



# ALBERTA COMMUNITY SKI AREAS BEST PRACTICES IN BUSINESS PLANNING

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CANADA WEST  
 **SKI**  
AREAS ASSOCIATION

## ALBERTA COMMUNITY SKI AREA BEST PRACTICES IN BUSINESS

### PLANNING

This Best Practices Guide was developed with a grant from the Alberta Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, and was created for Alberta Community Ski Areas. The information contained within this report will also provide great scope for ski areas throughout Western Canada who have new management, ownership, Directors, and any ski area considering investments and diversification of their business.

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This document is intended as a report to government and a resource for ski area managers. It is a compilation of information from ski area personnel and other industry professionals.

This document is not intended to dictate requirements and should not be interpreted as a standard. It contains “informational” resources and examples that may be updated, revised or withdrawn at any time. While thought to be accurate and functional, it is provided without warranty of any kind.

Operations will vary from area to area. Deviation from the information presented may be dictated by the circumstances of each unique situation and by the policies, procedures and protocols of each individual ski area. Laws, regulations and policies may also vary in different jurisdictions.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The thirty-four ski areas in Alberta play an important role in communities throughout the province providing social and economic benefits. Ski areas act as social gathering places, especially in winter months, and provide healthy outdoor physical activity for residents including school children. Ski areas also diversify regional economies and contribute economically as well as by providing opportunities for first-time employment.

The ski industry in Alberta stimulates over \$450 million annually, and the continued success of in-province ski tourism is directly linked to the health of smaller regional community and urban ski areas in the province. The broader industry actively supports small areas through sharing of best practices and expertise. Most small community ski areas also rely upon the continued support of community volunteers, local businesses, and funding from provincial and regional governments. These ongoing commitments are important to the continued operation.

The research for this project has identified that ski areas in the study share similar challenges as they look toward the future. Most of the small ski areas operating in Alberta, and many that have closed over the past years, were first developed in the 1960’s and 70’s. They were formed as community driven projects and have been a generator of skiers and snowboarders that support the regional and destination ski areas in Alberta.

In many cases the time for replacement of capital assets has arrived. Ski lift upgrades or replacement, snowmaking infrastructure efficiency improvements, and grooming machine maintenance can all challenge ski areas without financial reserves.

Most ski areas were first opened in the early 1960’s.

- The oldest ski area was developed in 1926 (Norquay)
- The newest two are: 2015 (Eastlink Park) and 1996 (Vista Ridge).

## Project Overview

Canada West Ski Areas Association has undertaken a study of Alberta's ski areas to identify best practices and the current and varied state of ski areas throughout Alberta. This project is funded by the Alberta Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

There are currently **34 operational ski areas in Alberta, 28 of which are smaller community-based operations**. Many of these ski areas are experiencing challenges, including: aging equipment, lack of cash reserves, shorter winter seasons, staffing shortfalls and changing demographics.

See **Appendix 1** for list of Alberta Ski Areas (as of December 2019)

There are three components of this report:

**State of the Ski Industry / Research:** A survey of community ski areas in Alberta was completed in July 2019 to determine the current state, trends and needs of smaller ski area operators throughout the province. Secondary research was also conducted on ski area operations and other forms of recreation to identify best practices, resources and funding opportunities for ski areas.

**Best Practices Guide:** This section identifies best practices related to the business of small, medium and community ski areas. This includes learnings from the research.

**Tools & Resources:** This report contains many tools and resources, a list of those resources in available in the Appendix and is referenced throughout the guide.

## SECTION A - STATE OF THE ALBERTA SKI INDUSTRY - RESEARCH

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The following section outlines the current state (2019) of the ski industry in Alberta based on research conducted, including surveys and interviews with most of the ski areas in Alberta, as well as many from other areas in Canada. Many of the observations create opportunities for improvement. Those opportunities will be discussed later in this report in the Best Practices section.

### Research Methodology

CWSAA distributed a survey (see **Appendix 3**) to the 34 operational ski areas in Alberta in July 2019. Nineteen Ski Areas (56%) completed the survey. The survey included 89 questions both quantitative and qualitative covering areas including sources of revenue, operating schedules, non-winter operations, future opportunities, major concerns, governance, staff/volunteer composition/challenges, land tenure, sources of funding, business planning components, insurance, and infrastructure.

Among the qualitative questions, the survey asked about best practices and innovative solutions that the ski areas have undertaken to improve their operations.

The *individual results of the survey are confidential* however throughout this report, several tables are provided with summary data from the quantitative sections of the survey. The responses from the survey provide the base for understanding the key opportunities that guide this report.

Additionally a questionnaire was distributed to 28 industry experts from the Canadian ski and golf industries. Sixteen respondents offered insightful content for the report including best practice examples. In some cases, personal phone interviews were used to elaborate on best practices.

Secondary research included:

- Population statistics for Alberta - Alberta Treasury Board and Statistics Canada.
- Comparisons of ski area revenue and expenses (provincially and nationally) - 2017/18 and 2018/19 Financial Analysis of Canadian Ski Areas, Ecosign Mountain Planners Ltd.
- Skier visit trends (nationally and provincially) - Canada West Ski Areas Association and the Canadian Ski Council, Facts and Stats Canadian Ski and Snowboard Industry 2017/18.  
*Note much of this information is confidential and not available for public distribution.*

- Examples of best practices, resources and opportunities for ski areas were further researched through internet searches as well as notes from CWSAA's visits to and conversations with ski areas over the past several years.

## Summary of Findings

### Alberta Market Demographics

The current **population of Alberta is 4.371 million** (2019) and is very diverse in culture and geographic distribution. Alberta has high concentrations of people living in and around the urban corridor involving Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton and low concentrations spread throughout the vast expanse of the balance of the province.

The Alberta population is **projected to grow by approximately 2.3 million** residents over the next twenty-eight years with the greatest increases in the urban centers. This bodes well for urban ski areas and the ski areas close to larger cities. **The majority of growth (47%) will be new Canadians** - the 2016 Canadian census counted 938,495 (just over 21%) of people living in Alberta who were born outside of Canada.

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*Embracing new Canadians to enjoy skiing and snowboarding is incredibly important, specifically those who come from parts of the world without a tradition of winter recreation.*

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The population of school-aged **children 5-17 years old is projected to increase by 2% annually** between 2018 and 2025. This creates an opportunity to grow school and youth programs.

The average age of the Alberta population is expected to climb from 38.0 years in 2018 to 41.2 years by 2046. The **number of seniors aged 65 and older is expected to more than double** from over 551,000 in 2018, to over 1.1 million by 2040. Ski Areas may want to consider reviewing the age requirements for senior's discounts – *see more in the Pricing Section of the Best Practices*. There are also many opportunities to create winter and summer **programs for seniors** and accessing **seniors as employees and volunteers** is and will be important.

## Expenses

The top five highest **operational expense categories** identified in the 2019 Alberta Ski Areas survey were:

1. Wages – impacted by minimum wage increase and high wage regions of province
2. Utilities, Power, Electricity - impacted by deregulation and seasonal loads
3. Repairs – particularly aging equipment and facilities
4. Insurance – continued increases, 10 year trend (significant increases for 2019/20 renewals)
5. Fuel and Gas –impacted by price increases, taxes

**Utilities are significantly impacted by seasonal loads.** Seven different Hydro utility suppliers in Alberta were noted in survey responses. Five ski areas have contract rate plans: one with ENMAX and four with ATCO and one is currently being monitored by the supplier.

## Infrastructure & Equipment

**Aging equipment** including ski lifts, grooming machines, water pumps, compressors, underground snowmaking piping, electrical infrastructure along with increased regulations for operation of ski areas are looming issues.

Many small ski areas have older **equipment that will require upgrading or replacement.** For example, there are still several ski areas operating fiber rope tows. It is important to note, that ski lifts are regulated and all ski areas must complete specific maintenance, testing and inspections in order to operate. However, if there is a breakdown, important replacement parts may not be available for older equipment.

### Snowmaking

The **reliance on snowmaking** to sustain ski area operations is critical. However, the majority of surveyed ski areas with snowmaking capabilities are dealing with **aging infrastructure** that is not functioning efficiently. Aging (leaky) underground piping for water and compressed air distribution, homemade snow guns, insufficient electrical supply, reliance on generators and booster pumps all lead to a reduction in system output efficiency and an **increase in energy costs.**



Overview of Alberta's snowmaking infrastructure:

- 24 out of all 34 ski areas in Alberta (70%) have some degree of snowmaking capacity.
  - The 10 ski areas without any snowmaking are all small community ski areas with less than 10,000 skier visits per year. Many (without snowmaking) have had seasons where they have failed to open within the past few years.
- 16 of 19 ski areas (84%) that responded to the survey operate snowmaking systems.
  - 7 of these state that they are entirely dependent on snowmaking to operate, 5 are very dependent, 3 are somewhat dependant.
  - Upgrading to new technology to reduce energy consumption and for better efficiency was mentioned by all but one ski area as a desired improvement.
  - **Snow inducing additive** (Snowmax) is added to snowmaking water at five ski areas (out of the 19 surveyed) to **increase snow production efficiency**.

<b>SNOWMAKING</b> - based on the 16 respondents that have snowmaking				
	Average	Median	Min	Max
# of Snowmaking Days per season	29.3	30.0	10	50
Area covered by snowmaking (acres)	60.7	44.0	4	200
% of skiable terrain with snowmaking	68%	90%	2%	100%

Some mountain resorts and community ski areas use snowmaking to allow for **earlier openings** and to ensure a more durable **snow base in high traffic base areas**. Others such as Nakiska, Sun Peaks (BC) and Panorama (BC) utilize snowmaking on a broader scale to offer early season **race training** in advance of public skiing. Race training revenues assist in offsetting some of the early season snowmaking expenses and start up costs.

**Access to sufficient water supply** for snowmaking is an issue for some ski areas including cases where the supply is from within a National Park or from a municipal water source which may be limited by water license restrictions or piping capacity.

- 3 ski areas surveyed use municipal/city water supply.
- 5 source their water from rivers.
- The remainder use lakes, reservoirs and creeks.

Municipal water may also be chlorinated and/or delivered at a higher than optimum temperature. Pumping capacities at the ski areas that responded to the survey range from 225 gpm – 1500 gpm.

## Funding Sources

This section will concentrate on examples of funding sources uncovered in the research, which currently support small, community, urban and municipal/government operated ski areas. These funding programs may include Municipal, County, Provincial and Federal grant programs, Lottery Funds, Service Club Donations, Private Foundations and Corporate sponsorships.

The percentage of income reliance on funding from grants and sponsorships for small ski areas ranges from a low of 0% to a high of 56% (according the survey). **Without the support of these additional funding sources most of the not-for-profit ski areas would have difficulty staying viable.** In particular, these funding sources are essential for capital replacements and improvements.

The ski sector is vulnerable to changes in government funding programs. Provincial programs such as recreation grants or Travel Alberta co-operative marketing initiatives have significant impact on a community ski areas ability to upgrade infrastructure and market their resorts.

While municipal ski areas are eligible for many of the same grants that not-for-profit ski areas can access, those funded and/or operated by Provincial, County or Municipal Governments face the **challenge of competing for tax dollars** with all other operations and facilities funded by their budgets. Competition with **other forms of recreation** can become a political issue with other facility managers and user groups lobbying for their share of funds. Hockey arenas, swimming pools, seniors' centers, youth centers, fitness facilities, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, playgrounds, skateboard parks etc. all take a slice of recreation budgets. It is important for government funded ski areas to **formalize a written agreement** with the funding County, Municipality or Province **defining the annual contribution** towards operational and capital expenses.

See current list of grant programs, in this google doc:

[docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ViIjnx\\_d2JMcheKYII07OSulcExJlp\\_3OCpeGu3Dbw/edit#gid=135068196](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ViIjnx_d2JMcheKYII07OSulcExJlp_3OCpeGu3Dbw/edit#gid=135068196)

Indirect funding in the form of **tax exemptions** on land and waivers for land-use, may be considered for many of the not-for-profit ski areas, providing forgiveness from paying all or some of their land taxes or land lease expenses. The ski areas operated by County, Municipal or Provincial governments also **benefit from access to departments within their government operations** that supply services such as human resources, payroll, bookkeeping/finance and insurance programs.

## Seasonal Revenues & Activities

Spring, Summer and Fall (off-season) activities are **important additions to the revenue stream** for ski areas that have the facilities and resources to operate year-round. Twelve of the nineteen Alberta ski areas surveyed, reported additional operations outside of the traditional winter season. Revenue percentages for off-season vary, with the busiest ski areas reporting nearly 50% of their total annual revenue derived from non-winter operations.

The ski areas that have year-round operations are **less reliant on the success of the winter operations** thus reducing financial risk. However, most ski areas with year-round operations still rely on ski operations as their primary revenue source.

<b>TOTAL REVENUES BY SEASON</b> (non-destination resorts only)			
	Average	Median	Range
Winter	85%	97%	30 - 100%
Spring	2%	0%	0 - 15%
Summer	8%	2%	0 - 40%
Fall	4%	0%	0 - 40%

## Winter Season Revenue Sources

The **majority of small ski areas** in Alberta are located east of the Rocky Mountains and are **subject to weather extremes**. Extreme cold, chinooks, snow draught, poor (warm) early season snowmaking temperatures and early warm spring weather can all be limiting factors to winter operations, and significantly impacting winter revenues.

For many of the not-for-profit community ski areas, the **reliance on volunteers** to operate the facilities and limited local market sizes create a short window of opportunity to generate revenue.

