

**National Ski Areas Association's
Testimony to the Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works on
"The Issue of the Potential Impacts of Global Warming on
Recreation and the Recreation Industry"**

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the 326 member ski areas of the National Ski Areas Association. Ski areas across the country are concerned about the issue of global warming and its potential impacts on winter recreation, mountain ecosystems, our bottom line and our way of life. I cannot think of a business that will be more directly and profoundly impacted by global warming than the ski business. The success of our operations depends on the weather. For this reason, we have made tremendous efforts to raise awareness of the issue of global warming and put solutions in place to solve it.

2002 Climate Change Policy

In 2002, the National Ski Areas Association adopted a climate change policy. At that time, climate change was the elephant under the carpet that needed to be addressed—and addressed directly. Our climate change policy was cutting edge in 2002 and unprecedented among businesses in the recreation industry. In summary, our climate change policy adopts a "REDUCE, EDUCATE, ADVOCATE" approach to fighting global warming. The policy calls for ski resorts to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), educate our guests and the public about the potential threat of climate change to winter recreation, and advocate the need for policy makers to act now and act aggressively in curbing GHG emissions.

Ski areas have taken tremendous steps to **reduce** our own GHG emissions. There are now fifty-nine (59) resorts purchasing renewable energy credits or green energy for their facilities and lifts. Of these 59 resorts, 28 are 100% green powered. The green power purchases of these 28 resorts result in the avoidance of 427,596,000 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂). This is the equivalent of planting nearly 17 million trees or avoiding more than 169,000 round-trip flights between New York and San Francisco. Additionally, resorts are providing their customers the opportunity to purchase "green tags" to offset their emissions and "ski pollution free" or sign up for green energy in their homes. Resorts are also generating renewable energy on site through micro-hydro and solar projects, and the first wind turbine will go on line at a ski area in August of 2007 at Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort in Massachusetts. Resorts are also using green building techniques, retrofitting existing facilities to save energy, using alternative fuels such as

biodiesel in resort vehicle fleets, and providing or promoting car pooling or mass transit use by guests and employees. We are a relatively small source of greenhouse gas emissions, however, and recognize that we will need the help of other industries to turn this problem around.

Ski areas have **educated** their guests and the public on the issue of global warming through an outreach campaign called “Keep Winter Cool.” NSAA’s partners in the Keep Winter Cool campaign are the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Clif Bar, the energy bar maker in California. Together, we have reached out to millions of people who ski and snowboard to make changes in their lives to fight global warming. We have enlisted famous athletes like Picabo Street from the great State of Idaho and Shaun White from the great State of California to help us inspire snowsports participants to take action now to fight global warming. I invite the members of the Committee to visit our website, www.keepwintercool.org for more information.

Ski areas have **advocated** swift action on the part of policy makers to address the issue of climate change, both at the federal and state level. During the 109th Congress, 71 ski areas in 21 states endorsed the McCain/Lieberman Climate Stewardship Act. During the 110th Congress, thirty resorts have endorsed the US-CAP approach to fighting global warming. Ski areas have also supported the adoption of renewable portfolio standards (RPS) and cleaner fuels and cleaner vehicle emissions requirements in a number of states.

Science and Data

Ski areas are aware of the many studies and models that project the impact of global warming on snowpack. As an industry, we have tracked the average number of days that our member resorts are open across five regions of the country. Over a 16-year period, our data shows a declining trend in the number of days open nationally and in several regions. More specifically, the data shows a decline of 0.8 days nationally per season over the past 16 years; a decline of 1.2 days per season in the Northeast; and a decline of 0.7 days in the Rocky Mountains. One hundred and thirty-four (134) of our member ski areas operate on U.S. Forest Service land. These resorts have witnessed declining recreation budgets and increased spending on forest fires in the past 10 years. Former U.S. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth stated upon retiring from the agency earlier this year that climate change is “undeniable” and that it has “huge social, economic and ecological implications.”

We are also aware of four recently published reports that specifically predict economic harm to the American ski industry as a result of climate change. They are: *Less Snow, Less Water: Climate Disruption in the West*, by Stephen Saunders and Maureen Maxwell of the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization; *Climate Change: Modeling a Warmer Rockies and Assessing the Implications*, by Gregory Zimmerman, Caitlin O’Brady, and Bryan Hurlbutt of Colorado College; *Climate Change and Aspen: An Assessment of Impacts and Potential Responses*, by the Aspen Global Change Institute; and *Save Our Snow: Climate Change in Park City* by Stratus Consulting Group.

Operational Impacts

There are plenty of good reasons for ski resorts to be concerned about climate change and its potential impacts on winter recreation. Scientific models suggest that as warming continues, we could experience decreased snowpack, warmer nights, and shorter seasons. All of these changes could profoundly affect our industry. Fewer operating days would obviously impact our bottom line. Warmer nights would impact our ability to make snow. Snowmaking has become the norm in our industry. Eighty-eight (88) percent of our members make snow. We start making snow in October to meet pent up demand for early season skiing and snowboarding. It is crucial that we have sufficient snow cover for the holidays, as they account for 30% of our revenues. This season, it was impossible for many resorts to make snow due to warmer temperatures at night—even in December and January. Warmer nights also significantly drive up the costs associated with snowmaking. Finally, spring rain can wash away our base at a critical time of year for skiing and snowboarding and shorten our season.

Economic Impacts

The mountain resort industry is a \$ 5 billion industry that employs 165,000 people. When you add in real estate, the equipment and apparel side of the industry, and all of the other businesses that rely on winter tourism to stay afloat, we have profound economic impacts. The ski industry's economic health is particularly crucial for a number of rural economies across the country. There are ski areas in 34 states. Fifteen members of this Committee have ski areas in their states.

Looking to the Future

The ski industry views climate change as a long term problem. However, we need to act now to solve this problem and turn things around. While we have significant concerns over the potential impact of climate change on our operations, we are also optimistic about the future. We believe in technology. We know that solutions exist to address this problem, and trust that policy makers will act quickly and decisively in putting solutions in place. The only other alternative for us is to ask Congress to move Christmas to February. Knowing that will never happen, we respectfully request swift and aggressive measures to address this important issue.

Thank you for your consideration of these remarks and the opportunity to address the Committee today.