

Four Season Cross Country Ski Area Planning

Brett Rannow
CRO Planning & Design



Introduction & Overview

- ▶ Introduction - Brett Rannow, CRO Planning & Design
- ▶ Overview Presentation
 - ▶ Discuss about *why* we should think adaptively about four season planning
 - ▶ Discuss components of four-season recreation planning
 - ▶ Work together on an exercise to think about your area, how it currently stands in four-season offerings, and how *you* would logically strengthen it in the next five years



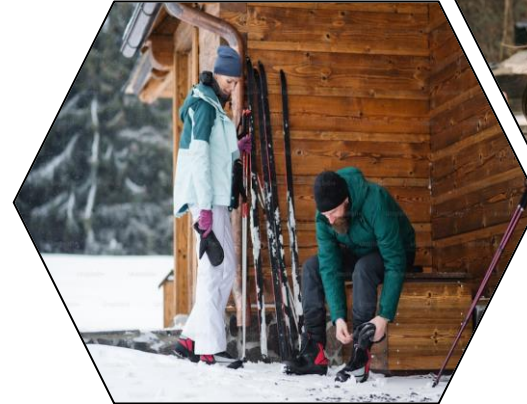
Trends in Outdoor Rec & Cross-Country Skiing

- ▶ Outdoor recreation, as a whole, is strongly growing
 - ▶ 2.2% growth in participation, 2021-2022 (OIA)
- ▶ CC Skiing growing at a faster rate, particularly during/after the pandemic
 - ▶ 8.1% growth in participation, 2022-2023 (SIA)



The Cross-Country Skier

- ▶ Primarily young (18-34)
 - ▶ 29% under 18
 - ▶ 23% 25-34
- ▶ Educated – 43% college graduate or higher
- ▶ High-earning income – 43% possess an income of \$100,000+
- ▶ 1 in 4 participate 7+ times per season
- ▶ Outdoor recreator
 - ▶ 27% Camp
 - ▶ 24% Hike
 - ▶ 22% Golf
 - ▶ 21% Road Bike
 - ▶ 18% Run/Jog
 - ▶ 13% Mountain Bike



What lack of snow means for the Loppet Cup

Local News

Snow problem: Vermont's high school Nordic ski teams adapt to inconsistent winters

The lack of snow in southern Quebec is driving cross-country skiers nuts

West Yellowstone Ski Festival cancelled due to a lack of snow

Without much snow, Mohawk Trail cross country ski team has to get creative, and stay flexible

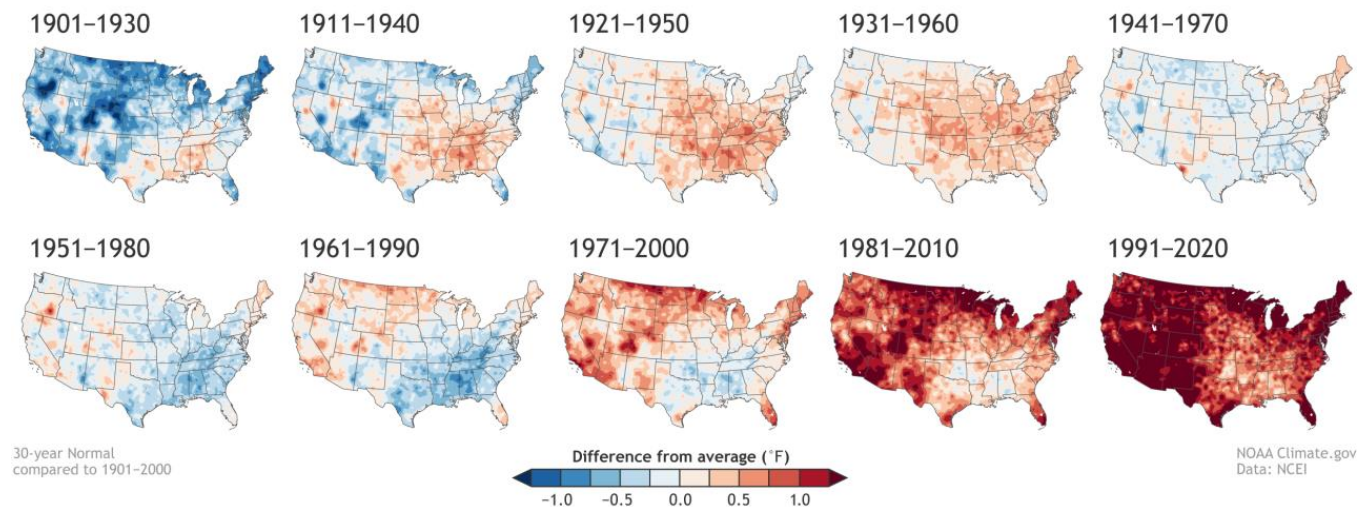
Minneapolis organizers scramble to make snow for World Cup cross country ski race