- The larger regional and destination resorts typically operate 7 days a week for between five and six months of the year.
  - The average **mid-size community ski area operates 75 days a year**,
  - **Urban ski areas** operate **more than 100 days** each (and up to 140 days).
- The **small rural ski areas** (typically under 20,000 annual skier visits) have much shorter seasons. Most do not open until Christmas break (or even January), and are open limited days (weekends, holidays and school visit days), **averaging about 55 days of operation**.

The recent CWSAA survey confirms that the **majority of revenue** at the small and community ski areas is derived from **winter activities**. The percentage of total income derived from winter sales revenue (lift tickets, rental shop, snow school, facility rental, food and beverage etc.)

versus other funding sources (government grants, corporate donations etc.) ranges from a low of 35% to a high of 100%.

- The **municipal/government operated ski areas average 79% of revenue from skiing and snowboarding operations**. Note: municipal operated ski areas also have access to capital funding, finance, human resources and payroll assistance and benefit from being covered by an insurance program, that off-sets many of the ski areas expenses.
- The 10 **not-for-profit ski areas** surveyed have a **large variation** in the percent of revenue from skiing and snowboarding sales.
  - **3 did not report any outside funding** (100% come from sales revenue).
  - **3 received the majority of their funding from non-sales** related sources (e.g. grants, sponsorships).

**Food and beverage** is the second largest source of revenue for ski areas (19% of average winter revenues). According to the Financial Analysis of Canadian Ski Areas (2018/19), for each skier visit customers spend an average of \$11.38 (national average) at the ski areas food and beverage outlets.

<b>% CURRENT REVENUES BY OPERATING PRODUCT – all survey respondents</b> <i>(note: does not include other revenue sources such as grants and sponsorship)</i>		
	<b>Average</b>	<b>Range</b>
Lift & activity tickets/passes (all types)	46%	25-68%
Food & beverage	23%	10-48%
Equipment rentals (eg. Skis, boots, bikes etc)	14%	7-25%
Snow school	12%	0-33%
Facility rentals (for events)	2%	0-13%
Accommodation rental (direct ski area revenues only)	1%	0-13%
Retail (eg. clothing, souvenirs)	1%	0-6%

## Programming and Facility Utilization

### Winter Operations

Nearly half the ski areas that responded to the survey only have skiing and snowboarding revenue generating winter activities.

**Tube park** operations appear to be successful and ski areas who have installed these facilities realize a quick return on investment with a range of 12 to 30% of their total revenue from this activity. Plus there is opportunity to convert tube park visitors into skiers and snowboarders as well as generate increased food and beverage revenue.

Tubing is the most common non-ski revenue-generating winter activity, with 8 ski areas offering. Tubing provides an average of 12% (and up to 30%) of winter ticket revenues for those that offer it. Many that do not currently offer tubing would consider adding it or sledding to their product offering. However, four ski areas would not consider adding a tubing or sledding product – it is believed that at least two could not because of restrictions on land-use and/or space.

**Snow shoeing** is also a common offering, but for many it is not a revenue generator. **Fat-tire snow biking** is only offered by two of the respondents; however six would consider it as an expansion product.

WINTER PRODUCTS – Status and % of revenues					
Product Status & % Revenues	Status			% of Revenues	
	currently offer	could in future	not considering	Average	Range
Skiing/snowboarding	19	0	0	81%	0 - 100%
Tubing/sledding	8	5	4	12%	0 - 30%
Snow shoeing	8	3	5	3%	0 - 5%
Cross-country skiing	4	2	9	3%	0 - 5%
Winter sight-seeing	3	2	10	3%	1 - 5%
Fat-tire snow biking	2	6	8	3%	*
Other	4	1	1	12%	5 - 18%

*\*data removed for confidentiality!*

The research has identified many innovative **programming** and facility uses that involve alpine skiing and snowboarding and nordic activities that encourage repeat visits and develop a feeling of belonging among regular visitors. *See more in Skier Development Programs Best Practices.*

There is currently a concern among ski area operators that provincial budget cuts may be effecting school program visits in the future. This would greatly impact ski area revenues and may diminish the development of new skiers and snowboarders for the overall marketplace.

#### LESSONS & PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

- Lessons: 18 out of 19 respondents offer both ski & snowboard lessons
- School visits per year:
  - over 150,000 (All Alberta ski areas)
  - 6.5% of all skier visits – ranges from 2% at mountain resorts to over 30% at some small ski areas.
- Club programs (e.g. race, freestyle):
  - 14 out of 19 respondents have clubs.
  - Average club has about 275 participants, with the smallest at 50 and largest at 1000!

The estimated total number of school program visits for the province of Alberta is approximately 150,000 (according to CWSAA estimates) per winter.

- The **urban ski areas** in Calgary and Edmonton account for nearly 60% of the province’s school trip participation (while they represent under 50% of the total Alberta school population). On average, schools accounts for 16% of urban ski areas total annual skier visits.
- **Smaller community** and rural ski areas report approximately 26% of all the provincial school visits. On average, schools represent approx. 16% of total skier visits for smaller ski areas that have school programs. Note a few smaller ski areas do not have school programs.
- **Destination** ski areas account for approx. 15% of all school visits. However, given their large overall visitation it accounts for approx. 2% of their total annual skier visits.

These large percentages underscore the value of school and youth programs at ski areas.

#### Spring, Summer and Fall Operations

Increasingly important to the success of ski areas are the off-season activities and facility uses.

Twelve ski areas (out of 17 that responded) currently offer revenue generating products/services outside of the winter season. However, five only offer private events like weddings and special events, rather than regular public weekly activities. One is currently developing summer products (expected to launch in 2020), three would consider in the future and two are not considering adding any non-winter products.

The table below illustrates survey results by off-season activity as percentages of annual revenue.

<b>SPRING/SUMMER/FALL PRODUCTS</b>					
<b>Status &amp; for those who offer, their percent of revenues</b>					
	<b>Status</b>			<b>% of Revenues</b>	
	currently offer	could in future	not considering	Average	Range
Private bookings	12	2	0	61%	2 - 100%
Special public events	7	5	0	6%	0 -15%
Adventure products	4	5	3	37%	0 - 78%
Sight-seeing	3	1	8	23%	2 - 50%
Camping	3	5	4	13%	5 - 45%
Summer day camps (kids)	2	9	1	10%	*
Mountain Biking	2	8	3	5%	*
Golf (any form)	1	3	8	*	*

*\*data removed for confidentiality!*

**Private bookings**, such as weddings and corporate groups are common with 12 ski areas offering. Some private events are for small kitchen rentals (such as groups doing canning or baking) and others offer full catering and venue services for large weddings. This is generally the largest source of revenue for off-season ski areas, which is evident in the Financial Analysis of Canadian Ski Areas (2018-19) which shows Food & Bar revenues in the summer average \$28.98 (nationally) for each summer guest.

Nitehawk, Vista Ridge and Snow Valley are three community ski areas with year-round operations. Vista Ridge and Snow Valley offer aerial parks as their primary attraction. Snow Valley and Nitehawk offer camp grounds as well as kid’s camps. Nitehawk and Winsport are the only ski areas in Alberta which currently operate a lift accessed mountain bike facility.

Kinosoo Ridge completed its Master Plan in 2018, which is geared towards an all-season resort plan. 2019 marked the third year of their Snow Fever festival, which involves a winter concert, celebrity appearances and family activities and they are in the process of building an aerial adventure park to commence in 2020.

## Pricing

Lift ticket and season pass pricing was reviewed as part of the 2019 Alberta survey and research. The following price examples are average prices in Alberta:

- Overall average (ticket window) **Adult full day lift tickets** \$43.94 (low \$10, high \$114)
  - Destination resorts significantly skew the average price high (their day tickets range from \$89-114),
  - Average adult ticket at Community Ski Areas (excludes destination mountain resorts) is \$33.56.
- Overall average (full price) **Adult season passes** \$459 (low \$80, high \$1395).
  - Again destination resorts seasons passes are significantly higher (ranging from \$859-1395)
  - Community Ski Area adult season passes average at \$317.

<b>LIFT TICKET RATES FOR COMMUNITY SKI AREAS</b> (Excludes all mountain resorts)			
<b>Day Ticket</b>	Average	Median	Range
Senior	\$ 21.48	\$ 22.88	\$ 9.00 – 35.00
Adult	\$ 33.56	\$ 34.50	\$ 10.00 – 50.00
Student	\$ 29.70	\$ 32.50	\$ 10.00 – 40.00
Youth	\$ 28.14	\$ 27.50	\$ 10.00 – 40.00
Child	\$ 26.29	\$ 26.00	\$ 12.00 – 35.00
Tot	\$ 14.50	\$ 15.00	\$ 10.00 – 21.00
<b>Season Pass</b>			
Senior	\$ 227.25	\$ 246.00	\$ 105 – 429
Adult	\$ 317.33	\$ 320.00	\$ 80 – 479
Student	\$ 293.60	\$ 292.00	\$ 80 – 429
Youth	\$ 265.69	\$ 275.00	\$ 65 - 429
Child	\$ 247.77	\$ 273.00	\$ 80 - 379
Tot	\$ 116.00	\$ 114.00	\$ 10 - 235

**Season Pass payoff rates vary** across ski areas with an average of 9.3 days among community ski areas – ranging from 5 days to 13 days! Alberta mountain resorts are typically above 10 days payoff, with the average of approximately 12 days.

Another pricing strategy observation is the **age requirements for seniors and tots passes**. For some there is a **relatively low age for seniors' discounts** (day and season passes) commencing as low as age 55 and 60 for some ski areas. Generally about half of ski areas (mostly smaller) start at age 55 or 60, with the remainder (including all destination resorts) starting at age 65.



Note, some resorts have a second tier for seniors (for instance over 80 at Marmot Basin) which provides a further discount or even free.

There is little consistency for tot's passes – both in terms of age and price. The destination and larger resorts offer a free pass for those under 6. However two ski areas charge all youth (with tots rates slightly lower than child rates), and others start charging at 4 or 5.

## Governance

The **majority of ski areas** in Alberta are operated as **not-for-profit societies** (20). Nine are privately (corporate) owned and five are Municipal/Government operated.

The survey respondents identified that most (16 of 19) function with a **Board of Directors** who provide guidance and direction to management and in many cases work with committees and task groups. The not-for-profit ski areas, who have limited paid staff (or none in some cases), also **rely heavily on their volunteer Board members** for functional duties including bookkeeping, marketing, maintenance of equipment, operating grooming machines, snowmaking, lift operation, fundraising and completing grant applications to name a few of the many tasks.

Most of Alberta's **government run ski areas** are operated by the municipality (4), and one is operated by Alberta Parks. These government ski areas will have much of the administrative capacities managed by the municipality (or Alberta Parks), and in some cases the ski area management also manages other facilities (parks, pools etc.) within the region.

**Corporately owned ski areas** include all of the destination resorts, as well as a few family-run community ski areas. Only one ski area in Alberta is part of a multi-resort ownership group – a Canadian company which owns six Canadian ski resorts. While some of the corporate ownership groups do own other businesses, each business is generally independently run and many are family run businesses. The Canadian ownership and lack of corporate conglomeration is unique to Alberta, with many destination resorts across Canada and the United States being purchased by large multi-resort conglomerates.

## SECTION B – BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

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Throughout this guide, you will find innovative ideas and best practices used at ski areas. Quotes from ski areas are highlighted in blue italics throughout the guide that showcase opportunities and observations from ski areas surveyed for this project.

### Business Planning

The importance of creating a business plan for all ski areas cannot be stressed enough. The information about the business, once gathered, can be easily updated annually or as needed. Beyond the actual function as a planning tool, the business plan itself provides important information for purposes such as:

- seeking funding from lending institutions
- preparation for grant applications
- Board member education
- reporting to stakeholders
- reporting to the government body with oversight of the operation

The General Manager will involve Board Members in business planning by presenting a plan or framework for them to analyze and comment on. Without the basic framework to discuss business planning a Board can go askew very quickly. Presenting concise, relevant and accurate information to the Board without overwhelming them with options and irrelevant details allows for **productive input and idea generation**. This in turn allows for **good decision-making**.

Many ski areas will also prepare long-range development plans – or **Master Plans**. A ski area master plan utilizes the goals and objectives of the ski area (which links to the Business Plan) and takes into consideration physical realities of the area – such as terrain, capacity, access etc. A master plan is a process that is typically conducted by an engineer or specialty firm that also has expertise in environmental and regulatory requirements or restraints. Master plans often cover the active slopes (ski area terrain), as well as base area and may incorporate other resort features such as residential and commercial areas. The development of a Master Plan is a process that involves the ski area management, Board of Directors, community officials as well as public consultation. The vision created in the Master Plan is usually a long-term plan that may be implemented in phases over many years, and is often updated (i.e. every 5-10 years).

## Staff recruitment, development and retention strategies

**Recruiting and retaining qualified trained people** came up in the research as **key issues** from ski area operators as well as from experts who supply and support the ski industry. To help with ski area staff engagement and retention, CWSAA and go2HR developed a resource for ski areas.

### Ski Industry Employee Retention & Engagement Guide

[www.go2hr.ca/resource-library/employee-retention-and-engagement-guide](http://www.go2hr.ca/resource-library/employee-retention-and-engagement-guide)

Having a strong team, starts at the top with the manager(s).

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*“The best way of sustaining a small ski area, is having a good **multifaceted businessperson** motivating and driving a small core of dedicated and driven individuals. Without having a good business focused individual it is very hard to create the revenue streams required to stay in Business. Unfortunately, it is very hard to find an individual that can be **both operationally capable and business focused**. Putting resources into finding, and more importantly keeping, such an individual is paramount to sustaining the operation.”*

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Training and development opportunities are important for **retention efforts** and to **grow the qualifications and expertise of a team**. The ski industry has a positive reputation for creating opportunities for ski areas to learn from others through networking, while attending the CWSAA conferences, trade shows and through participating in industry committees.

