

Ski Area Management Guidelines

Introduction

Downhill skiing has a long history in Canada's national parks. The Banff Ski Club was formed in 1917 and the first commercial ski facility began operations in 1934. Downhill skiing has since become a cornerstone of winter tourism in the Rocky Mountain national parks. Banff and Jasper National Parks of Canada are international ski destinations attracting hundreds of thousands of skiers each year. Due to the pressures placed on alpine and sub-alpine environments, the 2000 *Canada National Parks Act* prohibits developing new commercial ski areas inside the national parks.

The nature of skiing and skier expectations, as well as national parks policies have changed considerably since the initial Long-Range Plans were developed for the Lake Louise, Sunshine Village, Mount Norquay and Marmot Basin ski areas in the 1980s. In order for these areas to operate in a manner that will not impair the ecological integrity of the parks and assist them to remain competitive, a clear and consistent approach to managing ski areas is required. Ski Area Guidelines were established in 2000 to guide the development of new Long-Range Plans. In order to facilitate improvements to ecological integrity, reflect the full scope of Parks Canada's mandate and address the concerns of communities, ski areas, tourism associations and environmental groups, some refinements to the guidelines are necessary. These refinements reflect the original intent of the guidelines and will be the basis for managing ski areas in the mountain national parks.

Basic approach

The following outlines the broad approach that will be taken to manage the mountain national park ski areas:

- Parks Canada's fundamental responsibilities are protecting heritage resources, facilitating opportunities for public education and memorable visitor experiences. As part of this integrated mandate, the *Canada National Parks Act* requires that the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity will be the first priority when considering all aspects of the management of parks. These responsibilities will form the foundation for decisions.
- Parks Canada's primary goal for the management of ski areas is to achieve long term land use certainty that:
 - ensures ecological integrity will be maintained or restored;
 - contributes to facilitating memorable national park visitor experiences and educational opportunities; and
 - provides ski area operators with clear parameters for business planning in support of an economically healthy operation.
- To address the needs of the ski areas and Parks Canada, a collaborative approach is desired.

- Growth Limits and parameters to guide development and operations have been established for communities and outlying commercial accommodation to ensure ecological integrity and reinforce their location in a national park. Ski areas will be treated in a similar manner.
- The requirements of the *Canada National Parks Act*, *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* and the *Species at Risk Act* will be met.
- The 2000 Ski Area Guidelines recognized that existing Long-Range Plans were out of date. They identified the need to have new plans completed by 2002. These plans are overdue. New development will be addressed through new Long-Range Plans. In advance of new plans, development will be restricted and may only be considered under the conditions outlined in these guidelines.
- Ski Area Site Guidelines will be approved by the CEO of the Parks Canada Agency. Ski Area Long-Range Plans will be approved by the Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency.
- Parks Canada will work with ski areas to advance Long-Range Plans in a timely manner. Regulatory options to increase certainty in terms of planning and development processes and acceptable time frames for the preparation of Long-Range Plans will be considered.
- Parks Canada will seek to work together with ski areas, communities, the tourism industry and agencies to support a vibrant winter experience.

Principles to guide new long range plans

The following principles will guide the preparation of Long-Range Plans:

- The approach taken to manage growth and the preparation of Site Guidelines and Long-Range Plans at ski areas will be similar to that taken for communities and outlying commercial accommodation.
- Inside the existing Developed Area, new development can be considered where potential ecological impacts can be mitigated.
- Outside the existing Developed Area, new development can be considered if there is a Substantial Environmental Gain within or adjacent to the leasehold.
- Ski areas will contribute to a unique, memorable national park experience.
- Ski areas will promote public appreciation and understanding of the heritage values of the park and world heritage site and local conservation initiatives.
- Ski areas will be leaders in the application of environmental management, stewardship and best practices.

Application of principles

The following information outlines how the principles will be applied.

