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Rib Mountain Ski Club

### Granite Peak Ski Area's Proposed Expansion

I grew up skiing at the Granite Peak Resort. When I was three years old my mother taught me how to ski and over time it has developed into one of the great loves of my life. I have spent countless hours at this resort, made many friends and developed my skills to such a level that as an adult I am considering joining the national ski patrol. In this essay I would like to examine Granite Peak's history and discuss the details of its upcoming expansion, a change that will alter the nature of skiing in the Midwest, further solidifying the resort's growing roll both in the local community and as a regional ski destination.

Though now modernized with impressive snow guns, extended runs, updated chairlifts and a great terrain park, Rib Mountain State Park has a fascinating history. Rib Mountain State Park has been providing downhill ski opportunities and winter recreation since the 1930's. As discussed in the Wausau Daily Herald article 'A first look at Granite Peak's Expansion' from 2016, the hill has gone through a great many changes since it opened back in the 1930s for recreational downhill skiing. It seems difficult to believe but skiing was quite new to North America when the Rib Mountain ski hill opened in 1937. Although it seems like a fantastic claim, the resort's web site asserts that "At the time, Rib Mountain had the longest ski run in the nation, and the tallest vertical in the Midwest."

Charles Skinner and family took over the business of the ski hill in 2000 and over the last two decades have invested some 26 million dollars in facility upgrades. Without these investments, Granite Peak could have suffered the fate of other ski resorts such as Telemark in Bayfield County, which went out of business for lack of patronage. Granite Peak is again upgrading its facilities to provide one of the best ski experiences in the Midwest. The move to expand into the West side of Rib Mountain State Park and add additional runs has divided the community with many arguing that the environmental impact on hiking and nature trails cannot be justified. However, for both skiers and non-skiers the impact of the expansion on the local economy will be extraordinary. Assessments suggest that the local post-expansion economic impact of Granite Peak will be some 54 million dollars annually with as many as 100,000 new visitors to Marathon County every

year. The effect of such a great monetary sum flowing into this area will affect hotels, restaurants and other local businesses. As of now, there are roughly 3,500 season pass hold holders and with the expansion the hill is expected to amass as many as 200,000 skier visits annually. The goal is to compete with Michigan resorts and pull skiers from Chicago and Minneapolis. Charles Skinner suggests that "The next phase of the development will put this area right on target and supply families, local businesses and visitor groups with an extremely captivating attraction." In addition to the increased revenue from tourism, the expansion will increase the number of local full and part-time jobs to 380, not to mention 20 million dollars in local construction spending for the project. But what will the expansion mean in terms of skiable terrain and its effect on Rib Mountain State Park?

Granite Peak currently has some 149 skiable acres and the expansion will create much more skiable terrain. In fact, the development will increase Granite Peak to 223 skiable acres, or an increase of 74 acres, roughly 50% of the hill now. This will greatly alleviate ski traffic on crowded days and enhance the ability of all levels of skiers to enjoy the resort. In a personal discussion about the matter, head coach of the Rib Mountain Ski Team Ron Lawrence has gone on record that "This is great for Wausau as a community. It's not only a big boost for the economy but for our lifestyle too. To have such a beautiful place to enjoy nature is a wonderful benefit for the Wausau area. How many other communities have this in their backyard? People drive for hours to ski here and the expansion means it will be that much bigger and better." (Personal Interview). In response to environmental critics, Charles Skinner has released a plan to minimize the carbon footprint of the Granite Peak Ski Area with energy conservation and waste reduction as primary goals of the resort. Although the expansion still has a few governmental hurdles to overcome, the master plan is moving forward and if all goes according to plan will be complete within the next several years.

## References

<https://www.granitepeakexpansion.com/resource-library/master-plan-goals-aim-to-grow-granite-peak-and-reduce-carbon-footprint-2/old>

<https://www.wausaudailyherald.com/story/news/2016/12/06/first-look-granite-peaks-expansion-plans/95062376/>

Personal Interview: Ron Lawrence, head coach, Granite Peak Ski Team.