**CWSAA’s Spring Conference & Fall Meetings** host educational training courses such as the Lift Mechanics Courses (Lift 151, 152, 153 Selkirk College courses - [selkirk.ca/program/ski/passenger-ropeway-mechanics](http://selkirk.ca/program/ski/passenger-ropeway-mechanics)) and each year additional courses are held for specialty areas (such as working at heights) or general topics (Operations Supervisors Courses).

Each year the CWSAA Spring Conference holds approximately 50 different sessions over three days with topics including Human Resources, snowsports, risk & safety, maintenance, operations, marketing and a specific forum for small ski areas. This event provides a great opportunity for all ski areas to offer **learning and networking opportunities** for their staff, board members and management. The top benefit of these gatherings (as rated by ski areas) is the networking and industry connections made at the conference between ski areas that are able to help each other out, and suppliers and industry experts that provide solutions.

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*“Attending CWSAA conferences and fall meetings is vital for keeping staff engaged and up to date with the industry. Networking builds community.”*

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**Partner organizations** such as CASI, CSIA, go2HR, Travel Alberta and AEDARSA are another source of training and development opportunities. Each have well-educated working groups to provide expertise on specific topics. Many offer free webinars and annual updates for the industry.

Online courses such as Selkirk College’s Ski Area Risk Management course ([selkirk.ca/program/ski/ski-resort-risk-management-online](http://selkirk.ca/program/ski/ski-resort-risk-management-online)) and Train the Trainer for Lift Supervisors ([selkirk.ca/program/ski/lift-150-train-trainer](http://selkirk.ca/program/ski/lift-150-train-trainer)) offer important unique skills training specific to ski resort operations and management.

Thinking ahead at least five years about the development of a management team is critical to the long-term success of any small or large business. Ski areas should identify who is the second in command and if the General Manager, Operations Manager, President etc. were suddenly not there, would someone else be able to step in to pick up the essential responsibilities. Also, management needs to identify which key team members may be retiring or looking for an exit strategy, and who could be mentored to fill those roles.

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*“**Succession planning** is key with many management team members retiring in the next 5 – 10 years. **Providing opportunities internally** with professional development training, benefits, and ensuring managers support/delegate/train to **foster that learning and responsibility**. Finding the right people who are just as passionate is a challenge.”*

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It is also common to **cross train** staff between departments at a ski area. This provides staff the opportunity to increase their hours, while reducing the recruitment requirements for the ski area. It also provides flexibility. At Vista Ridge they have a number of staff who work in multiple departments – e.g. a ski school instructor who is also a bartender.

**Partnerships between ski areas**, provide great mentorship opportunities and can also fill gaps in staffing or technical expertise when needed. For example:

- The manager of Hart Highlands (BC) helps train instructors at other ski areas in Northern BC.
- Nitehawk’s lift maintenance staff have contracted their services to other ski areas.

- A group of ski areas in Northern Alberta and Northern BC **work together on some of their major maintenance initiatives** (e.g. haul rope splicing) so that they can benefit from the skills and experience of each other.
- Marmot Basin has a relationship with Edmonton Ski Club and provides mentorship and support to the small ski area.

### **Wages & Compensation**

Each spring CWSAA surveys ski areas to determine average regional wages for common non-management positions such as lift operations, food & beverage, snow school, patrol, groomers, guest services, as well as entry level supervisors. The **CWSAA Wage Survey** collects this information for the purposes of industry advocacy and international worker programs. It also provides ski areas that participate in the survey data to help with budget planning, recruitment and with setting wages.

Beyond wages, there are numerous ways to engage staff and keep them happy.

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*“Typically, most ski areas are already trying to pay more than businesses in town in order to attract applicants. Providing **benefits** such as subsidized transportation, clothing, equipment, they all add up.”*

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### **Recruitment**

The Western Canadian ski industry aggressively recruits Canadians to fill its job vacancies; however, it does not receive enough Canadian applications to fill all positions. Thus various **international worker programs** are used to augment the workforce, especially in resort communities. Many ski areas also hire international recruiting companies to secure employees.

See more about CWSAA’s position statement on the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program and International Experience Canada (IEC) Program: [cwsaa.org/policy/temporary-foreign-workers/](https://cwsaa.org/policy/temporary-foreign-workers/).

Recruitment through post-secondary institutions for co-op and practicum terms as well as through international colleges has been successful for some ski areas.

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*“Competition is fierce for skilled workers. Most small areas have limited resources and sometimes even appeal for international labour pools. Focusing on college practicums/co-op terms usually yields some potential results. Working to initiate youth in the community at an early age helps to grow hometown candidates.”*

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Ski Areas may **recruit New Canadians** and **International College students** through promoting a Canadian work opportunity with home stay experiences and the exchange of culture between New Canadian workers and ski area guests. Students on an international student visa may work up to 20 hours per week during the school year and have proven to be an energetic and resourceful source of employees.

**High schools** are often a great recruitment opportunity. Many school boards recognize certification (CSIA and CASI) and similar courses as credits towards their high school diploma. There may also be opportunities for apprenticeship programs with volunteer high school students.

**Industry job posting resources are available for staff recruitment:**

- CWSAA Job Board (free for CWSAA Members): [cwsaa.org/jobs/post-a-job/](https://cwsaa.org/jobs/post-a-job/)
- Selkirk College SROAM program (co-op placements and graduate recruitment): [selkirk.ca/program/ski](https://selkirk.ca/program/ski)

## Governance: Working with Volunteers & Board of Directors

Sustaining a **management** person (or team) is critical in the successful operation of ski areas. These key staff members also work with the Boards of Directors to keep them informed and to seek their assistance in decision making and with assembling volunteer task groups or committees.

A **strong volunteer base** is critical to any ski area whether it is a not-for-profit, corporation or operated by a municipal or regional government. These important people support ski areas by sharing their **knowledge, skills, professional and social contacts, guidance and even labour** to ensure success. They act as a conduit connecting the management and operations of a facility to the activities that are important to user groups such as ski racing clubs, freestyle clubs, ski patrol and the general skier and snowboard community.

Volunteerism has its own challenges. Volunteers often participate because they have a connection, usually a social connection that allows them to participate as more than just a volunteer. In the case of many volunteer run organizations, the members that have put in so much personal time over many years may someday **experience burnout**. Some volunteers drop out as they age or their family grows up and leaves the community or they no longer participate in skiing or snowboarding. Providing **social engagement** and recognition are vital to the retention of volunteers.

### Recruitment of Board members

Finding the right Board Members and volunteers is critical to the success of your ski area. Recruitment is an ongoing activity to ensure there is fresh energy and committed voices. Some boards will have rotating roles and terms limits.

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*“Being on a Board can be **a lot of work and time commitment** and if you are going to attract good people this needs to be **balanced with having fun and a common vision** for the resort. It is up to driven individuals to “sell” the vision to the community. With a clear and exciting vision and development plan people will want to be involved.”*

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It is important to **select board members who fit the roles needed** within the organization, in terms of skills, commitment and connection. Many successful ski areas actively **recruit their board** members (as opposed to wait for volunteers). Some ski areas attend tourism, economic development and board of trade functions to tap into their volunteer networks for people with relevant skills needed on their Boards. It’s an opportunity to determine who has the

appropriate skills needed now and in the future as well as **who may be over committed** and not ready to join a board at the time.

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*“Don’t wait for people to volunteer, go seek out people who you believe will be helpful and ask them. Tell them you think they are what the mountain needs for this specific role.”*

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### **Role of the Board**

Governance within the Board of Directors is important. **Management must** have strong direction to **guide the Board**. A Governance Policy, Business Plan and Terms of Reference for the Board are very helpful to define the direction of the ski area, the role of the Board and each of the Board members.

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*“Monthly meetings are a must, along with ongoing conversations with board members. Board members generally join as they have an interest, skill or background. Find those areas and engage the board members, as they are a great **resource to leverage partnership in the community**. As most board members are volunteers the **social connection** must be utilized to keep it fun.”*

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Many ski areas have set up board member **duties that reflect operational needs**; an operations person (find a carpenter or general contractor), retail/marketing (someone who owns a retail shop in town), treasurer (a bookkeeper, or accountant that truly understands numbers) etc.

### **Risk Mitigation**

The safety of guests and staff is the most important roles of a ski area. It is also important in managing the expenses and liability exposure of any ski area. One component of risk mitigation is educating and informing the guests, and the CWSAA Exclusion of Liability program is a significant element used by all western Canadian ski areas.

- **Signage** – There are many signs that are important in educating the guests about the risks at each ski area. These can be obtained through ski industry sign producers. The **Exclusion of Liability** and **Alpine Responsibility Code** are two standard industry signs that are very important. All ski area members of CWSAA can order up to 20 Exclusion of Liability and



Alpine Responsibility Code signs **free of charge** (additional signs may be ordered at a cost from sign shops). [cwsaa.org/safety-signage/](https://cwsaa.org/safety-signage/)

- **Safety & Risk Awareness** information – In the summer of 2019, the CWSAA Exclusion of Liability program was updated, which included new signs and a **webpage** that complements the signs. It is recommended that ski areas have visible links on their website to a page with specific Safety & Risk Awareness information including the risks, dangers and hazards. [cwsaa.org/links/safety-risk-awareness/](https://cwsaa.org/links/safety-risk-awareness/)
- **Waivers** – CWSAA has examples of many waivers for ski areas. However, it is vital that all ski area waiver documents are reviewed in detail with the ski area’s insurer and legal counsel.

It is important for each ski area to regularly **consult their insurance provider and legal counsel** to review their Exclusion of Liability program and risk mitigation strategies. Each ski area will have unique circumstances and risks that may require specific mitigation strategies, and CWSAA is not equipped to assess and provide guidance for those specific circumstances.

Some additional measures to consider in developing your risk mitigation strategy include:

- Develop a **crisis management/incident response plan**.
- Develop a **crisis communication plan** – See Crisis Communications template created for CWSAA here: [cwsaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CWSSA-Crisis-Comms-Handout-Tamara-Little-compressed.pdf](https://cwsaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CWSSA-Crisis-Comms-Handout-Tamara-Little-compressed.pdf)
- Take **photos and/or videos capturing of your risk mitigation measures** at least once per season (and as significant changes occur). This should include photos of signage, catalogue of your waiver, a digital capture of any online waivers and all Safety & Risk Awareness webpage materials etc. Review what you include in this file with your insurer to ensure the images provide appropriate context and include all important items.
- Stay up to date with important safety and risk management updates through CWSAA newsletters and attendance at Fall Division meetings and CWSAA Spring Conferences risk management sessions.

## Insurance

The global insurance industry is not unfamiliar to cycles. In 2020, ski areas are seeing increased rates and this is expected to continue in the near term. The types of coverage ranges broadly from business interruption to liability to property.

Safety and risk management continues to be a lead focus of the industry. Implementation and rigorous adherence to industry best practices have served the industry well and helps maintain the confidence of the insurance community. The CWSAA Exclusion of Liability program including signage and waivers is a critical element to risk management. Operations are also regulated through lift maintenance requirements, employment standards, and other regulatory agencies. Ski areas are encouraged to send staff to attend training at CWSAA events to gain this knowledge. Extensive risk management content including lift maintenance training is delivered through these events. Specialised insurance brokers also play a role in identifying vulnerabilities within a ski area risk management plan.

Ski areas have had many years to develop best operational practices for ski and snowboard experiences. New product offerings are developing quickly and do not have the same maturation as an industry. As ski areas look to diversify and broaden their revenue streams from strictly ski and snowboard, ski areas need to be aware of insurance premium implications as insurers may not evaluate at these new activities equally.

Property loss is increasingly considered at higher risk as many ski areas are located remotely. Wildfires in western Canada and abroad have increased this perception. This serves as an example where policies must be reviewed in detail as clauses may be changed from year to year to reflect new concerns from the global insurance community.

There are several insurance brokers that specialise in ski resort coverage. These contacts are available through the CWSAA membership directory. The companies provide benefit in being able to acquire insurance in a challenging climate, and also provide practical insight and knowledge for ski area operators. They have demonstrated commitment to the industry and bring the benefit of a wide array of ski experience and risk management to the individual ski area operator.

## Infrastructure, Equipment and Regulatory Compliance

The most notable operational concerns from Alberta ski areas, that came forward in the research include:

- aging equipment including ski lifts,
- grooming machines,
- water pumps,
- compressors,
- underground snowmaking piping,
- electrical infrastructure,
- increased regulations for operation of ski areas,
- worker safety,
- environmental concerns/climate change, and
- land use/tenure.

Ski areas should develop a business plan and **identify upcoming challenges** through an inventory of major capital items. This will help ski areas become more prepared to seek out funding and community support through a **program of major maintenance and phased replacement** of critical infrastructure. Reliance on grant funding for replacement of this equipment is important for many small areas. Some ski areas have also successfully secured infrastructure funds by participating as a venue for major events (e.g. multi-sport provincial or national games).

### Passenger Ropeways

Ski lifts are regulated provincially, and ski area managers must complete specific maintenance, testing and inspections in order to operate. Many small ski areas have aged equipment that will require upgrading or replacement and in some cases replacement parts may no longer be available. For example, while there has been a significant replacement of fibre rope tows in favour of conveyor lifts over the past twenty years, a number of fibre ropes still exist. Replacing any lift requires significant planning and investment including consideration of new uses available for the new lift. For example with the addition of a conveyor lift, new activities such as tubing or even summer operations such as mountain biking access may be considered.