Existing Developed Area

- The existing Developed Area represents the area modified for skiing or other uses within the leasehold through the construction of physical works, or through clearing/removal of trees and other vegetation, landscaping, terrain modification or other activity associated with ski area operation. It includes ski runs, lift lines, parking areas, commercial buildings, operational buildings and forested areas between ski runs. It does not include Undeveloped Areas, Un-serviced Terrain or Un-skiied Terrain. The perimeter of the Developed Area will be determined by:
 - the top terminal of the upper-most lifts;
 - the outer limits of formally cut ski runs/gladed areas or approved Ski Terrain; and
 - the perimeter of base/parking, staging and operational areas.
- Within the Developed Area, improvements to services and facilities can be considered. Additional infill ski runs, glading, run widening and parking can be considered. However, to ensure ecological integrity and address aesthetic issues, modification of physical terrain and forest cover will be carefully managed. Site Guidelines will identify ecological management parameters to ensure ecosystem functioning is maintained and that sensitive areas are protected. At a minimum, this will include maximum run width, minimum distance between runs, maximum number of new runs and the prohibition of development in sensitive areas. Other parameters will be determined on a ski area by ski area basis. The Long-Range Plan will include a run improvement and vegetation management strategy that ensures:
 - a sustainable alpine and forest ecosystem;
 - preventing the spread of exotic non-native invasive plants and their elimination where practical;
 - non-native species are not introduced;
 - the reclamation of degraded landscapes, no longer in use, to natural conditions;
 - wildfire facility protection;
 - the maintenance and where practical the enhancement of wildlife habitat and movement in all seasons;
 - the protection of habitat for any species at risk;
 - minimizing water erosion; and
 - the maintenance and where practical the enhancement of the health of aquatic ecosystems.
- Capacity:
 - The capacity of ski areas can increase but development will be permanently capped through Site Guidelines.
 - Growth Limits will be established for Ski Terrain, the Developed Area and commercial buildings. These limits will represent build out.

- Within the developed area and the context of ensuring ecosystem functioning and terrain limitations, the balancing of ski area components can be considered. These components are Ski Terrain, commercial buildings, out-of-base lift capacity, total lift capacity and parking (including transportation shuttle systems).
 - In determining Growth Limits and balancing requirements of individual ski area components, Parks Canada may seek the advice of external experts.
 - Ski area development to the maximum Growth Limits can be considered if the principles and conditions set out in the approved Site Guidelines and Long-Range Plans are met.
- Within the Developed Area the following can be considered:
 - lift replacement, upgrade, realignment and new lifts;
 - increase in day lodge and commercial building size;
 - relocation and replacement of existing lodges and facilities; and
 - new warming huts and washroom facilities.
- Development of new on-hill accommodation and the expansion of the number of rooms of Sunshine's existing hotel will not be permitted. New facilities, including day lodges, will not be permitted. New employee housing, except those required for security reasons, will be provided in the near-by communities.
- The Goat's Eye Day Lodge proposal was at an advanced stage of review when the 2000 Ski Area Guidelines were announced. The guidelines indicated the Goat's Eye Day Lodge would be subject to a comprehensive study as required under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. Accordingly, a proposal for the facility can be considered as part of a Long-Range Plan or advanced outside of the plan.
- Use of mass transit will be the primary means to address parking issues. Parking lot reconfiguration and expansion within the existing Developed Area can be considered within terrain and ecological limitations. New skiing parking nodes will be prohibited. Use of existing parking lots off-site can be considered, preferably in the communities, in order to support shuttle bus services.
- Significant terrain modification will be prohibited. No new alpine ski ways will be permitted. Existing ski ways can be improved to address skier safety, terrain stability and aesthetic issues. Changes must minimize ground disturbances, address aesthetic impacts and be reversible.
- Expansion, modification or introduction of snowmaking can be considered. Long- term decisions on snowmaking will be made in the long range planning process. Where applicable, long-term water withdrawal limits and protocols will be established to ensure minimum stream flows are maintained and a healthy aquatic

environment. Limits will be subject to review and adjustment based on the hydrological information available at the time the application for a water permit is sought. Ongoing monitoring will be required. Snowmaking operations will be addressed as part of the Best Management Practices component of the Long-Range Plan.

- Infrastructure (eg. water, sewer, power) capacity increase can be considered. Infrastructure must have sufficient capacity and meet environmental standards before ski area growth can take place.
- Exceptions to these Guidelines for facilities, parking, terrain modification limitations and adjustments to the perimeter of the Developed Area can be considered if there are Substantial Environmental Gains. Exceptions will not be considered for on-hill accommodation, Growth Limits, water permits and infrastructure requirements.

