



New York State Senate and Assembly Joint Budget Hearing on Environmental Conservation

Testimony Submitted by Scott Brandi, President, Ski New York

February 7, 2024

On behalf of the over 52 ski areas, thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony in support of the snow sports industry. Our industry not only improves New Yorkers' quality of life by promoting health and wellness through outdoor recreation and provides priceless family entertainment in the backdrop of our scenic mountains, but also helps drive New York State's economic and tourism engines.

Ski New York is an independent, member-based association with a steadfast commitment to advancing and expanding our state's snow sports industry. Ski NY works tirelessly to develop marketing programs, create educational opportunities and enhance public awareness of the benefits of snow sports throughout the state and region to foster new and continued growth for our members.

The New York State Ski Industry consists of 52 ski areas, more than any other State in the Nation. We are fifth in the Nation in annual skier visits at 4,000,000, with approximately two-thirds of these visits attributable to New York state residents. We employ 12,300 New Yorkers and have an economic impact of over \$1.4 billion during the four months of winter. Thus, the ski resort industry is very important to the state, particularly during the time of year when such businesses primarily operate (December through March). Additionally, the location of New York ski areas is widely distributed throughout the state (as opposed to being concentrated in a certain geographic sector of the state). There is a ski area within 90 minutes of nearly every major New York metro area; this distribution makes skiing and snowboarding an important contributor to employment and quality of life for residents all across New York State. Our ski areas are comprised of 49 privately owned and operated resorts, 46 of these are "Mom and Pop" type operations, 3 of the ski areas (Gore, Whiteface Mountain, and Belleayre ski centers) are managed by the State through the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA).

Ski areas are experiencing the impact of climate change. To address climate change and to stay competitive with the State-owned facilities as well as other states, NY's ski areas will need to have state-of-the-art snowmaking systems that allow them take advantage of shorter windows of snowmaking opportunities, as well as purchase equipment that will be more energy efficient and environmentally sound.

Our ski areas lost much of the snow they made prior to the rain and warmth of Christmas week. The loss of revenue ranges from 100% to 30% with the larger resorts being able to operate at higher capacity due to expansion of energy efficient snowmaking equipment, higher pumping capacity and water storage. Subsequent years can be successful only if significant investments are made in energy efficient snowmaking infrastructure.

Thus, we are respectfully requesting the inclusion in the enacted budget funding of \$10 million for the purchase of energy efficient snow making equipment that can be accessed by the State's private ski areas.

There is precedence for the State to provide funding for its private ski areas. In 2018, the Senate included language in its one-house budget resolution “directing NYSERDA to maintain a program which would provide \$20 million over 3 years for private ski areas to invest in snow making efficiency projects.”

This ultimately did not make it into the enacted budget, however later that year in 2018, NYSERDA and the Ski Areas of New York collaborated on a new program to help ski areas purchase energy-efficient snowmaking guns. The program provided up to \$5 million for NY Ski areas to upgrade and expand their snowmaking operations. A maximum of \$300,000 in funding was available per resort, with funds provided at an 80/20 match, with 80 percent of the funds paid by the program and 20 percent paid by the ski area, subject to maximum funding based on snow gun type. The average price for a stick snow gun is about \$3,000-\$4,000, and a fan snow gun could range between \$12,000-\$15,000. The program was very successful, with over 30 ski areas participating before the funding was exhausted.

Last year’s enacted budget included over \$90,000,000 in capital funding for the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA). In the previous three years over \$300,000,000 in capital funding was provided. The Executive has proposed \$80,500,000 in capital funding for ORDA in SFY 24-25. Some of this funding specifically targets energy efficient snowmaking and related equipment. The private sector competes directly with the State-owned ski areas. Privately owned ski areas must pay taxes and comply with regulations that are not imposed upon the ORDA resorts.

State investment in the ski industry will complement the investment in the Olympic Authority and advance winter tourism throughout the State. It will support additional private capital investment in our industry as well as develop further employment. Our ski areas add economic stability and outdoor recreation for upstate towns and villages. SKI NY’s Kids Ski Free for third and fourth graders has introduced over 100,000 NYS school children to winter sports. In addition, local ski areas provide a venue for continued youth involvement in racing, freestyle, and snowboard programs, promoting healthy outdoor activity. We look to you to help New York ski areas continue to be a viable part of the State’s future.

Funding for this program would benefit ski areas both small and large, from the Mid-Hudson regions, to the Catskills, the Adirondack and the North Country, as well as Western New York and the Southern Tier.

We urge your consideration as we are an industry in need and in order to sustain our current levels of operations and the current number of operating ski areas we need your support.

Respectfully,



Scott Brandi
President
SKI NY

Enc. Ski Areas of New York Economic Impact Analysis.