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*“Whispering Pines was able to secure grant monies in support of acquiring and relocating a used chairlift to Whispering Pines. This included discussions with their MLA and eventually with the Minister responsible for this funding.”*

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It is the responsibility of all ski areas to understand and comply with the regulations regarding the maintenance and operation of passenger ropeways (all ski lifts including conveyor lifts).

**CSA Z98** is the national code that provides requirements for the design, manufacture, construction, modification, operation, inspection, testing, and maintenance of passenger ropeways. (Note: a new version of the Z98 code is pending approval for use in 2020.) Ski areas are required to follow the provincially approved version of the code. Ski areas should have a copy of this code which is available through online subscription:

[store.csagroup.org/ccrz\\_ProductList?cartID=&operation=quickSearch&searchText=Z98&searchFilter=all&portalUser=&store=&cclcl=en\\_US](https://store.csagroup.org/ccrz_ProductList?cartID=&operation=quickSearch&searchText=Z98&searchFilter=all&portalUser=&store=&cclcl=en_US)

In Alberta, a **Passenger Ropeways subcommittee** provides technical guidance and recommendations under the Alberta Safety Codes Council. Ski area interests are brought forward through the ski area representatives and related suppliers that serve the committee.

All ski areas in British Columbia are required to have a qualified lift trainer (for other provinces it is an option). This qualification is achieved by completing the **LIFT 150: Ski Lift Operations Train-the-Trainer** course (through Selkirk College - [selkirk.ca/program/ski/lift-150-train-trainer](https://selkirk.ca/program/ski/lift-150-train-trainer)). The course is designed to help ski lift supervisors or managers, develop a comprehensive program for training ski lift operators, including the ability to:

1. Explain the need for ski lift safety and the steps required to achieve it.
2. Identify and explain regulations governing ski lifts that relate to lift operator training.
3. Deliver a ski lift operator's training session.

**Alberta Elevating Devices & Amusement Rides Safety Association (AEDARSA)** is the regulating body for passenger lifts in Alberta. Some of the areas AEDARSA supports includes:

- Provides technical code support and advice to help ski areas achieve compliance.
- Provides industry training, open to all ski areas. AEDARSA hosts a 1-day Alberta Passenger Ropeway Training (APRT) FREE seminar, annually.
- Keeps fees associated with operation permits and inspection cost to a minimum.
- AEDARSA will continue to support Selkirk College/CWSAA lift mechanics training courses through funding, delivery and technical support.
  - At this time AEDARSA encourages participation in the courses, but they are not mandatory in Alberta.

## **Worker Safety**

Every ski area must **ensure all workers are provided with a safe work environment** - Managers and Board members are responsible to know the Occupational Health and Safety requirements for their workplace and to ensure all staff are trained in the appropriate workplace safety standards applicable to their position. Worker safety is a very important component of the CWSAA Safety & Risk Committee, which is regularly reviewing important topics and advocating on behalf of the ski industry.

Ski areas should have a **pre-season training and orientation program** that includes **safe work practices** and job specific requirements. These important messages should also be regularly **incorporated into pre-shift** meetings throughout the ski season. CWSAA has excellent resources which have been developed in cooperation with go2HR. These resources are free for ski areas to use and should be part of ongoing training.

### **Ski Area Worker Safety Resources**

[go2hr.ca/skisafety](http://go2hr.ca/skisafety)

Ski areas can also work with their local occupational health and safety representatives, regional health inspectors, lift inspectors and the Ministry of Labour and invite them to speak to staff and volunteers on relevant topics during pre-season training.

### **Occupational Health & Safety Resources for the Ski Industry:**

- [go2hr.ca/skisafety](http://go2hr.ca/skisafety)
- [alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx](http://alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx)
  - Subscribe to their newsletter for important updates and resources:  
[alberta.ca/health-safety-eneews.aspx](http://alberta.ca/health-safety-eneews.aspx)
  - OHS Safety Code explanation guide: [ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li001](http://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li001)
- [cwsaa.org/login](http://cwsaa.org/login) - Ski Areas have access to industry best practice guides and more resources in the member's section of the website.
- [www.wcb.ab.ca/resources/for-employers](http://www.wcb.ab.ca/resources/for-employers) - Workers Compensation Board of Alberta

## Diversification of Seasonal Revenue & Activities

Ski areas of all sizes have become less dependent on revenues from skiing and snowboarding operations by taking steps to **diversify their business to involve four season activities**. Many have developed additional facilities and/or expanded the use of existing facilities through innovative programming. These new opportunities **enhance tourism and recreational opportunities** for their respective region, and buffer the resorts from unpredictable weather.

Nitehawk Year Round Adventure Park in Grande Prairie, Vista Ridge All Seasons Park in Fort McMurray and Snow Valley in Edmonton are all examples of community ski areas in Alberta that have taken the initiative to expand their operations. Diversifying revenue streams can reduce financial risks and enable year-round employment of key staff, which helps with retaining long-term valuable employees.

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*“Diversifying helps to ensure we do not have all of our eggs in one basket and helps us weather proof (to a point) our resort.”*

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There are pros and cons to diversification and each ski area must explore what may work for their business in detail. Each new idea must be treated as an extension of the ski areas business, beginning with **formal research** to determine whether such diversification is feasible at all. Facility and programming **diversification may not be practical for all** small ski areas. Those with limited funding opportunities, land use limitations, smaller local population and limited labour supply *may* not desire or be suited for all-season expansions. Ski areas must also determine the **impacts on ‘down-time’** for staff holidays and maintenance schedules – year-round attractions will shorten the window for major annual maintenance and upgrades on primary facilities such as lodge, parking lots and lifts.

There are also additional **capital investments** required in developing new facilities and programming, which may qualify for financing or funding programs. In some cases third party operators may wish to partner on the installation of facilities such as Tube parks, Zip Lines, Mountain Coasters and Adventure Parks, which could alleviate the financial investment.

**Third party partners** and users should be strategically considered. These could include user groups (e.g. a local bike club using the trails), event promoters (e.g. using the property for a festival or event), and other businesses (e.g. an adventure company that has installed and operates an activity such as zip lining, or a food truck that sells from your site). These groups may provide additional revenue opportunities as well as activities for your patrons, however,

those revenues should be balanced with the costs and risks. There may be legal and insurance implications to their activity at the resort, which must be explored with your counsel/advisors.

## Winter

The most common and often the most effective diversification is **snow tubing**. Tubing is also a gateway to skiing and snowboarding because it provides people that have no winter or ski experience an opportunity to play in snow. While doing so, guests are exposed to the ski area and watching people having a great time skiing. Many resorts have also used tubing for school group opportunities.

With limited infrastructure, some small ski areas (such as Tawatinaw) offer tubing on a 'walk up' area – therefore no need to add a conveyor or handle tow. Designating a specific tobogganing and sledding zone (as well as designed times) is also an option at some ski areas. CWSAA has a **tubing best practices guide** (download from the CWSAA Member's only website: [cwsaa.org/login/](https://cwsaa.org/login/)) that can help ski areas understand the setup and operation of a tube park.

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*“Our tubing area is pretty successful at attracting new Canadians. Tubing is also good to get younger kids out to the facility before they are old enough to come for a ski visit.”*

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**Food service** and **sightseeing** are additional winter (and even year-round) services that can be implemented at a ski area. Food service is also a great revenue opportunity for non-skiing visitors (e.g. parents to watch their children ski) as well as an important social component for après.

Considerations for expanding winter operations should be made for additional **staff and equipment required**. For instance adding snowshoeing, fat biking, or cross country skiing does not require lift access, however, these activities still require trail building, maintenance, grooming, patrol and likely equipment storage. It is important to review the legal and insurance implications of expanded operations – tickets and signage are important steps to reduce the ski areas liability for these activities.

## Summer

There are two streams of summer expansion opportunities. Activities that work within existing infrastructure and resources, and new attractions that require capital investment.

1. **Opportunities where there is little staff impact and capital investment** are one's that utilize existing facilities. Summer rentals of existing facilities is a common example – such as day lodge rentals, adventure races etc. It must be determined if the facility is properly equipped before advertising facility rentals, especially catering (proper kitchen design and building layout for catering, the purchase of additional kitchen equipment, fire suppression systems, tables, chairs, linens, dishware etc). If equipped, this is a great market for events like weddings, family reunions, camp outs (e.g. scout groups), corporate retreats etc.

If the objective is to rent to generate revenue (not just provide a community service), the full costs of rental must be captured, such as: cleaning, utilities (and impact on seasonal loads), increased insurance rates for renting to third parties, maintenance, staff for booking and supervision of groups etc.

2. **Summer attractions that require capital investment** may include mountain biking, adventure products, camping etc. Any major capital investment and business diversification should be thoroughly researched and included in your business plan and master plan (see Business Plan section, page 17). With most infrastructure expansions, there is considerable time required to plan, build and execute as well as a need to hire new staff and develop management expertise.

Summer attractions can provide new year-round employment opportunities to key staff and management, as well as personnel development opportunities in running a new attraction. Depending on the community and type of attraction, new offerings may appeal to new users, while others may further engage existing customers.

Consideration should also be made for capital investments that provide diversification beyond winter season, as well as support the winter operations. This may include new or expanded day lodge or food and beverage facilities. For Nitehawk, they were able to install lighting that is used for night-skiing in the winter which doubles as RV park lights in the summer. Due to the seasonal load tariffs, most ski areas pay for power in the summer that they do not use however, at Nitehawk they have created a 120 pad RV park with sites throughout the resort and each pad is serviced by power that is already paid for.

While **bike parks** have not yet become common in Alberta, lift accessed mountain biking is being added as a summer activity at several resorts across Western Canada. CWSAA now offers an annual Bike Park Forum to advance the bike park industry at ski areas.



**Marketing** is critical for a new facility or attraction. You cannot just build it, and expect people to come. Many summer activities attract a different audience than winter. There are also regional tourism opportunities to speak with your Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) about, who may be able to support your marketing efforts. *See more in the marketing section.*

One successful example of the development of summer diversification is Revelstoke Mountain Resort. The initial summer attraction was a mountain coaster. The coaster was so popular (videos went viral) and with limited capacity the ski area had to quickly add measures to control and entertain the waiting guests. Euro bungee trampolines were added, in addition to a system to designate time slots for the coaster. The mountain coaster was the beginning of Revelstoke Mountain Resort being recognized as a summer destination. The resort has quickly moved to capture the demand and has now expanded its summer operations with an aerial park, axe throwing and mountain biking.

**Resources for exploring opportunities for diversification include:**

- CWSAA Spring Conference (April)
- NSAA National Convention (May)
- NSAA Downhill Bike Park Summit (June)
- CWSAA Fall Meetings & Bike Park Forum (September / October)
- AEDARSA: [www.aedarsa.com](http://www.aedarsa.com)
- Adventure Park Insider Magazine: [adventureparkinsider.com](http://adventureparkinsider.com)
- Alberta Recreation and Parks Association: [arpaonline.ca](http://arpaonline.ca)
- Association for Challenge Course Technology (they have an annual conference in February): [www.acctinfo.org](http://www.acctinfo.org)

**Examples of programming and facility diversification:**

<b>Products, Programming and Events</b>	<b>Ski Area Examples</b>
Music festivals / concerts	Timber Ridge, Kinosoo, Sunshine, Lake Louise, Sun Peaks
Wine, beer, cider craft tasting events	Lake Louise Brewski Festival Big White Cider Fest
Weddings	Canyon, Timber Ridge, Norquay
Summer kids day camps	Nitehawk, Snow Valley, Winsport, Mt Seymour
Local nature related events	e.g. Castle Mountain's huckleberry festival
Camping / RV park	Nitehawk, Snow Valley
Connecting to a snowmobile route as a destination for snowmobilers capturing food and beverage revenue from this audience	Mt Timothy
Lodge rental	Spring Lake (hunting groups) Mt Joy (community groups) Ski Salmo (rents its commercial chalet kitchen to a group for canning season)
Summer Slip N Slide event	Optimist Snow Park
Summer tubing	Nitehawk, SilverStar
Trail running clubs & races	Nitehawk, Mt Joy
Yoga retreats	Timber Ridge
Golf including disc golf (for summer or winter), mini golf, golf courses	Vista Ridge, Sun Peaks, Mt Baldy (winter Disc Golf)
Aerial Adventure Park	Snow Valley, Vista Ridge, Revelstoke
Via Ferrata	Mt Norquay, Kicking Horse
Mountain Biking (lift accessed)	Nitehawk, SilverStar, Panorama (and many more)
Ice skating	Vista Ridge, WinSport, Apex Mountain
Zipline	WinSport, Mt Washington

## Skier Development programs

Recommendations from many of the industry experts who contributed to this report see great potential for growth in school programs, especially since the population of school-aged children 5-17 years old in Alberta is projected to increase by 2% annually between 2018 and 2025. This creates an opportunity to grow school ski programs and youth programs to secure future participants in the sport of skiing and snowboarding. They also grow potential for off-season use of facilities for youth programming such as summer camps, mountain biking, adventure parks and outdoor education.

A key to the school market is to create programs that offer more than a “day off school” to go skiing and snowboarding. When an **educational approach** is used to enhance the experience there is a better chance that more school boards, principals and teachers will embrace the opportunity. Annual presentations to these important groups outlining the educational experience will generate more engaged participation. Creating learning outlines for teachers on topics that fit their curriculum, beyond skiing and snowboarding, makes the day more interesting for the kids and aligns with educational goals.

