

Inside Stevens

January 3, 2009

Taking the (Environmental) Initiative at Stevens Pass...

There are times when the effort required to operate a comprehensive environmental program in a remote mountain setting becomes overwhelming. Standing inside a 5-foot-tall trash dumpster trying to free a jammed lid with brute force can give even the most committed environmentalist pause to wonder how worthwhile his efforts are! Are we really making a difference? It's one thing to draft the policies on paper, but it's quite another to put them into practice within a volatile business like a day-use ski and snowboard area.

We're up against some big forces and behaviors here, and it can take many hundreds of individual efforts before we see changes. One person separating out their recycling after lunch isn't going to affect much, but the incremental effect of many people does make a real difference. Our new recycling station –the size of a very large dump-truck– fills every few weeks; clearly many visitors and staff are participating. I sure hope they are, as it's my job to get them to do so!

It's also clear that our actions are not taking place in a vacuum: these days we are connected to a much bigger economic and social reality. For example, our Facilities staff are dutifully baling cardboard so we can sell it to an industrial recycler, but thanks to the economy, and the related drop in imported goods from China, no one's making boxes, and the market has tanked. Now, I've got stacks of cardboard looking for a home and it's in everyone's way.

Regardless of challenges like these, at Stevens Pass we firmly believe that careful stewardship of our mountain environment is essential to the ongoing success of this winter resort, and we are committed to a genuine corporate environmental ethic. In fact, we think there is no alternative – we must act with sustainability in mind. Wide-ranging initiatives launched over the past several years, from biodegradable tableware to large-scale recycling, are indeed softening the resort's impact not just on the National Forest where we operate, but also far beyond.

We know that combating the effects of global warming is critical for the future of entire ski/snowboard industry and we seek to lead by example in that arena, governed by our environmental plan. After operating in this location for 70 years, we also know that protecting and restoring the natural resources that have provided us our livelihood is the least we can do. And we know that discerning snow enthusiasts will favor a resort that acknowledges and mitigates its own impacts.

So where do things stand this season? Here are a few new and updated programs that we're proud of:

New Environment & Sustainability Staff – We have a new division with two full-time employees who focus on long-range planning, near-term sustainability issues, and the reduction of overall environmental impacts from our resort operations; only a handful of winter resorts nationwide have any staff dedicated solely to these important tasks.

100% Carbon-Offset with Windpower – In renewing our contract for a second year with Bonneville Environmental Foundation, we're still the only winter resort in all of the Pacific Northwest to offset the greenhouse gas impacts of our electricity and propane use with 100%

green power. By purchasing these offsets, we meet our own sustainability goals, as well as investing in new windpower farms across the Western US. Guests can buy their own offsets too, helping mitigate the impact of tailpipe emissions from their journey to the resort.

Dramatically Expanded Recycling Program – We have switched to a new, inclusive recycling system in which all items (paper, plastic, glass, aluminum, steel, even paper beverage cups) are placed in one container without sorting, making widespread participation much easier. So far this season, we have deployed new recycling bins at various locations, and will soon have them on the slopes as well. As noted above, under this new arrangement, our guests and staff are generating approximately 15 cubic yards every two weeks, saving us money, and reducing landfill impacts. On the industrial side, we have also overhauled our hazardous waste recycling: we now divert all fluorescent light bulbs, batteries, and appliances to appropriate commercial facilities.

Switching from Paper to Electronic Systems – For the 2008-09 season we implemented a massive overhaul of our paper-based sales, ticketing, and rental systems using a cutting-edge electronic tracking and commerce system. This means quicker access through the gates for guests, and less paperwork across the resort. For example, in our busy rental shop alone, this move reduced paper usage by 66 percent! In prior years, the amount of triplicate forms used each season would stretch 35 miles if lined up end-to-end. In addition, our lift tickets and discount cards will no longer be single-use paper products, but instead re-loadable, durable plastic versions, usable (even washable!) for years.

Foodservice Waste Reduction – We're pleased to announce that all the disposable food & beverage containers we use are now made from certified biodegradable and renewable cornstarch or paperboard (no more plastics and Styrofoam® cups), and many go the extra step by containing recycled content. This not only reduces reliance on non-renewable petrochemical products, but also saves landfill space, and costs Stevens about the same, so the choice was easy! Soon, we hope to close the loop by trying to pilot a compost program for these containers, producing topsoil.

Transportation Alternatives – Back in 2000, we began a scheduled *Park & Ride* service based in the foothills west of the Cascades, in order to lessen single-occupant vehicle usage of the upper Stevens Pass Highway, reduce parking demand at the resort, and provide a lower-impact transportation option. Starting this winter, we launched a direct bus shuttle service from the downtown REI in Seattle that has proved very popular so far. Also new this year is an online application for the popular social networking site, *Facebook*, which will enable guests to share their travel plans, driving routes, and snow-riding abilities in order to promote further carpool opportunities. This is all in addition to our extensive bus transit fleet for employees that we launched a decade ago, and which operates 8 roundtrips/day on both sides of the Cascades. Our fleet delivers over two million employee passenger miles per season, keeping hundreds of cars off the road every week, and preventing many tons of carbon emissions per day.

These are just a few of the efforts underway that collectively help us mitigate the unavoidable impacts of living, working, and recreating in this wonderful setting. We are constantly seeking new ways to reduce consumption and waste, and we welcome suggestions from our guests. We invite interested readers to visit our website for more information:

www.StevensPass.com/Environment