

Inside Stevens

Friday, April 4, 2008

April Closing Date

When we get to this time of the season the most often question we are asked is “will you extend your season?” and that is especially true this season with the amount of snow we have received.

First of all I want to dispel a persistent rumor - our closing date is not dictated to us by the USDA Forest Service (FS) or a condition in our Special Use Permit. The ending date for a season is a business decision we make. Once we establish our operating plan in the fall prior to a given season we do submit that plan to the FS for their review and approval. If we were to make a business decision to extend the season, we'd write a plan supplement for the FS.

When we write the operating plan and establish an ending date for the season, we look at a number of factors – primary among those is the level of visits we typically get in April. It isn't an issue of having enough snow; it is the visitation during the time of year. Our historic data on visitation in late March and April shows us time and again that the level of visitation is not enough for a sustainable operation. There is a point at which it is not fiscally viable to continue operations. We need a certain number of visits per week to justify the cost of the operation. Once the weather warms and it is spring (well technically) in the city, many other activities tug at people and they begin to redirect their attention to gardening, boating and golf. If they have kids, often times the spring sports like soccer and baseball take precedence. All these activities compete with skiing and snowboarding.

Every season we watch and monitor our visitation levels in late March and do discuss the possibilities of a longer season (at least on weekends). Another consideration is the weather. As long as the weather is “winter like” people are more likely to continue to enjoy the sport. However, when we have warm spring sunshine or a significant rain event we find that skier and snowboarder interest drops off substantially.

Another consideration, especially in late March, is whether we have enough employees to operate past our established closing date. Since many of our employees work seasonal jobs, they make commitments to move on to their “summer” job based on our closing date. Without a good base of employees to operate, it is challenging to provide the level of services and operations we have set as our standard.

As in the past, our future operating plans will be based on the level of business we have historically seen along with trends we see in the season and given the conditions.

John A. Gifford
General Manager