**Ever Active Schools** is an Alberta provincial initiative designed to create and support healthy school communities. The program focuses on a comprehensive school health approach, which addresses health and education goals to improve the social outcomes of children and youth in Alberta. Through partnerships and competency-based learning, Ever Active Schools spearheads meaningful collaboration between the health, education, recreation and active living sectors. One such program is the **Ski, Skate, Slide** program which encourages winter physical education in alternative environments. Schools can obtain the Ski, Skate, Slide toolkit to help introduce skiing activities to their classes during ski area outings. [everactive.org](http://everactive.org)

**School programs** that incorporate learning opportunities over **multiple occasions** encourage the development of skills for new skiers and snowboarders to gain the confidence to return on their own and join their friends in a sport that lasts a lifetime. One ski area noted they combine multiple activities to provide a full-day of activity – such as morning skiing or snowboarding and afternoon snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. This helps when the ski area has limited supply of each equipment type, as well as provides a multi-faceted experience for the children.

The **CWSAA School program webpage** has a variety of videos and activities that will help when discussing the opportunity for a school trip with your local school officials.

### School Ski Trip Resources

[cwsaa.org/links/school](http://cwsaa.org/links/school)

Many ski areas have also found that bringing some snowsports education opportunities to the school, creates an opportunity to build relationships with the schools.

<b>Ideas to engage schools in snowsports within the classroom:</b>
Classroom visits for pre fitting equipment, video sessions on safety, Alpine Responsibility Code, lift safety etc.
Discussions on careers in the ski industry, for older students.
Science lessons related to snowsports – e.g. physics of skiing & snowboarding, science of tubing, climate and weather etc.
Snow related in-classroom education is available from <b>AdventureSmart</b> , for winter survival and safety. <a href="http://www.adventuresmart.ca/kids/ssep.htm">www.adventuresmart.ca/kids/ssep.htm</a>
Physical education gymnasium sessions on snowboarding for primary aged children is available through the <b>Little Riders</b> program offered through many of the provincial snowboard associations and the Canadian Ski Council. <a href="http://skicanada.org/little-riders">skicanada.org/little-riders</a>

The **Manitoba School Boards Association**, developed a comprehensive “Planning Ski and Snowboarding Education Programs” Guide. The guide was developed for schools to help plan and implement a ski/snowboarding event that actively encourages the safe participation of students of all levels of ability and experience, while minimizing the risks inherent in these winter sports activities. This guide is a good resource:

[mbschoolboards.ca/documents/services/riskManagement/studentSafety/SkiManual2015.pdf](http://mbschoolboards.ca/documents/services/riskManagement/studentSafety/SkiManual2015.pdf)

**Competitive programs** offered by alpine racing, freestyle and nordic clubs create opportunities for more challenging pursuits at even the smallest of ski areas. **Programming for kids, adults and seniors** throughout the season contributes to repeat visits which adds to the family atmosphere and ultimately the regular skiers and snowboarders become active as volunteers that support the operations of the ski area.

### **Best Practices for Packaging and Programs**

Innovative programming is always evolving as trends in skiing and snowboarding change along with the demographics of the marketplace. Each ski area must assess the market it serves to develop **programming that encourages repeat business** of their existing customer base as well as to **encourage new participants**.

There are a number of ‘turnkey’ **national initiatives** offering introductory skiing and snowboarding programs, open for any ski area in Canada to participate in. The Canadian Ski Council provides national advertising for these initiatives which are geared towards new skiers and snowboarders:

- **Grade 4/5 SnowPass** – This pass program offers children an opportunity to try skiing and snowboarding at ski areas across the country. While the pass does not provide revenue

back to the ski area, national surveys show that nearly 40% of all SnowPass holders choose to take lessons; the average SnowPass family spends between \$75 and \$300 on every visit; and 60% of families say they are hitting the slopes more thanks to the SnowPass. 80% of SnowPass holders were introduced to snow sports through family and the SnowPass helped introduce 15% of new family members to snow sports (2019 CSC SnowPass national survey).  
[skicanada.org/grade-4-5-snowpass](http://skicanada.org/grade-4-5-snowpass)

- **Never Ever Days** – Packages a lesson, lift ticket and equipment rentals for first-time skiers and snowboarders. This national package is promoted by the Canadian Ski Council and package revenue is returned to ski areas. Ski areas also provide ‘come-back offers’ to participants to ensure they return for more lessons and visits to encourage progression.  
[skicanada.org/never-ever-days](http://skicanada.org/never-ever-days)

**New Canadians** are an example of a very large potential new market (21% of the Alberta population and growing) for snowsports. In order to attract this new and growing market several ski areas have partnered with local immigrant groups to offer special programs and events for newcomers to try skiing and snowboarding.

- Pass Powderkeg partnered with a private foundation which funds programs such as the “Welcome to Winter Program” for new Canadians.  
[passpowderkeg.com/2019/01/10/welcome-to-winter-program](http://passpowderkeg.com/2019/01/10/welcome-to-winter-program)
- Winsport partners with the Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association and the Centre for Newcomers to offer a Newcomers program to 200 new Canadians of all ages with skiing, snowboarding and skating lessons.
- Table Mountain has held an International Day for the last few years. They partner with an Immigrant Association in the city and bring members offering heavily discounted lessons and provide rentals and passes at no charge to introduce the sport and destination.

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*“The entry level package deals and ‘discount’ nights attract a different clientele than the regular ski and board community. It is very important that when you have a promotion that attracts new people that adequate resources are put to helping them on snow and in the rental shop. Providing an **incentive to come back** again will also help build this group into regular customers rather than a one-off skier visit.”*

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Below are several examples of innovative programming ideas that have worked for ski areas in Western Canada:

- Nitehawk Year-Round Adventure Park, participates in Grande Prairie's Winter Try-It Day which is a one-day event providing free passes (and rentals) for those that sign up, funded by a sponsor: [gpsportconnect.ca/events/try-it-day](https://gpsportconnect.ca/events/try-it-day)
- Pass Powderkeg offers a four lesson series that has an added value of a free season pass. [passpowderkeg.com/home/learn-to-turn](https://passpowderkeg.com/home/learn-to-turn)
- Mount Washington Discover Days – On specific mid-week days Mount Washington offers a free 2-hour group lesson, learning area lift ticket and equipment rental package to any first-timer over 12 years old (pre-registration required). [mountwashington.ca/activities-groups/events/event/402-learn-to-alpine-ski-or-snowboard-free](https://mountwashington.ca/activities-groups/events/event/402-learn-to-alpine-ski-or-snowboard-free)
- A few ski areas offer a free Bunny Hill to encourage trial. Note, with free access, it is still important to issue a complimentary lift pass (and have the guest sign a waiver).
- Edmonton ski areas each have a promotional night to stimulate the market. Many of them have a sponsor to offset the costs (e.g.: \$8 ticket, \$8 rental).
- Successful school programs may offer a comeback offer that encourages the family to come with the student after they have finished the school program.

## Funding Sources & Grants

There are many different funding opportunities that ski areas can explore for capital projects, equipment and operating funds. In some cases, community ski area projects may qualify for **multiple grants and rebates**.

**CWSAA Small Areas Assistance Program** provides funding for small ski areas to attend industry conferences and educational opportunities. CWSAA and its members have utilized various fund-raising efforts to create a pool of funds to provide financial support to Small Ski Areas.

### CWSAA Small Areas Assistance Program

[cwsaa.org/policy/small-areas-assistance](https://cwsaa.org/policy/small-areas-assistance)

Creativity is key for **corporate owned ski areas**. These ski areas may qualify for funding programs that include student summer work grants, workforce retraining initiatives and grants and rebates for energy conservation to mention a few. Additionally **partnering with the not-for-profit organizations** who are users of their ski areas may allow access to funding that will benefit the overall operation. The not-for-profit ski and snowboard racing clubs, freestyle clubs, adaptive programs and ski patrol all may apply for funding to purchase equipment, construct or improve facilities on site, offer programming, slope improvements for competitions (i.e. Provincial and National events) to name a few initiatives that could benefit the overall ski area.

**Suppliers to the ski industry** including ski lift manufacturers, ski lift installation companies, grooming machine manufacturers and snowmaking suppliers all have offered **support with quotes on purchase and installation** in advance of grant applications. Working with these suppliers can be valuable beyond price quote information as many have worked across Canada, the USA and internationally and have been involved with ski areas that have utilized **innovative funding programs** to complete projects.

There are examples of ski areas where the owners/shareholders have opted to **forgive their shares** in order to **create a not-for-profit society to operate the ski area** and ensure the continued operation. The new not-for-profit entity **now qualifies for funding grants**. My Mountain Co-op, which operates Shames Mountain in Terrace BC, have been successful in attracting corporate sponsorship donations, provincial grants, lottery funds and fund raising through “Go Fund Me” (i.e. new snow cat), since becoming a not-for-profit.

**Corporate owned ski areas** as well as the **County/Municipal** and **not-for-profit** ski areas **may all apply for grants and rebates** on equipment and electrical improvements that increase **energy efficiency** and reduce operational expenses long term. *See section on energy.*

Ski areas must embrace the opportunity to attend **grant writing workshops** and to work with local Community Futures business advisors, Chambers of Commerce and attend Provincial Tourism workshops. Some ski areas have noted they **hire a consultant to write their grant applications** (which is permitted in some cases). The completion of a Business Plan will create much of the detail required in most grant applications, reducing the amount of time required to assemble information for each application.

Note, continued **reliance on grants as a core mechanism for funding can prove to be risky** as downturns in the economy may cause Government funders to revisit their spending priorities and corporations who provide funding for community support programs may be reduced or eliminated.

### Grants Listing

*See current list of grant programs, in this google doc:*

[docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ViIJnx\\_d2JMchEKYII07OSulcExJlp\\_3OCpeGu3Dbw/edit#gid=135068196](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ViIJnx_d2JMchEKYII07OSulcExJlp_3OCpeGu3Dbw/edit#gid=135068196)

Below are some examples of innovative ways ski area have funded their operations:

- **Corporate Sponsorship** is an important form of funding for ski areas of all sizes. Whitecourt's new ski hill is significantly sponsored, with **title venue naming** of Eastlink Park for their partnership with Eastlink cable television and telecommunications company, much of the ski area is sponsored by other corporate partners including **run names, lifts, terrain park etc.**
- Misery Mountain recently ran a fundraising campaign to **name their runs** for a 5-year period. Vista Ridge's long-standing partnership with Syncrude is evident in the naming of their Syncrude Bison chair.
- A few ski areas offer **weeknight special offers** such as the Servus ski nights at Winsport, Nitehawk and Snow Valley, which help attract new participants to the ski hills and is funded by the sponsor.
- Several ski areas sell **advertising** on their properties including signage on chair backs and in the day lodge as well as ski run and terrain park sponsorship.
- In 2019, **Kal Tire** began a partnership with ski areas in Western Canada (through CWSAA) offering a **credit towards vehicle maintenance and tires** (the amount is based on size of operation) in addition to season passholder offers (\$100 off tires).



## Managing Expenses

In order to maintain control of expenses, managers and Board members must work within detailed budgets to ensure funds are available to sustain operations and to identify any shortfalls.

The top five highest operational expense categories identified by the 2019 Alberta Ski Areas survey were:

**Wages, utilities (power, water, natural gas), equipment repairs, insurance and fuel.**

The research identified that **shortfalls in cash flow** are common among small community ski areas who find themselves in the position of continually applying for supplemental funding. Additionally very few small community ski areas have the capacity to undertake capital projects without the aid of external funding; however there are few who generate the cash reserves annually to fund these capital projects and equipment replacement.

However, an industry Best Practice (when appropriate) is to set up a capital replacement reserve to plan for aging equipment and infrastructure major repairs and replacement.

In order to manage expenses it is helpful to maintain continuity of management to ensure a **close understanding of budgets and to build and sustain relationships with funding agencies, Banks/Credit Unions, suppliers and other ski areas through the CWSAA.** This management commitment involves attention year-round. Cost savings ideas and revenue generating ideas from community members, Board and staff are paramount in keeping costs minimized and revenue maximized.

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*“Being on top of what is going on both in a macro and micro way is the only way to keep a small ski area in business.”*

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Contributors to this report have identified cost savings initiatives that may assist in keeping expenses manageable such as:

- Cross training staff to work in different job functions throughout the day to reduce numbers of overall staff (rental shop, snow school, food services, lift operations, grooming snowmaking etc.).
- Sharing technical resources with other ski areas for maintenance of lifts and snow grooming equipment.

- Sourcing used rental equipment and staff uniforms from larger ski areas that are replacing.
- Vehicle leasing versus owning – opportunities for rebates upon vehicle return.
- Collaborating with ski areas and other seasonal load users to lobby the Alberta Utilities Commission for consideration of contract hydro rates.
- Review supplier contracts (such as garbage removal and food/beverage), getting additional quotes and requesting discounts based on volume.
- Document strong risk management policies and low claim history for favourable insurance renewals.
- Collaboration on group buying opportunities with other local businesses or ski areas. For example: the National Golf Course Owners Assoc. Golfmax Purchasing program provides preferred pricing on many consumable products and purchasing/leasing programs for equipment [www.ngcoa.ca/benefits/98/saving-you-money-within-your-golf-operation](http://www.ngcoa.ca/benefits/98/saving-you-money-within-your-golf-operation)

## Technology

All ski areas have technology needs, and for some regions internet and cellular signals is limited and thus a challenge. Most ski areas will have basic business office functions, POS systems and merchant/payment systems that will require computer systems and internet access.

**Point of sale systems** can vary in their level of sophistication, but most ski areas will need a system to support the redemption and control of various pass products – such as Grade 4/5 SnowPass, Groupons, Liftopia and other third party products. POS systems will also enable ski areas to gather better sales and usage data. These systems many require a small investment, but don't have to be cost prohibitive. Rabbit Hill purchases refurbished computers for their systems, and has a licensing agreement that only has the software modules required on specific terminals, to limit their annual costs.