Summer Use

Existing and potential summer use of ski areas presents ecological challenges beyond those of winter operations. There are more and different wildlife species that utilize ski area slopes in summer than in winter including sensitive species such as grizzly bears, woodland caribou, mountain goat, lynx and wolverine. Wildlife are particularly vulnerable during the spring and early summer because of sensitive life cycle requirements such as nesting and rearing newborn. In addition, several of the ski areas have important wildlife routes adjacent to the leaseholds or transecting them that are essential to the long-term health of wildlife populations.

The summer season in the parks is the busiest visitor season. To address park ecological issues a range of visitor experience and ecological strategies have been developed for each park. While the number of summer users at ski areas will likely be substantially lower at most ski areas than the winter season, the ecological impacts at both the ski area and the broader park ecosystem are potentially greater.

The ecological circumstances, sensitivities and adjacent land use strategies are different at each ski area. For these reasons ski areas will be managed on a ski area by ski area basis and proposals for changes in summer use or new initiatives will only be considered where it can be clearly demonstrated that ecological issues can be successfully addressed. A precautionary approach will be applied to decisions on summer use.

In order to consider new summer use and changes to existing summer use, proposals must demonstrate that the following criteria will be met:

- No significant increase in wildlife-human conflict, wildlife habituation, displacement, disturbance or in human caused wildlife mortality.
- Wildlife habitat and movement patterns are protected.

- Visitor use is concentrated to minimize wildlife impacts. There is no significant increase in access to sensitive areas nor increase in visitor use adjacent to the ski area.
- The focus is on learning about the park and world heritage site. Services and activities that are in direct support of facilitating visitor learning opportunities can also be considered. New activities will only be considered if they are consistent with the park management plan or related park wide direction.
- Education must be an essential aspect of any new summer use outside of the base area.
- The experience reinforces the unique location in a national park.
- Potential impacts on other park users are satisfactorily addressed.
- Initiatives complement broader area land use strategies.

Site Guidelines for each ski area may identify additional site-specific requirements. Decisions on summer use will be determined through a Long-Range Plan and application of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*.

Where summer use is permitted it will be carefully managed to ensure ecological values are not compromised. Ongoing monitoring programs will be put in place to ensure ecological issues are being effectively addressed. Additional mitigations will be put in place if necessary.

Outside the developed area

- Ski area expansion into Undeveloped Areas, Un-skied Terrain and Un-serviced Terrain can only be considered if there are Substantial Environmental Gains. An example of an exception that can be considered is a leasehold reduction or reconfiguration that results in better protection of sensitive areas in exchange for development in less sensitive areas. New land, in exchange for removal of the sensitive areas from the leasehold, will be managed through a Licence of Occupation consistent with the tenure of the lease.
- Leasehold expansion will be prohibited. Licences of Occupation will be used to manage avalanche trigger zones that are outside of existing leasehold areas.

Memorable experiences

- The nature of ski area operations and visitor experiences will reflect and reinforce its location in a national park and world heritage site consistent with the expectations for communities and outlying commercial accommodation operations.
- In winter, new activities will be consistent with the park management plan or related park wide direction. Motorized (excluding ski lifts) activities will not be

permitted. Activities that take place inside commercial buildings and non-motorized activities, that take place on ski runs and that involve sliding downhill similar to skiing and snowboarding, can be considered outside of a Long-Range Plan subject to Superintendent approval.

Education

- Ski areas will be encouraged to provide winter educational opportunities that focus on the heritage values of the park and world heritage site as a component of the skiing/snowboarding experience.

Environmental stewardship

- An environmental management system and monitoring system, consistent with the environmental policies and the principles identified in *Sustainable Slopes, The Environmental Charter for Ski Areas*, will be a component of a Long-Range Plan.

Leases

- At the request of a ski area operator, a new 42-year lease will be negotiated as part of the long-range planning process. Exceptions to the Ski Area Management Guidelines and development in less sensitive areas can be considered, as previously noted, for those ski areas that advance leasehold reconfiguration during the planning process, to expedite better protection of park lands.
- Alternatively, a ski area operator may elect to negotiate a new 42-year lease upon expiration of their current lease.
- The new lease will rationalize the leasehold boundary with the perimeter of the new Developed Area and reflect the negotiated Growth Limits. New leases will continue to be subject to legislation, regulations, policy and guidelines in force and as modified from time to time.