Opinion | Warm temps, no snow, no business: Finally ready to believe?

Trends in Temperature & Snowfall

- ▶ Impacts of low snow and shortened seasons
 - ▶ Wobus et al., 2015 – Reduced winter season results in potentially millions of lost recreation visits
 - ▶ Hagenstad et al., 2018 – Low snow years can result in double digit decreases in participation (10%+) and local economy pitfalls
 - ▶ Who's at risk?

U.S. ANNUAL TEMPERATURE COMPARED TO 20th-CENTURY AVERAGE



So What?

- ▶ Cross country skiing participation is stubbornly on the upswing, especially among young people and Millennials, despite increasing loss of participation opportunities
- ▶ Temperature trends impact participation opportunities – what to do with all these users?
- ▶ Skiers participate in other non-winter recreational activities
- ▶ Cross country ski trails and areas are likely to attract a dedicated userbase
- ▶ Cross-country ski areas can serve as excellent four-season recreation destinations with built-in assets and userbases
 - ▶ Four-season adaptation can help strengthen a ski area's viability through diversification
 - ▶ Thinking more expansively about the value and efficacy of a ski area, both internally and externally

Four-season Planning

- ▶ What is this presentation?
 - ▶ Brainstorming exercise to ‘audit’ your ski area’s current assets, desired future assets, and the process to logically implement improvements that improve your area’s natural, financial, and social viability for all four seasons.
- ▶ What is this presentation **not**?
 - ▶ A detailed, step-by-step master planning process exercise
 - ▶ However, it should provide enough information to kickstart the conversation on four-season planning within your organization and begin to articulate your planning intentions to potential funders, grantees, members, and the public.
- ▶ Presentation Goals
 - ▶ Provide a quick, inexpensive, and independent way for ski areas to proactively think about four-season planning in the wake of changing use patterns and unpredictable season lengths.
 - ▶ Helps areas and teams ‘get on the same page’ for understanding future needs and how to get there

Four-season Planning

"The challenge for the planner is to translate peoples' recreation desires into facilities that serve as concrete expressions of the [area's] image" (Melville, 1988).

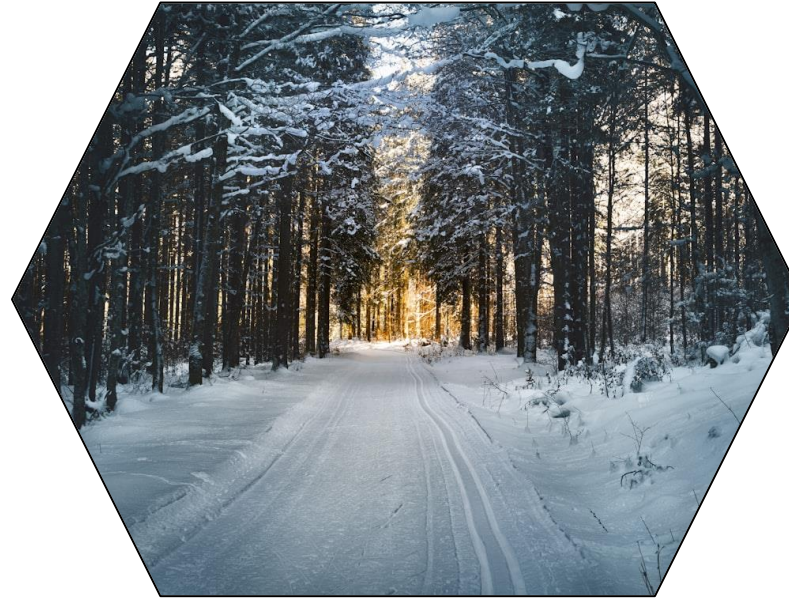
What is your area's image, and what recreation desires exist in your community in Winter, Fall, Spring, & Summer?