**Payment processing** may be required in a number of your business areas from ticket window, food & beverage to rentals. Keep in mind that the ski area absorbs the credit card fees, whereas Debit/Interac fees are extremely nominal. To ensure payments can be accepted during internet outages, its' helpful to have a **backup system**. A separate phone line (not your main customer service line) that can be used on critical merchant terminals, will ensure payments can be processed during internet outages. Manual credit card machines are also recommended in the event of power outages.

Many ski areas lease or own **ATMs**. A leased machine would be serviced by the provider and fees would be collected by the provider, however, there would be no cost/risk to the ski area to

acquire the machine. By purchasing a machine, the ski area sets the customer use fee and retains it. Therefore the ATM can be a source of revenue for the ski area, while reducing some of the credit card transactions. ATMs can also be connected to a backup power supply – if the resort loses power, customers can still withdraw cash for purchases!

Ski areas that have regular issues with internet connectivity would also benefit from a backup satellite system. These can be an inexpensive service that automatically activates when the internet goes down, to allow computer systems to continue to stay online (albeit slower).

## Energy and Water

Ski Areas, especially those operating snow making systems, use a **substantial amount of energy for a few months** in the late fall and early winter. The highest energy use may occur for a two to six week period of pre and early season snowmaking. Therefore securing a contract rate plan that meets seasonal usage requirements rather than an annual peak rate may create important cost savings.

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*“Timing of snowmaking start up to lessen peak draw. Some ski areas in Ontario have negotiated **mid-month billing dates** to allow snowmaking to begin in mid-November or mid-December to work with temperatures suitable for snowmaking that allow for earlier season opening without paying peak demand rates for a full month while only using power at peak for half of the month.”*

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The recent survey results identified seven different hydro suppliers in Alberta supplying hydro to the nineteen ski areas who responded to the survey. Only **five of the ski areas have contract rate plans for seasonal use**, one with ENMAX and four with ATCO. One ski area noted they are currently being monitored by their supplier for consideration. CWSAA has an Alberta Energy working group made up of ski area representatives from Alberta who have been working over the past ten years to **negotiate seasonal load energy rates**. There has been some success for Fortis customers as well as those listed above. The Committee, working with a consultant, expects to have an appeal presented to the Alberta Utilities Commission in May of 2020.

Reducing the off-season peaks of high electrical draws has also been a strategy some ski areas have initiated:

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*“Avoid using electrical motors on lifts and snowmaking during summer maintenance to avoid unnecessary off season peaks. The use of auxiliary drives on chairlifts eliminates electrical load spikes. Also snowmaking air compressors that need to be started in the off-season should be done one at a time again to avoid an unnecessary peak”.*

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### **Reducing Energy costs**

There are many strategies that ski areas have used to reduce energy costs. Energy reduction programs are often eligible for grants and rebates, even for privately owned ski areas. Some of these strategies include:

- **Metering buildings** or using a **portable meter/data logger** to gauge actual power use everywhere. This will **identify high use facilities and equipment** that may benefit from upgrades.
- **Cancel all energy accounts** at the end of a season when the property and energy is not in use. The energy provider will still charge a “delivery fee” to the transformer associated with the property even if no electricity is consumed and even when the power is turned off on the property. One ski area discovered the hard way and received a \$5,000 delivery bill over the summer period when no energy was used. Cancelling the account is the best method to ensure no fees are charged.
- **Renovations, or upgrades** with less than five years ROI, are easily funded through grants for upgrading insulation, LED lighting, alternate heating options, replacing old doors and windows and more efficient kitchen equipment.
- Improved **LED lights** provides increased illumination and lifespan of lights which in turn reduces labour and equipment cost to replace bulbs. This is especially efficient for outdoor lights (parking lots, tower lights, night skiing etc.) where replacement of lights often requires specialty equipment to access.
- Upgrading **from air/water snowmaking guns to fan guns** has significantly reduced power consumption for ski areas. Ski areas have also found it has improved the quantity and quality of snow.
- Smaller ski areas may want to consider **using diesel or natural gas generators (which can be rented)** to run pumps, compressors and fan guns for snowmaking, which may be less

expensive than upgrading electrical utilities to facilitate snowmaking. Mt Joy uses a natural gas generator to provide power for snowmaking. The generator at the top of the hill provides greater coverage **without upgrading the hydro infrastructure.**

### **Water Supply**

Access to sufficient water supply for both domestic drinking/potable water as well as **large volumes of water for snowmaking** is an issue for some ski areas. Pumping capacities are also **limited by water licenses** from Provincial and National regulators.

**Municipal water** is normally delivered **above optimal snowmaking water temperatures** and may **require cooling** through pumping into a holding/cooling pond or cooled mechanically. Cooler water delivers **more efficient snowmaking** output by lowering the amount of water that escapes into the atmosphere through evaporation (steam). Additionally a de-chlorinator may be needed for city water as it takes less energy to make snow with unchlorinated water.

Creating a **man-made reservoir** large enough for an entire season of snowmaking may be cost prohibitive for some. However reservoirs **provide benefits including access to high volume water supply** during peak water demands, **reducing siltation** (which causes pump damage and discoloured snow) and **cooling water**. In all cases there must be a recovery source such as a creek, well or river from which water naturally drains or is pumped to backfill the reservoir during shutdown periods.

**Snow inducing additive** (e.g. Snowmax) is added to snowmaking water at five of the Alberta ski areas (who responded to the survey) **to increase snow production efficiency** which in turn reduces water and energy use.

Ski areas must also be conscious of the **potable (drinking) water supply**. Some ski areas do not have access to enough (or any) drinking water. In these cases, **trucking in water** may be required. This is costly, and may create risks such as road access for delivery trucks during poor road conditions and ensuring enough water on-site during peak draw times. Therefore proper monitoring systems and conservation methods are critical. For example, Rabbit Hill trucks in its drinking water and has a scheduled delivery twice a week regardless of whether they need it or not. They've also sourced a backup delivery company for emergency supply.

## Marketing

While larger ski areas have people (and in some cases departments) that focus on marketing, for most community ski areas, marketing is a small part of an administrator's or even a volunteer's role. There are a number of co-op marketing programs and national initiatives available to ski areas to ease the time and cost of taking on marketing initiatives alone:

- **Go Ski Alberta** is a co-operative marketing partnership with all ski areas in Alberta. In the past Travel Alberta has matched the ski areas investments (for 2019/20 Travel Alberta suspended its program and new funding partners are currently being investigated). Ski areas contribute to the program based on their size, and no investment (as of 2019) is required for ski areas under 10,000 annual skier visits. The digital marketing program focuses on growing the sport and reducing the barriers.
- **Co-operative marketing opportunities** – many Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) or other regional consortiums offer co-operative marketing opportunities to promote activities, events, a specific period of time or the region in general. Be sure to develop relationships with your DMO and seek opportunities to participate in joint marketing initiatives that fit your objectives.
- **National initiatives such as Never Ever Days and Grade 4/5 SnowPass** offer national marketing support. These programs are marketed nationally, as well as marketing materials are available for ski areas to do supplementary advertising. *See more about these programs in the Skier Development Programs section.*

There are also several marketing and media tactics that ski areas should consider to help promote their ski area and the recreation opportunities for low (or no cost):

- **Media relationships** – Building relationships with your local media can provide great media coverage for your ski area. With good relationships you will have better control over the message (e.g. in the case of poor weather, they would hopefully come to you to determine positive messaging, rather than a fully negative news story). They will also be more likely to share great news from your ski area (e.g. events, announcements, snowfall, opening updates etc.), and organic chatter (e.g. radio hosts discussing what a great weekend they had skiing). Consider seeking out media personalities who would be a good fit to invite as guests to the ski area for complimentary skiing and/or an introductory lesson.
- **Social Media** - Ensure someone on your team is proficient in social media and is responsible for regularly posting. Be sure to regularly post photos, videos, provide tips, upcoming event updates and information about your ski area. Nitehawk's Facebook page is an excellent

example of valuable and relevant content, including their use of live videos for conditions and event updates.

- **Drone use** – Several areas have found that using drone footage to showcase their ski area has grown their social media following, as well as brought many new visitors to the ski area. It is important to investigate local and federal laws regarding drone use in your area. For more information see Transport Canada: [www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/aviation/drone-safety/where-fly-drone.html](http://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/aviation/drone-safety/where-fly-drone.html)

Some other examples of what industry has done to market to new participants:

- Discounted special evenings with a community partner. The partner ‘sponsors’ the event, providing funding but also promotion for the ski area ( i.e. Food Bank Fridays sponsored by Servus Credit Union)
- Promotions in malls and ski and snowboard shows/swaps – Some venues will not allow sales to occur, however there are creative ways to create awareness. Rabbit Hill worked with Alberta snowboarding to set up a Burton Riglet demo in a local mall to give young patrons a first-hand opportunity to engage in snowboarding. They brought instructors and did a demo, and it created a great opportunity to get kids to give the sport a try in a comfortable environment.
- Partnerships with the social clubs of major businesses/employers. At Vista Ridge, the Syncrude and Suncor social clubs subsidize season passes for their members at Vista Ridge. This promotes use of the ski area and facility to working families in Fort McMurray.
- Library Pass Program - Pass Powderkeg puts 12 family passes into the local Chinook Arch library system. People can sign out and use the pass for free access to the ski area. The users almost always purchase rentals and it promotes Pass Powderkeg to new ski families.

For ski areas with the capacity to undertake more sophisticated marketing initiatives, knowing your existing and potential customers is critical to effective marketing. One such method is segmentation, which uses common criteria such as demographics, geography, interests, social values and behaviours to categorize individuals. There are a number of free resources available to help you understand your audience:

- **Explorer Quotient (EQ)** is a Destination Canada segmentation system that categorizes travellers based on demographics, origins, behaviours, motivations and their travel and social values. EQ is based on the Environics segmentation platform, but has created specific

Explorer types for the traveller segment. Find out more: [industry.travelalberta.com/visitor-market-insight/visitor-insights/albertas-best-customer](https://industry.travelalberta.com/visitor-market-insight/visitor-insights/albertas-best-customer)

- **Prizm:** Alberta’s Economic Development, Trade & Tourism (EDTT) research department subscribes to the Environics segmentation platform, and uses Environics traditional Prizm segments to analysis customer information. Alberta ski areas can have their customer information segmented through EDTT. By providing all your customer postal codes, a report can be generated of your top segments, travel distances, demographic highlights, media habits and more. Contact CWSAA for more information if interested.  
[www.alberta.ca/tourism-industry-market-information.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/tourism-industry-market-information.aspx)
- The Canadian Ski Council has created their own skier segmentation ‘**Snow ID**’. Each season, ski areas have the opportunity to participate in the National Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Participating ski areas host a kiosk at their ski area, and encourage guests to complete the national survey. Those ski areas can access their quality score information throughout the season, as well as receive an annual segmentation report (Snow ID) for their ski area (given enough data is collected). Ski areas can also access the annual national consumer segmentation and satisfaction report – visit the CWSAA Member’s only section of our website for this report.

## Stewardship

### Climate Change/Weather

Weather is always a leading topic of interest for ski areas. As weather systems continue to shift, ski areas remain committed to their responsibility to land stewardship, and are taking increasing strides to reduce their footprints and complement operations with the land. Through new technology, amended techniques, and greater understanding of the environment, CWSAA members are advancing best practices.

#### **CWSAA Stewardship Position Statement**

and articles about how ski areas are fostering their commitments:

[cwsaa.org/policy/climate-change](https://cwsaa.org/policy/climate-change)

**Summer slope modifications** such as grading, removing stumps, logs and rocks, and grass and brush cutting create slopes that require less snow coverage for skiing and snowboarding. Small ski areas may be able to receive **grants to hire summer students** for this type of work.



**Volunteers** and **local government** may be willing to lend equipment such as mowers, brush cutters and excavators for these projects. Some ski areas even use animals such as sheep and goats to graze down the ski slopes.

It is important to ensure proper **re-vegetation** of ground cover and **drainage controls** are put in place after slope modification to **prevent slope erosion** during regular runoff and storm events.

**Snowmaking has proven to be critical** to sustain operations including ski areas of all sizes and locations across Canada who have previously operated without it. *Snowmaking is covered in detail in the Energy & Water section of this report.*

The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), the ski association for the USA, has a robust **Sustainable Slopes** program. Check out their webpage for current resources, as well as their annual report to read practices that participating ski areas have undertaken.  
[nsaa.org/environment/sustainable-slopes](https://nsaa.org/environment/sustainable-slopes)

### **Wildfire Prevention**

Given that many ski areas are surrounded by forest and are often in remote areas, the potential for **dryer forests** and the danger of wildfires is significant. Grants may be available for the creation of **fire breaks** around ski area sites as well as brushing projects for the **removal of forest fuels** in the undergrowth that may accelerate a wildfire. A proper **wildfire assessment** and a program of forest management are important considerations for any ski area.

For more information and programs for wildfire prevention:

- Alberta Wildfire: [wildfire.alberta.ca](https://wildfire.alberta.ca)
- Wildfire Prevention, BC: [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention)

### **Flooding**

**Storms and spring runoff** cause high stream and river levels which could cause **damage to land, buildings and equipment**. For those in river valley's it is critical to have an open communication line with those that control dams etc., to be aware of any upcoming expected changes to river levels in order to prepare for flooding (sand bagging, moving equipment, removing electrical boxes etc.).

