Supply Chain Sustainability: SKI INDUSTRY INITIATIVES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

By 2040, the world's population will have grown by 2 billion people. As all industries project the impact of that growth on resources, environment, and society, it has become abundantly clear that a certain level of accountability rests with businesses. How have businesses within the ski industry responded to this need for corporate responsibility, and what steps are they taking to ensure that the natural environments and communities we cherish will continue to thrive for generations to come? By looking at the contributions of resorts, suppliers, and industry leaders to supply chain sustainability, we can gain a better understanding of the breadth and depth of the solutions that are currently being implemented, and how to expand these initiatives into the future.

Sustainability and the supply chain was the topic of a webinar recently hosted by Brendle Group, a supplier company to NSAA based in Fort Collins, Colo., and supporting partner of NSAA’s Climate Challenge and Sustainable Slopes Grant Program. Wikipedia states that “sustainability in the supply chain is increasingly seen among high-level executives as essential to delivering long-term profitability.” Moderated by Judy Dorsey, president and principal engineer at Brendle, the webinar offered perspectives about current trends, best practices, and challenges. Included on the panel were Anita Weise, VP of procurement, Vail Resorts Management Company, Colo.; Ross Freeman, environment and sustainability manager, Stevens Pass Mountain Resort, Wash.; Doug Freeman, VP of global supply chain and product development, Patagonia, Reno, Nev.; Jeff Wilson, VP of sustainability, Quiksilver, Calif.; and Beth Jensen, director of corporate responsibility, Outdoor Industry Association, Utah. The following article is a recap of the webinar discussion.

**HOW DO WE DEFINE SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SKI INDUSTRY?**

Anita Weise, VP of procurement at Vail Resorts, sums it up as: “meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. [Sustainability] encompasses social welfare, protection of the environment, efficient use of natural resources, and economic well-being.”

Some of the key issues surrounding supplier sustainability performance in the ski industry include: environmental impact, cost efficiencies and risk management, human rights and working conditions, and community building. Programs like Sustainable Slopes (which began in 1999), the Charter in 2000, the Golden Eagle Award, and the Climate Challenge (currently in its second year) have encouraged ski areas to monitor their environmental impact and shift their business practices based on their findings. Ski areas participating in the Climate Challenge have committed to monitoring greenhouse gases and implementing at least one new reduction project per year. This has translated into working with suppliers to address their greenhouse gas challenges as well.

As Weise states, commitment to the reduction of greenhouse gases and other environmental issues has changed the way Vail and other resorts select and interface with their suppliers. “When we're sending out a bid or doing a formal RFX, we have a set of standard sustainability questions that we are now asking our suppliers: 1) Have you measured and taken steps to reduce...”
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hasn’t stopped the area from finding creative ways to do so. “Because I’m working with a limited budget in a very small program, I’m always looking for opportunities to really leverage and maximize the dollars I do have – for example, by piggybacking onto something the vendor or supplier might already be doing, like the take-back programs,” he says.

Freeman offers the following solutions to smaller resorts who may be facing similar resource limitations: seek out opportunities to leverage existing partnerships, assist vendors in restarting stalled initiatives, piggyback environmental initiatives onto better-funded departments, offer to serve as a pilot or demonstration project, ensure the vendor understands your organization’s philosophy, seek out green partners/vendors at local conferences, and apply for state/federal environmental grants to fund your initiatives.

Freeman describes one of the successes Stevens Pass had in implementing their green philosophy: “We found a local [cooking] oil that has a higher cost but a longer lifespan in the fryers, and it turns out it also includes free collection by a local renewable biodiesel producer, who collects it once a season in a huge vacuum truck powered by biodiesel. It’s this incredible full circle, and I love telling that story to guests because they really get excited about it.”

In terms of supplier perspectives on sustainability, Patagonia offers a particularly impressive one. The company mission is: “Make the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, and use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.” All of Patagonia’s strategies emanate from this mission statement. A values-based organization, Patagonia translates its mission into action with initiatives like PCR fleece (made from recycled plastic).

**GUESTS ARE AWARE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS... AND ONE-THIRD SAY THAT THIS COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCES THEIR DECISION TO SKI OR RIDE AT STEVENS PASS.**

- Ross Freeman, Environment and Sustainability Manager, Stevens Pass Mountain Resort

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**WE CONTINUALLY SEEK OUT AND ASSESS, COLLABORATIVELY EVOLVE, AND ASSIST OUR MEMBER COMPANIES IN ADOPTING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL BEST PRACTICES**

- Beth Jensen, Director of Corporate Responsibility, Outdoor Industry Association

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**Anita Weise, Vice President of Procurement, Vail Resorts**

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**Ross Freeman, Environment and Sustainability Manager, Stevens Pass Mountain Resort**
Jeff Wilson, vice President of Sustainability, Quiksilver

“SHARED KNOWLEDGE IN THE INDUSTRY DRIVES YOU TOWARD THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SUPPLIERS AND THE RIGHT ANSWERS TO LOOK FOR.”

– JEFF WILSON, VP SUSTAINABILITY, QUIKSLIVER

Doug Freeman, vice President of Global Supply Chain and Product Development, Patagonia

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