How can your area meet these desires to become a year-round recreation destination?



The Exercise

- ▶ Want it to be:
 - ▶ Relevant
 - ▶ Useful
 - ▶ Easy
- ▶ Provide a Planner's perspective on four-season recreation management
- ▶ Your participation is encouraged! Want feedback to make the exercise better and available on CCSAA website



Step 1: Existing Conditions Assessment

- ▶ Understand where your area stands from a four-season perspective
- ▶ Does your ski area possess:
 - ▶ Physical assets?
 - ▶ Non-physical assets?
 - ▶ Administrative assets?
 - ▶ Program and event assets?
- ▶ Who does your ski area serve?
 - ▶ Just skiers and snowshoers?
 - ▶ Hikers?
 - ▶ Bikers?
 - ▶ Campers?
 - ▶ Tourists?
 - ▶ Event & race participants?
- ▶ Winter climate vulnerability
 - ▶ How often have mid-season melts shut down trails in the past five years?
 - ▶ Are current assets supporting your area during these situations?



Step 2: Top 5 Desired Improvements

- ▶ Take some time and think about the top five assets you **did not select** that you believe would best strengthen your ski area's ability to be a successful year-round recreation destination.
- ▶ What kind of improvements are they?
 - ▶ Are they geared towards extending snow seasons and winter-related participation opportunities (lights, snowmaking)? Effectively responding to low or no-snow conditions? Fully embracing warm seasons? Broadening your userbase/market? More rentals, events, or programs? Obtaining sponsors and partners?
- ▶ List them in no particular order



Step 3: Prioritization Considerations

- ▶ 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 depends on your ski area's available resources)
 - ▶ Improvement Cost
 - ▶ Availability of Funding
 - ▶ Availability of Labor
 - ▶ Ease of Implementation
- ▶ Thoughtfully considers project components
 - ▶ How much will the project cost?
 - ▶ Do we need to fundraise or apply for grants, or are funds available?
 - ▶ Can we do implement this in-house? Do we have partners that can help us with this? Do we need to contract help?
 - ▶ Does this project require permits? How long does that process take?



Step 4: Timeline & Dependencies

- ▶ Have thought through the ‘good, bad, and ugly’ of getting your top five improvements implemented
 - ▶ Now, it’s time to think about how you can logically phase them
- ▶ Also need to think about the dependencies that are intertwined within each improvement
- ▶ In the context of a ten-year timeline, describe the start/end dates for each improvement, their dependencies, and how they can be best phased in a way that build off each other



Conclusion

- ▶ As winters continues to shorten, ski areas must adapt through expanding their assets, offerings, and userbase
 - ▶ Understanding available strategies to retain users during warm, low-snow winter seasons
 - ▶ Planning for, welcoming, and incorporating warm weather activities, events, and programs into a ski area's repertoire can help strengthen its viability and establish itself as a community recreation destination
- ▶ This exercise can hopefully kickstart some thinking around the broader planning process and establish clear needs and goals before investing in the next step, professional planning.
- ▶ This is a first edition handout, and feedback is welcomed!



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Communities | Recreation | Open Space



**Cross Country
Ski Areas Association**

Discussions & Questions

Thank you!

Brett Rannow
CRO Planning & Design
Brett@CROPlanning.com

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Image References

▶ Slide 1

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- ▶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climatological_normal

▶ Slide 10

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