The Alberta and BC governments have excellent resources for programs and hazard management information:

- [www.alberta.ca/flood-mitigation.aspx](https://www.alberta.ca/flood-mitigation.aspx)
- [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/drought-flooding-dikes-dams/integrated-flood-hazard-management](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/drought-flooding-dikes-dams/integrated-flood-hazard-management)

### Land use/tenure

Land tenure is as critical as snow to the ski industry. Competing interests and increasing social license require ski areas to ensure strong relationships with landlords and related authorities. Dealing with **competing interests** or interest groups needs to be evaluated and **relationships formed** to help develop situations where benefits for all can be realized.

Ski area lease tenures in Alberta range from private holdings to provincial and national park boundaries and range from as little as three years to as long as 99 years. The intricacies of each of these arrangements are not presented in this report, however there are several themes that can be captured:

- Seek long term agreements. Investments, grants, etc are often contingent on conveying long term agreements.
- Seek opportunities in the land use agreements for diversification in land use. Agreements may restrict the operations to winter only or limit to a specific activity.

Starting November 1, 2019, the Alberta Government extended the opportunity for tourism and commercial recreation operators to access longer leases on public land in Alberta to a maximum of up to 60 years. [www.alberta.ca/tourism-and-commercial-recreation-lease.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/tourism-and-commercial-recreation-lease.aspx)

### Pricing Strategies

Lift ticket and season pass pricing is a complex matter. There are many factors and implications of pricing that can impact participation and perception of skiing and snowboarding. While ski areas have 'ticket window' pricing, there are many additional offers that guests may receive – and in many cases the ticket window prices are not what the majority of guests now pay.

*A robust study involving pricing strategy has been initiated at the national level (as of January 2020) through the Canadian Ski Council, and therefore this report will not address any specific best practices or recommendations related to ticket and pass pricing.*

Some observations in pass and ticket pricing include the age brackets related to seniors and tot tickets and passes. Many community ski areas offer a **relatively low age for seniors' discounts** (day and season passes) **at age 55 and 60**. Larger operations generally begin senior's rates at 65, which may be a more appropriate age for smaller ski areas to consider when offering age discounts. However, this may be balanced by the opportunity to have parents and grandparents accompany the rest of the family at the ski hill.

Again there is little consistency for **tot's** passes at community ski areas – both in terms of age and price. The destination and larger resorts offer a free lift tickets for those under 6. Encouraging participating at a young age and reducing the cost of trial for young children will **enable more families to participate**, and create lifelong ski families. For tots, ski areas must take into consideration that a full paying adult will be accompanying the child on the bunny hill, and the actual time spent skiing is extremely low for young children. To ease this, some areas offer **parent pass programs** – such as a shared a parents season's pass (e.g. Lake Louise, Mount Baldy) – so that one parent skis while the other looks after the children.

### Pricing of other Ski Area Products & Services

The average margin on **Ski School** is 40% after labour and other direct costs (Financial Analysis of Canadian Ski Areas, 2018-19). For the pricing of private lessons, group programs and school group programs managers may use labour cost plus a 10-20% profit as a base to calculate prices. **Rental equipment** prices may be calculated using a 3-5 year return on investment which includes a continuous replacement cycle.

**Food and beverage** pricing should be done with the **understanding of cost of food, labour, overhead** etc. and not gut feel or comparative pricing. There is value to having someone with knowledge of food and beverage operations assist with pricing. Community Colleges with Hospitality programs may be a source for assistance. According to the Financial Analysis of Canadian Ski Areas (Ecosign 2018-19), winter Food and Bar Service has an average Cost of Goods Sold of 33%, Labour cost of 30%, plus misc cost which provide for a total average of 25% margin on F&B sales.

Pricing for **off-season facility rentals** must include **consideration for additional expenses** that are not part of the regular winter business operations (additional insurance costs, liquor license costs, custodial and maintenance costs, staff for booking and supervision of groups).

**Festivals, mountain bike races, adventure races and concerts** have all been noted as revenue sources in the survey. Each **event must be evaluated** and expenses including labour, equipment use/fuel, additional insurance etc. all must be considered to determine a reasonable site/facility rental cost. Additionally the ski area must determine how the event will **benefit the ski area** including **promotional value and a positive rate of return/profit**.

## Advocacy: Best Practices for Working with Government and Ski Industry Associations

Most small ski areas **rely on support** from Regional, Provincial and Federal governments for everything from funding to land and water use permits. Having an ongoing relationship with these entities at the local level may be attainable, however, small ski areas must work together with others in the ski industry for assistance in having their voice heard at the Provincial and National level.

This type of support is one of the primary mandates for organizations such as the Canada West Ski Areas Association (and other provincial/regional ski associations). These organizations bring ski areas together **to form a greater voice** to be heard in support of skiing and snowboarding. The sharing of ideas, resources and the relationships formed create mutual support among the membership which comes together for the good of the industry.

As governments change, whether it be provincial, federal, municipal or regional, it is critical to **build relationships with the government proactively.**

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*“Our relationship with Local Government needs improvement. We had a great relationship with the former provincial government. Now we must work on building a relationship with the new provincial government.”*

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Government funded ski areas should **formalize a written agreement** with the funding County, Municipality or Province **defining the annual contribution** towards operational and capital expenses, as well as roles it pays within the ski area.

Knowing and demonstrating to government where your customers come from may also assist in government relations and potential funding. Many ski areas draw from large geographic areas, and are a key recreational and social facility for municipalities outside of the ski areas district.

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*“We surveyed ticket sales all year and demonstrated guests came from multiple municipal districts which allowed the ski area to receive funding from multiple Districts, not just one.”*

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Chambers of Commerce, local and regional tourism associations (DMOs) as well as other trade and community associations are important relationships to foster. These organizations may have funding and training opportunities that ski areas may take advantage of.

Together with ski areas throughout Western Canada, and organizations of common interest from across the country, CWSAA is constantly advocating for the ski industry. Ski areas are encouraged to attend CWSAA events and seek opportunities to participate in these advocacy efforts.

**END OF DOCUMENT**

**Appendices to follow**

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Alberta Ski Areas

Alberta Ski Hills	Location	Region	Type	Website
Canyon Ski Resort	Red Deer	Central	Community	canyonski.ca
Castle Mountain Resort Inc	Pincher Creek	South	Destination	skicastle.ca
Drayton Valley Brazeau	Drayton Valley	Central	Community	draytonvalleyskihill.com
Eastlink Park	Whitecourt	North Central	Community	eastlinkpark.com
Edmonton Ski Club	Edmonton	Edmonton	Urban	edmontonskiclub.com
Fairview Ski Club	Fairview	North	Community	skifairview.com
Gwynne Valley Ski Area	Wetaskiwin	Central	Community	gwynnevalley.ca
Hidden Valley Ski Resort	Elkwater/ Medicine Hat	South	Community	skihiddenvalley.net
Innisfail Ski Hill	Innisfail	Central	Community	innisfailskihill.com
Kinosoo Ridge Snow Resort	Cold Lake	North Central	Community	kinosoo.ca
Little Smoky Ski Area	Falher	North	Community	littlesmokyski.ca
Long Lake Ski Area	Thorhild	North Central	Community	skilonglake.com
Manning & District Ski Club	Manning	North	Community	facebook.com/ManningSkiHill
Medicine Lodge Ski Area	Bentley	Central	Community	facebook.com/medicinelodgeski
Misery Mountain Ski Area	Peace River	North	Community	miserymountain.com
Misty Ridge Ski Hill	Barrhead	North Central	Community	mistryridge.webs.com
Mount Joy Snow Resort	Lloydminster	Central	Community	mountjoy.ca
Mount Norquay	Banff	Rockies	Destination	banffnorquay.com
Nakiska Ski Area	Kananaskis	Rockies	Destination	skinakiska.com
Nitehawk Recreation Area	Grande Prairie	North	Community	gonitehawk.com
Pass Powderkeg Ski Area	Crowsnest Pass / Blairmore	South	Community	passpowderkeg.com
Rabbit Hill Snow Resort	Leduc County/Edmonton	Edmonton	Urban	rabbithill.com
Silver Summit	Edson	North Central	Community	silversummit.ca
Ski Marmot Basin	Jasper	Rockies	Destination	skimarmot.com
Snow Valley Ski Club	Edmonton	Edmonton	Urban	snowvalley.ca
Spring Lake Winter Resort	Hythe / Beaverlodge	North	Community	facebook.com/Springlake-Ski-Hill-2083406191909698
Sunridge Ski Area	Edmonton	Edmonton	Urban	sunridgeskiarea.com
Sunshine Village	Banff	Rockies	Destination	skibanff.com
Tawatinaw Valley	Westlock	North Central	Community	tawatinawvalley.ca
Lake Louise Ski Resort	Lake Louise	Rockies	Destination	skilouise.com
Valley Ski Club	Alliance	Central	Community	valleyskihill.ca
Vista Ridge All Seasons Park	Fort McMurray	North	Community	vistaridge.ab.ca
Whispering Pines	Worsley	North	Community	www.telusplanet.net
WinSport (Canada Olympic Park)	Calgary	Central	Urban	www.winsportcanada.ca

## Appendix 2: Glossary of Support Services

CWSAA Member's Only website	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/login/">cwsaa.org/login/</a>
NSAA - National Ski Areas Association	<a href="http://www.nsaa.org/">www.nsaa.org/</a>
Canadian Ski Council	<a href="http://www.skicanada.org/">www.skicanada.org/</a>
SAM Magazine – Ski Area Management Magazine	<a href="http://www.saminfo.com/">www.saminfo.com/</a>

### Human Resources / Staffing

Ski industry Retention & Engagement Guide	<a href="http://www.go2hr.ca/resource-library/employee-retention-and-engagement-guide">www.go2hr.ca/resource-library/employee-retention-and-engagement-guide</a>
CWSAA Job Board	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/jobs/post-a-job/">cwsaa.org/jobs/post-a-job/</a>
go2HR Job Board	<a href="http://www.go2hr.ca/jobs">www.go2hr.ca/jobs</a>
Selkirk College SROAM program	<a href="http://selkirk.ca/program/ski">selkirk.ca/program/ski</a>
Lift 150 – Train the trainer	<a href="http://selkirk.ca/program/ski/lift-150-train-trainer">selkirk.ca/program/ski/lift-150-train-trainer</a>
Lift 151, 152, 153 Lift Maintenance Courses	<a href="http://selkirk.ca/program/ski/passenger-ropeway-mechanics">selkirk.ca/program/ski/passenger-ropeway-mechanics</a>
Ski Area Risk Management	<a href="http://selkirk.ca/program/ski/ski-resort-risk-management-online">selkirk.ca/program/ski/ski-resort-risk-management-online</a>

### Risk Mitigation

Ski Safety Signage	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/safety-signage/">cwsaa.org/safety-signage/</a>
Safety & Risk Awareness	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/links/safety-risk-awareness/">cwsaa.org/links/safety-risk-awareness/</a>
Crisis Communications Plan template	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CWSSA-Crisis-Comms-Handout-Tamara-Little-compressed.pdf">cwsaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CWSSA-Crisis-Comms-Handout-Tamara-Little-compressed.pdf</a>

### Infrastructure & Regulation

Z98 Code	<a href="http://store.csagroup.org/ccrz_ProductList?cartID=&amp;operation=quickSearch&amp;searchText=Z98&amp;searchFilter=all&amp;portalUser=&amp;store=&amp;cclcl=en_US">store.csagroup.org/ccrz_ProductList?cartID=&amp;operation=quickSearch&amp;searchText=Z98&amp;searchFilter=all&amp;portalUser=&amp;store=&amp;cclcl=en_US</a>
Alberta Elevating Devices & Amusement Rides Safety Association (AEDARSA)	<a href="http://www.aedarsa.com">www.aedarsa.com</a>
Technical Safety BC	<a href="http://www.technicalafetybc.ca/">www.technicalafetybc.ca/</a>

### Occupational Health & Safety

Employee ski industry safety tools & resources	<a href="http://go2hr.ca/skisafety">go2hr.ca/skisafety</a>
Alberta OHS	<a href="http://alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx">alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx</a>
OHS Safety Code explanation guide	<a href="http://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li001">ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li001</a>
Worker's Compensation Alberta	<a href="http://www.wcb.ab.ca/resources/for-employers">www.wcb.ab.ca/resources/for-employers</a>
WorkSafeBC	<a href="http://www.worksafebc.com">www.worksafebc.com</a>

### Skier Development Programs

CWSAA School program webpage	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/links/school/">cwsaa.org/links/school/</a>
Grade 4/5 SnowPass	<a href="http://skicanada.org/grade-4-5-snowpass">skicanada.org/grade-4-5-snowpass</a>
Never Ever Days	<a href="http://skicanada.org/never-ever-days">skicanada.org/never-ever-days</a>
Ever Active Schools	<a href="http://everactive.org">everactive.org</a>
AdventureSmart	<a href="http://adventuresmart.ca/kids/ssep.htm">adventuresmart.ca/kids/ssep.htm</a>
Little Riders	<a href="http://skicanada.org/little-riders">skicanada.org/little-riders</a>
Manitoba School Boards Association "Planning Ski and Snowboarding Education Programs" Guide	<a href="http://mbschoolboards.ca/documents/services/riskManagement/studentSafety/SkiManual2015.pdf">mbschoolboards.ca/documents/services/riskManagement/studentSafety/SkiManual2015.pdf</a>

### Grants & Funding

Grants Database	<a href="https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ViIjnx_d2JMcheKYII07OSulcExJjlp_3OCpeGu3Dbw/edit#gid=135068196">docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ViIjnx_d2JMcheKYII07OSulcExJjlp_3OCpeGu3Dbw/edit#gid=135068196</a>
CWSAA Small Areas Assistance Program	<a href="http://cwsaa.org/policy/small-areas-assistance">cwsaa.org/policy/small-areas-assistance</a>



