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### History and Expansion of Granite Peak

I learned how to ski when I was three years old at Granite Peak. I was taught by my father who had also grown up skiing there and would and does ski almost every day. He encouraged my family to ski, which turned into one of our favorite family activities. Now that I am older I am able to ski whenever I like, which following in my father's footsteps, is almost every day. I am also a ski instructor at Granite Peak which has given me the opportunity to give back to the place I love along with helping younger kids find the love for skiing that I have. It has been an amazing opportunity to be able to help grow the next generation in their skiing abilities and with life skills such as communication and teamwork. I would like to further my involvement and give back to the ski hill as a ski patrol when I am old enough. I have many adult friends who are ski patrols and I have looked up to them and wanted to be like them since I was little. The ski hill has made a big impact on my life and I would like to continue to make a positive impact on the next generation and anyone else I encounter on the ski hill. In this essay, I am taking a deeper look into how Granite Peak developed and how it is continuing to expand and how that is and will affect the Wausau area and the many skiers who come to Granite throughout the year.

Granite Peak opened in 1937 making it proudly one of the first ski hills in North America as it says on the Granite Peak website. Fred Pabst operated the hill until 1947 when the state and a local organization cooperated in owning it. The hill opened with 6 runs, one t-bar chairlift powered by a Ford motor and a small temporary chalet. The historic chalet that we can see there today was built in 1939 from funds that were raised by the Marathon Civic Corporation replacing the temporary chalet. The residents of Wausau helped to build the runs by clearing trees, stumps, brush, and boulders, along with clearing a road and parking lot that could hold 300 cars. 17 years after the co-ownership started, Carmie Oliva was recruited to run the hill because the town thought that having a private owner would be best. For 36 years Oliva was faithfully running the ski hill and helping it to grow. Now, he and many of his family members, now run the famous Carmelo's at the base of the ski hill.

Since 2000, with the take over of ownership by Charles Skinner, Granite Peak has added 58 new runs and installed 7 new lifts along with restoring the historic chalet,

building the new Sundance Chalet and Grill and much more. All of the improvements since this time have cost over \$26 million. Though this is a lot, the resort brings in over 110,000 visitors a year and this number is continuing to grow. This is one reason why Skinner proposed the expansion of Granite Peak and he sees that when the expansion is done the number of visitors per year will nearly double. On crowded days the lines for the chairlifts get very long, but with the expansion, people are able to spread out further on the hill giving everyone a more enjoyable experience making them more likely to come back and bring more people to the resort. The expansion would add more than a dozen new beginner and intermediate runs on the West side and a few new runs on the East side of the hill. This will have a great impact on the ski school that Granite Peak has because it will bring in more skiers allowing for the ski school to grow and help more people learn how to ski and improve their abilities. In a personal interview with Brenda Zimmerman, Granite Peak Ski School manager/director, she states, "the expansion is an incredible opportunity for the Wausau area especially Granite Peak and the ski school." When she talked to Charles a few weeks ago he shared his vision for the expansion saying, "the plan for the ski school is to add another building specifically for the ski school, and with the runs, having an area specifically roped off for teaching to maximize the safety of our guests." (Brenda Zimmerman). The main focus for the ski school is safety, and with the expansion bringing in more guests, they are able to better ensure guest safety by creating a designated section for those who would like lessons. Skinner feels the need to expand to compete with other resorts updates and expansions and not decline and eventually run out of business like many other small resorts such as Telemark Resort in Bayfield County.

Another reason Skinner is proposing the expansion is for the economic benefits. Wisconsin Public Radio covers Dave Eckmann, president of the Greater Wausau Chamber of Commerce, saying that Granite Peak Ski Area is Wisconsin's largest ski resort, with an economic impact estimated at \$27.5 million per year in the Wausau area. After the expansion, the economic impact is predicted to be around \$53 million per year while also adding around 180 jobs. In the same article Diane Brusoe, a DNR program manager, said the park's plan needs to take into account other potential uses for the park beyond skiing. Skinner said that Granite Peak would work closely with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to minimize the amount of land used. With that being said the expansion is said to add 10 km of trails for hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing with the intent to benefit everyone with this expansion. Although there are still many battles that the expansion plan has to face before it gets put into place, if all goes as planned the expansion will happen and be completed within the next few years.

## References

<https://www.wpr.org/ski-hill-expansion-mountain-biking-could-come-rib-mountain>

<https://www.skigranitepeak.com/history-of-granite-peak>

Personal Interview: Brenda Zimmerman, Ski School Manager/Director, Granite Peak Ski School