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Climate Change and Skiing

Climate change continues to have an impact on everybody's lives in more ways than what they may realize. Whether it's the rising temperatures or melting glaciers, everyone has seen the effects of global climate change. A less critical piece, yet still important hobby that could be lost to climate change, is skiing. With rising temperatures, natural snow is harder to come by, and making artificial snow becomes harder to rely on due to inclement snow making conditions. If climate change continues on its current trajectory, we could lose weeks of the skiing season, or even lose it all together.

Everybody loves to ski when there is fresh snow. Kendall Brunette writes that "First tracks are the coveted, cherished and committed signatures pursued by skiers and snowboarders alike. First tracks are reason for the early morning alarm clock that disturbs a heavy winter slumber¹." Those first tracks in fresh snow are in increasing amounts of danger. Year after year, there is less snow falling across skiing places everywhere. Therefore there is less opportunity for those coveted first tracks. Brunette reports that

¹ Brunette, Kendall. Climate Change Casualty: What the ski industry stands to lose. May 5th, 2015

“winter temperatures are projected to warm an additional 4 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century, and that snow depths could decline in the West by 25 percent to 100 percent.” This shows how much danger skiing is in. Our winters are already warmer with less snowfall than 10 years ago, which has led to shorter ski seasons. Continued warming trends will just cut more into the already depleted ski seasons. Climate change is the biggest danger to winter and skiing, as it has been for the last 50 years.

The shorter ski seasons have an effect on both the skier and the resort owners. Shorter seasons mean less time for skiers to get out on the snow, and also less customers for the ski resort owners. There are places that aren't able to stay open because of the loss of snow and time to keep the resorts open. Brunette writes that “Since 1950, more than 600 U.S. ski areas closed for reasons that include decreased snowfall” This number is just going to continue to go up if the warming trend we are seeing continues to happen. This is not positive for the economy either. POW reports that “In low snow years, reduced participation decreased value added by over \$1 billion and cost 17,400 jobs compared to an average season².” These are staggering numbers that have a real effect on the places that lose those jobs and revenue. The first places that will lose their skiing opportunities will be the Northeast, and the Midwest. Both of these

² POW. How Climate Change Will Impact the Snowsports Industry. Winter 2022.

areas already rely on making snow more than the West, and increased temperatures will just continue to deplete the time that the resorts can be open. This will affect all of us firsthand.

Not only is there less natural snowfall each year, it is becoming more difficult to make artificial snow. I talked to the General Manager of Granite Peak- Greg Fischer who told me that not only must it be cold to create snow, it must be a dry cold. He said that this year it has been more of a damp cold and that has prohibited them from making enough snow to open up all the runs by the time they normally would each year.³ There will just continue to be more years where there are issues with snow making, whether it is too warm, or incorrect conditions for making snow. This is seen all around the country, but magnified in places that rely so much on artificial snowmaking.

Climate change is going to continue to have detrimental impacts all around the world on so many levels, some of which are more drastic than others, but we all need to appreciate the winters while they still are how we know them. We need to appreciate the length of the ski season and the quality of the snow we ski on before it is too late and it is gone forever.

³ Oral interview with Greg Fischer, 1/27/2023

Works Cited

Brunette, Kendall. Climate Change Casualty: What the ski industry stands to lose. May 5th, 2015

POW. How Climate Change Will Impact the Snowsports Industry. Winter 2022.