

Ski Area Name: _____

Ski Area Location: _____

Ski Area Managing Organization: _____

Four-Season Cross Country Ski Area Inventory & Planning Exercise

Introduction

This exercise provides a quick, inexpensive, and independent way for ski areas to internally assess and plan for four-season management in the wake of changing use patterns and unpredictable season lengths. The goal of this exercise is to help cross country ski areas, managers, and boards to 'get on the same page' for understanding their cross country ski area's existing assets, their needs for the future, and how to logically map out the process to fill these subsequent needs. This presentation is **not** a step-by-step guide for carrying out a detailed master planning process; however, it should provide enough information to articulate your ski area's planning intentions to potential funders, grantees, members, and the public and can set a foundation for the development of a broader master plan which requires in-depth public engagement, expertise, and financial resources. It can also help your team understand if there's a broader need for professional long-range, four-season planning.

Step 1: Existing Conditions Assessment

Let's start by reviewing the assets that your ski area currently has on hand. An existing assets assessment helps identify available resources such physical, non-physical, administrative, and operational assets that contribute towards your ski area's functionality. Understanding these assets enables your team to maximize their utilization, minimize unnecessary construction, and tailor development plans to the specific needs and characteristics of the area, ultimately enhancing the overall recreational experience for visitors at any time of the year.

In the boxes below, please check off any assets that your ski area **currently possesses**:

<i>Physical Assets - Does the ski area contain:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hiking/snowshoeing-specific trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Accessible trails (ADA, adaptive recreation)	<input type="checkbox"/> Rentable day use/event indoor spaces
<input type="checkbox"/> Biking-specific trails (e.g., singletrack summer trails, fat tire winter trails)	<input type="checkbox"/> Paved parking lot	<input type="checkbox"/> Rentable day use/event outdoor spaces
<input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian-specific trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Unpaved parking lot	<input type="checkbox"/> Rentable overnight use spaces
<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-use non-motorized trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Equipment/maintenance facility	<input type="checkbox"/> Rentable recreation equipment (e.g., skis, snowshoes, bikes, trekking poles, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-use motorized trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Club/warming house	<input type="checkbox"/> Rentable open space/trails for events & races
<input type="checkbox"/> Lighted trails	<input type="checkbox"/> Trailside amenities (e.g., benches, kiosks)	<input type="checkbox"/> Publicly accessible restrooms
<input type="checkbox"/> All-season signage/wayfinding features	<input type="checkbox"/> Snowmaking equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> Disc golf nets/infrastructure
<input type="checkbox"/> Adventure assets (e.g., ropes course, zipline)		

<i>Program & Event Assets - Does the ski area host or support:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Bike races	<input type="checkbox"/> Running races	<input type="checkbox"/> Other winter clinics/camps/programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resource Collection Program (syruping, foraging, NTFP harvesting, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Bike clinics/camps/programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Running clinics/camps/programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Other non-winter clinics/camps/programs	
<input type="checkbox"/> Bike events	<input type="checkbox"/> Running events	<input type="checkbox"/> Other events (in-house & rented events)	

<i>Non-Physical Assets - Does the ski area contain:</i>	<i>Administrative Assets - Does the ski area contain:</i>	<i>Userbase - What's your current market:</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> A dedicated website	<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time paid staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Skiers
<input type="checkbox"/> Social media presence	<input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal paid staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Campers
<input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/> Hikers
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsorships	<input type="checkbox"/> Management board/council	<input type="checkbox"/> Trail runners
<input type="checkbox"/> Cost-share agreements	<input type="checkbox"/> 501(c)(3) non-profit status (if non-profit)	<input type="checkbox"/> Snowshoers
<input type="checkbox"/> A community engagement strategy	<input type="checkbox"/> A capital improvement budget	<input type="checkbox"/> Motorized users
<input type="checkbox"/> Membership options	<input type="checkbox"/> Use fees	<input type="checkbox"/> Bikers
		<input type="checkbox"/> Climbers
		<input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riders
		<input type="checkbox"/> Fitness groups
		<input type="checkbox"/> Backpackers
		<input type="checkbox"/> Event participants
		<input type="checkbox"/> Tourists
		<input type="checkbox"/> Race participants

<i>In the past five years, how often have you had to close trails mid-season due to warm conditions and/or lack of snow?</i>			
Once per season	2 - 4 times per season	7 - 9 times per season	Never
	5 - 7 times per season	10+ times per season	