Projects in advance of a new long range plan

Since 2002, criteria have been in place that allowed the consideration of projects that had minimal potential to impact cumulative effects, to be considered in advance of a new Long-Range Plan. Several projects have met the previous criteria and have either been approved or are at an advanced stage of discussion. These can continue to be considered and are listed below:

Marmot Basin

- Lower chalet deck expansion

Sunshine Village

- Terrace Wing hotel replacement
- Temporary snowmaking on lower ski out

Following the completion of Site Guidelines, and in recognition that it will take time to prepare a Long-Range Plan, Parks Canada may consider additional projects if they are entirely within the existing Developed Area, do not contribute significantly to cumulative effects, are not linked to other projects and Long-Range Plan decisions and do not result in incremental expansion. The following are the types of projects that may be considered:

- Replacement of existing ski lifts;
- Parking lot improvements within the existing footprint;
- Limited terrain modification of existing ski runs; and
- Improvements to snowmaking infrastructure to support existing ski runs currently covered by snowmaking; water withdrawal would need to remain within existing water permit limits.

Beyond the types of projects noted above, the consideration of future projects in advance of Site Guidelines and Long-Range Plans will be strictly restricted to those that are maintenance, repair, replacement on a true 'like-for-like' basis or that are supported by Parks Canada for environmental reasons.

Definitions

Developed Area

The Developed Area represents the area modified for skiing or other uses within the leasehold through the construction of physical works, or through clearing/removal of trees and other vegetation, landscaping, terrain modification or other activity associated with ski area operation. It includes ski runs, lift lines, parking areas, commercial buildings, operational buildings and forested areas between ski runs. It does not include Undeveloped Areas, Un-serviced Terrain and Un-skied Terrain. The perimeter of the Developed Area will be determined by:

- the top terminal of the upper most lifts;
- the outer limits of formally cut ski runs/gladed areas or approved Ski Terrain; and
- the perimeter of base/parking, staging and operational areas.

Growth Limits

The maximum amount of development/resource utilization over time; represents build out.

Like for Like

Buildings and facilities can be replaced if they remain essentially the same. Lifts can be replaced, but the nature and location cannot. Buildings can be replaced with ones that have the same size, functions, capacity and location.

Long-Range Plan

Outline the development and operation of the ski area for all seasons for a period of 5 to 15 years. Long-Range Plans will include an environmental management system and Best Management Practices. As required by the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, ski area Long-Range Plans are subject to a comprehensive study. Following the approval of a Long-Range Plan, development, consistent with the plan, can proceed to the permitting stage without the need for additional environmental assessments.

Serviced Terrain

An area that is lift accessible and regularly maintained to facilitate or improve visitor use and safety including the provision of signage, avalanche control, ski patrol, grooming, snowmaking, brushing, individual tree removal and access/egress.

Site Guidelines

Based on the Ski Area Management Guidelines, ski area specific Site Guidelines outline what development and use may be permitted, Growth Limits, the broad parameters for the type, nature and location of development and use and the approaches to enhance the character of the ski area's operation to reflect its location in a national park and world heritage site. They provide direction for the preparation of Long-Range Plans. Site Guidelines are intended to guide development and use for the foreseeable future.

Ski Terrain/Run

Ski terrain/run is an area that is routinely skied over the course of a normal ski day (subject to avalanche and snow conditions). The terrain includes alpine areas, formally cut runs/trails, gladed areas, cat tracks, roads, lift lines or connectors. The terrain has been developed or is serviced. It does not include areas that require ski touring, hiking, or climbing to access or egress areas that are not serviced.

Substantial Environmental Gain

An environmental gain is a positive change in key ecological conditions (wildlife movement and habitat, wildlife mortality, sensitive species/areas and aquatic ecosystems) that leads to the restoration or the long-term certainty of maintaining ecological integrity.

In order to determine if an ecological gain is substantial, the following criteria will be considered:

- magnitude – major as opposed to minor improvement;
- geographic context – broad scale as opposed to localized impact; and
- ecological context – improved protection or positive impacts to high value, rare or sensitive species/or multiple species.

Undeveloped Area is a natural area that has not been previously developed or altered for skiing or other uses.

Un-serviced Terrain may or may not be accessed from existing lifts, however services as described in Serviced Terrain are not provided.

Un-skied Terrain is an area that is Undeveloped and not serviced. Skiing is limited to those activities that typically occur in backcountry areas and involves ski touring, hiking, climbing and personal avalanche safety management.