it often (and well) at meetings.



Ralph DesLauriers, founder of **Bolton Valley Ski Area, VT**, passed away peacefully in October surrounded by his family. He was 90 years old.

In the fall of 1952, his parents bought the 280-acre Fiske dairy farm and moved their large family to Vermont, marking the beginning of DesLauriers' lifelong education in running a family business. He attended the University of Vermont's College of Agriculture, earning a B.S. in Agricultural Economics while working full time on the farm. Around this time, the growing DesLauriers family began transitioning from dairy farming to the emerging hospitality business by converting historic barns into motel units.

DesLauriers served eight years in the Vermont Army National Guard, rising to the rank of captain before his discharge in 1965. His most ambitious venture began a year earlier, when his father purchased 8,250 acres of timberland for \$13 per acre. DesLauriers conceived a plan to develop the property into what would become Bolton Valley Ski Area. Construction of the access road began in 1966, and a 4.5-mile mountain road, skier parking lot, 24-room hotel, base lodge, ski trails, lift system, and supporting utilities were all completed in just eight months. Bolton Valley Ski Area opened the day before Christmas that December.

In 1997, after years of poor snowfall and mounting debt, Bolton Valley was sold. In 1999, DesLauriers moved to Jackson Hole and joined his son Rob and brother Chuck in developing the Teton Mountain Lodge, then led the development of the Teton Springs Lodge. He returned to Vermont in 2008, and in 2017 at age 82, he came full circle when he repurchased Bolton Valley Ski Area with his children Evan, Adam, Rob, Eric and Lindsay, and a small group of local investors.

DesLauriers served on the boards of Ski Vermont, NSAA and the New England Council for Economic Development. He was honored with The Small Business Person of the Year in 1978 from the SBA, and his lifelong contributions to Vermont's ski industry were recognized with his induction into the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum Hall of Fame in 2022. 📌



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