Step 2: Top 5 Critical Improvements

Now that you've evaluated your existing assets, take some time and think about the top five assets that you **did not select** that you believe would best strengthen your ski area's ability to be a successful year-round recreation destination. Do you think your area would be best positioned if it developed physical assets, like rentable spaces? How about expanding your administrative structure or program offerings? Or should you focus on expanding your market to include more user groups? Additionally, which new improvements best fit within your recreation landscape, available resources, and overall community? All ski areas will differ! In the box to the right, determine your area's top five targeted improvements in the next five years, in no particular order of priority - you will do that in the next step.

Four-season planning still includes winter! Does your ski area face recurring mid-season melts? What improvements will enhance your space's utility during wintertime heat spells? Is this happening frequently enough that it needs to be prioritized and regularly planned for?

You may have more than five in mind, but it's best to keep your scope narrow to really tack down your most important four-season needs. Additionally, you'll find that many assets and improvements are intertwined with one another, and a critically important improvement is likely tied to the development of other assets found within the list above - this will be addressed in Step 4.

1.	4.
2.	5.
3.	

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Step 3: Prioritization Assessment

Now that you've identified your top five improvements, it's important to think about factors that can either propel or hinder their efficient implementation. In this step, in the context of the five critical improvements that you have identified and your ski area's current resources, identify the following and whether they are **Low, Medium, or High** (which also depends on your ski area's available resources). Also list other considerations that may be unique to your ski area:

- **Improvement Cost:** The estimated total cost of the improvement. Think materials, labor, equipment, and maintenance.
- **Availability of Funding:** Estimated funding available for the project. This can come from internal sources like membership dues, facility rental revenue, and use fees as well as external sources like grants, donations, sponsorships, and partnership cost-share agreements.
- **Availability of Labor:** Estimated labor available for the improvement. Do you have volunteers or staff in-house that can carry out the tasks required by the improvement? Can you lean on partner groups to provide in-kind labor? Do you have a trusted group that can facilitate non-physical improvements like events, programs, races, or market expansion?
- **Ease of Implementation:** Estimated level of difficulty to successfully implement the improvement. Is the improvement a relatively straightforward process that can be done in house, like developing and installing signage for summer trails or is it a long-running process that will require contractors, permits, easements, and multiple layers of coordination?

Improvement	Improvement Cost	Availability of Funding	Availability of Labor	Ease of Implementation	Other Factors of Consideration
1.	L M H	L M H	L M H	L M H	
2.	L M H	L M H	L M H	L M H	
3.	L M H	L M H	L M H	L M H	
4.	L M H	L M H	L M H	L M H	
5.	L M H	L M H	L M H	L M H	

Step 4: Timeline & Dependencies

Now that you're aware of the 'good, bad, and ugly' of getting your top five critical improvements implemented, it's time to think about the best way to logically phase the improvements. For example, projects that possess low improvement costs and high ease of implementation may be a 'quick win' that can be done right away. Additionally, a project may possess a high availability of funding and labor but also holds a high improvement cost and has a very low ease of implementation, requiring your area to set aside multiple years for its completion. This step also encourages you to think about the **dependencies** that are intertwined within an improvement. For example, expanding your area's user base to include campers is dependent on other improvements like overnight parking, rentable overnight spaces, and four-season signage. These dependencies may not be considered 'critical improvements,' but must happen to successfully implement a critical improvement. In the table below, and in the context of a ten year timeline, describe the start/end dates for each improvement and how they can be best phased in a way that build off each other. For example, developing social media pages and a website will facilitate the ability to attract tourists, which can then justify the development of overnight rentable facilities. Feel free to reference the assets in Step 1 when listing dependencies or list others that come to mind and are relevant to your ski area.

Improvement	Desired Start Date	Desired Completion Date	Dependencies to Address Within Timeframe
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Step 5: Now What?

While brief, this exercise helped you identify 1) Your ski area's existing four-season offerings and the present components that are related to providing such offerings, 2) The top five improvements that will make your ski area a more viable four-season recreation destination, 3) The factors that will help or hinder their implementation, and 4) How to logically implement your improvements within five years that account for those factors and the dependencies that revolve around them. Now, it is up to your team to use this exercise to continue the conversation on four-season planning and determine whether a more extensive planning process, either internally or with a consultant, is necessary.