### Sustainability & Stewardship

National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), Sustainable Slopes	<a href="https://nsaa.org/environment/sustainable-slopes">nsaa.org/environment/sustainable-slopes</a>
Alberta Wildfire	<a href="https://wildfire.alberta.ca">wildfire.alberta.ca</a>
Wildfire Prevention, BC	<a href="https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention">www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention</a>
Flood Mitigation Alberta	<a href="https://www.alberta.ca/flood-mitigation.aspx">www.alberta.ca/flood-mitigation.aspx</a>
Flood Management, BC	<a href="https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/drought-flooding-dikes-dams/integrated-flood-hazard-management">www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/drought-flooding-dikes-dams/integrated-flood-hazard-management</a>
Alberta Land Tenure	<a href="https://www.alberta.ca/tourism-and-commercial-recreation-lease.aspx">www.alberta.ca/tourism-and-commercial-recreation-lease.aspx</a>
Ontario Snow Resorts Association (OSRA) Environmental best practices	<a href="https://www.skiontario.ca/osra/envbestprac">https://www.skiontario.ca/osra/envbestprac</a>

### Marketing Resources

Population Projections, Alberta and Census Divisions, 2019-2046	<a href="https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/90a09f08-c52c-43bd-b48a-fda5187273b9/resource/2ba84ee4-c953-457c-a8c7-351f6dd68abf/download/2019-2046-alberta-population-projections.pdf">https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/90a09f08-c52c-43bd-b48a-fda5187273b9/resource/2ba84ee4-c953-457c-a8c7-351f6dd68abf/download/2019-2046-alberta-population-projections.pdf</a>
Travel Alberta – Business website	<a href="https://industry.travelalberta.com/">https://industry.travelalberta.com/</a>
Prizm customer segmentation (via Travel Alberta)	<a href="https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-tourism-industry-research.aspx#toc-2">www.alberta.ca/alberta-tourism-industry-research.aspx#toc-2</a>
Destination Canada – industry tools (incl Explorer Quotient)	<a href="https://www.destinationcanada.com/en/tools">www.destinationcanada.com/en/tools</a>
Destination BC – Industry resource site	<a href="https://www.destinationbc.ca/learning-centre/">www.destinationbc.ca/learning-centre/</a>

## Appendix 3: July 2019 Ski Area Survey

### Alberta Ski Area Business Planning Survey

The following survey is being conducted by CWSAA to collect important data on the state of the ski industry in Alberta, and help determine future opportunities, as well as develop a small and community ski area business planning best practices guide.

*CWSAA and its consultant (Bob Falle) will hold your survey responses confidential. Only aggregate information will be shared. Individual responses will NOT be shared with other ski areas or organizations.*

Ski Area Name:

Individual Completing the Survey:

Title:

Email Address:

Phone Number:


*Our Ski Area agrees to share this information with CWSAA and its consultants to prepare this study. **Please click on the box to the right.***

I agree

FALSE

#### Instructions to complete the survey:

---

Please type only in the **grey entry boxes**. If you have additional information to provide, please feel free to provide in a separate document or email.

There are several fields with **dropdown boxes**, these fields are shaded **light blue**. Once you click on the entry box, you'll see a small arrow to the right, click the arrow to see the options and click on the most appropriate answer.

This is an excel file, if you can't finish at one time, no problem. You can **save** the completed portion and come back to the file to complete any gaps later.

Please **answer to the best of your ability**. In most cases estimates are sufficient, and if you are fully unsure of the answer, please skip the question. Thank you for taking the time to complete this information. If you have any questions, please contact Cynthia Thomas at [marketing@cwsaa.org](mailto:marketing@cwsaa.org).

*Complete the survey by July 30 for your chance to win ASM Fall meeting registration for 1 person, plus \$350 towards travel/accommodations.*

## A. Winter Products & Services

1. What **winter services and products** do you offer (or could potentially offer) and what percent of your **winter ticket revenues** do each make up (best estimate).

Use the drop down boxes in the first column to enter the status at your ski area and in the second column enter % of winter revenues.

Product	Status (pick from dropdown)	Approx % of Revenues
Skiing/snowboarding		
Cross-country skiing		
Snow shoeing		
Tubing/sledding		
Fat-tire snow biking		
Winter sight-seeing		
Other		
		sum: 0%

2. Does your ski area offer:	Status	If yes, approx how many people participated last season
Snowboarding Lessons		
Skiing Lessons		
School ski trip visits		
Club programs (race, freestyle etc)		

### 3. Lift Ticket products:

Please answer the following questions for each age category:

	Senior	Adult	Student	Youth	Child	Tot
Price of Single day lift ticket						
Full Price of Seasons Pass						
Age Range for each category						

4. If you offer a **Family Pass**, please explain the pricing for day tickets and season passes, as well as eligibility.

5. Other category or pass type(s):

6. Do you participate in any **discounted pass products** or multi-mountain offers (eg Costco, multi-day pass, ikon etc)?  
 If so, please provide comments on what product(s) have been **most value** to you?

**Winter operating schedule:**

7. How many **days per week** is your ski area scheduled to be open during a *standard week* (i.e. not including Christmas)?
8. Do you offer **Night skiing**?  How many nights per week?
9. How many **days** did you operate during each of the following winter seasons? (approx)
- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 2018-19 season | <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> |
| 2017-18 season | <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> |
| 2016-17 season | <input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> |
10. Were there any winter seasons in the past 20 years, your ski area has **not** operated?
11. If so which years, and what was the primary cause of not operating?

**B. Spring/Summer/Fall Operations**

---

1. Do you (or could you) have any revenue generating operations **beyond the winter season**? *Select from the dropdown list below.*

***If you answered a. or b. above, please complete the following section.***

2. Enter the status of each spring/summer/fall products and % of *current* non-winter revenues.

Product	Status	Approx % of non-winter Revenues
Mountain Biking	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Private bookings	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> eg. weddings, chalet rentals etc
Summer day camps (kids)	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Special public events	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> eg. adventure races, festivals
Sight-seeing	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Camping	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Adventure products	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> eg. aerial courses, via ferrata
Golf (any form)	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/> eg. mini, frisbee, 9/18 hole
Other	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

sum: 0%

3. Thinking about **all** of your products/services both winter and non-winter, what is the current allocation of revenues by season (%).

Winter  
 Spring  
 Summer  
 Fall


sum: 0%

### C. Future Opportunities

1. Are you currently considering or have plans for **expansion or diversification** of the business? Explain.

2. What are the pros and cons for your business, to **diversifying** your ski area operations (ie summer operations, new activities etc) - list 2-3 for each.

Pros

Cons

3. Are you offering **programs to engage new participants**? If so what programs, services and/or initiatives have been valuable in engaging **new demographics** to visit your ski area? (eg. new Canadians, indigenous groups, youth etc).

4. What/when was the largest **event** your ski area has hosted (eg. Alberta Winter Games etc)?

5. Did your ski area receive any **legacy** from this event (or other event) - eg new equipment, infrastructure, donation etc? If so, what?

6. What are your **biggest future concerns**.

*Use numbers to rate those items that apply, with 1 for the most concerning item.*

Climate change/weather seasonal variations

Energy costs	
Land tenure / use	
Ability to find skilled workers/volunteers etc	
Succession plan – eg. key individuals within 5 years of retirement	
Labour costs – minimum wage, WCB premiums	
Declining participation in snowsports	
School trips	
Legal, insurance, regulators	
Other, please note:	

7. Have you engaged in any innovative solutions/practices to help **alleviate any of the above future concerns?** If so, explain.

#### D. Governance Structure

1. What is your governance/corporate structure? *Select one from the dropdown list below.*

2. What is the greatest benefit/value of this structure for your ski area?

3. What is your greatest challenge with your ski area governance structure?

4. Do you have a Board of Directors, council or other elected body governing your organization?

If yes, please answer the following questions:

When was your last AGM?

How many members are on your board?

5. What partnerships or membership affiliations do you belong to (or participate with) that provide a specific value/benefit to your ski area. If so, what organization and why?

#### E. Staff and volunteer composition

1. How many **paid** staff do you have at the **peak** of the ski season?
2. How many year-round, full-time **paid** staff do you have?
3. Do you have **volunteer** positions?  How many?
4. Are your staff **unionized**?  What percentage?
5. If there was a demand to grow/develop summer operations, what staffing barriers would exist to **retain key year-round staff**. Please explain any barriers (eg. other summer commitments like farming).

6. What is your *most significant* challenge, deficiency or future requirement with **staffing**?

7. Most resorts find **attracting and retaining Snow School staff** a challenge. If this true of your resort, what successes have you had in attracting or retaining Snow School Staff?

8. Most resorts find **attracting and retaining Food & Beverage staff** a challenge. If this true of your resort, what successes have you had in attracting or retaining Food & Beverage Staff?

9. Are there required job **certifications**, in any departments that **limit your ability to recruit**? Please identify the specific jobs and certification challenges (eg. anything from instructor, trades, kitchen, etc).

10. What is the most important skill for **ski area senior manager(s)**?

## F. Land/Tenure

1. What is the **size** of the land (tenure/owned) you have access to? *acres*
2. What % is **base area terrain**?  % **slope terrain**

Of the **un-utilized** land, please identify below what % could be developed in the future for expansion and other uses?

3. What % of un-utilized **base area terrain** could be in the future?
4. What % of un-utilized **slope terrain** could be utilized in the future?

5. What is the **ownership** of the land you operate on? (eg private, lease, crown)

*For ski areas on leased or crown/parks land ownership:*

6. When is the next renewal date of your tenure/lease (or expiration)
7. How long is your next term in years?

8. What restrictions/conditions is there of your land-use. Please provide a high level (general) list (or provide a separate attachment/email).

--

9. To whom, does your ski area **pay taxes/land use fees** to?

--

10. Do you receive any **exemptions** such as Municipal or Regional District **waivers**?

--

## G. Financial

*Please answer to the best of your ability. All information provided is kept strictly confidential.*

1. Please provide the approx % of current revenue (income) from the following sources:

Product	Approx % of Revenues
Lift & activity tickets/passes (all types)	
Snow school	
Food & beverage	
Equipment rentals (eg. skis/boots etc)	
Retail (eg. clothing, souvenirs)	
Accommodation rental (direct ski area revenues only)	
Facility rentals (for events)	
Grants (Federal/provincial/private etc) - list below	
Fundraising	
Sponsorships	
Other sources (please list below)	

*sum: 0%*

2. Provide a list of **other** major funding sources not identified above:


3. Provide a list of **grants** (gov't & private) that you have received in the past 5 years, and what each was used for (ie specific event, specific equipment, employment, operating etc):

Grant Name	Source	Funds used for




4. If you have recently **invested** in new equipment or opened a relatively new facilities, what were the major **sources of funding**? How did you secure your financing?

5. Does your ski area **contract out** any revenue centres (eg. Food & beverage, snow school, rentals, retail etc)? If so, identify which areas and provide background?

6. How many of the past 5 years, has your ski area generated a **profit**?


7. Are you able to meet your financial obligations?

8. Do you have a rolling deficit?

9. To whom do you have **outstanding debt(s)** in the form of loans, mortgages etc? eg. Banks, Credit Unions, Individuals, Provincial, Municipal (provide general categories not individual names).

10. Do you have measures in place to ensure the **sustainability** of your area through a **challenging season** (ie low snow)? If so, please explain.

11. What are your top 5 highest operational **expense** categories? (eg. wages, repairs, electricity etc)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5


12. Who is your **hydro supplier**?

13. Do you have a special hydro rate plan?


14. Do you have any innovative financing or debt management arrangements to reduce your obligations or expenses (eg interest holidays, special rates, consolidations)? Please explain.

## H. BUSINESS PLANNING

---

1. Do you have a **current business plan**?
2. Do you have goals, objectives, mission statement for your ski area?

3. What method(s) do you use to **measure the success** of your ski area:

4. What are the key **strengths** of your ski area:

5. What would be the biggest **challenge** to your continued operation:

6. Who are your biggest current **customer** segments/groups:  
 (eg. schools, seniors, families, destination visitors)

7. What are the biggest **gaps & opportunities**:

8. Who/what are your **competitors**?  
 ie could be ski areas or other business types (eg. Activities like hockey, swim, indoor soccer etc happening during winter).

9. How would you describe your engagement and **relationship** with your local **government**/district/  
 regional municipality?

## I. Insurance

---

1. Is your ski area covered by its own insurance, or is the ski area covered under another organizations policy (eg municipality)?

2. Does the ski area carry more than one insurance policy (eg property, liability, equipment). How many?

3. Please provide a list of your main insurance products and providers:

Coverage Types	Provider

4. Has your ski area recently **improved your insurance** in any way, if so how?

## J. Assets & Infrastructure

1. What **year** did your ski area **first** open?

### LIFTS

*Note, CWSAA has a list of all Ski Area lifts, hence we are not collecting this info from you.*

2. What is the **next major need** for your lifts (eg. a specific repair, replacement, expansion):

### SNOWMAKING

3. Do you have snowmaking?

4. Average # of snowmaking **days** per season:

5. **Area** covered by snowmaking:

# of Acres  
 % of skiable  
 terrain




6. Describe your **source of water**:

7. Snowmaking Equipment:

Snow fans

Snow lances/towers/poles

Water pumps

Compressors

Quantity





Capacity

Capacity




17. What is the next major capital investment planned at your ski area (lifts, vehicles, buildings etc)

**Thank you!**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have anything further to share that will help develop best practices for business planning of small and medium ski areas in Alberta, please note below, or share in an email to [marketing@cwsaa.org](mailto:marketing@cwsaa.org).