



**Outdoor Recreation Day
Ski Industry TESTIMONY**

Vermont Ski Areas Association
Molly Mahar, President
February 12, 2025

The Vermont Ski Areas Association is a non-profit trade association representing 22 alpine and 26 cross-country ski areas across Vermont. Ski areas are not only major economic drivers and employers in the rural communities where most are located, but skiing is also an important part of the state's tourism, heritage, and culture. Ski areas have successfully conserved and protected lands through master planning and careful management to benefit our state, its natural resources, and the environment over many decades.

Vermont is the top ski state in the East and number four in the country, measured by business levels. Skiing brings close to \$1 billion in direct visitor spending each winter and the industry supports roughly 13,000 jobs; twenty five percent of those are year-round positions.

Outdoor recreation is an important gateway for Vermonters and visitors to understand the importance of our environment. Skiers come to the mountains for recreational opportunities but also to experience the mountain environment. We strive to manage that environment properly, so people will continue to visit, the environment will be protected and the capacity to support and promote outdoor recreation will be enhanced.

Ski areas strive to make the mountains more accessible and welcoming to all. Thousands of school children participate in multi-week programs at low or no cost, to ensure skiing and snowboarding are accessible to Vermont kids. We are working to understand and remove barriers for people from historically marginalized communities and working with media and influencers of color who are skiers or are interested in learning, so they can tell their Vermont story and elevate the message of snowsports and travel opportunities in Vermont to their followers. And we support Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports in their mission to help people of all abilities enjoy snowsports in Vermont.

Ski areas are part of Vermont's working landscape; they are stewards of the land, and their managers take this responsibility seriously, spending millions of dollars in planning and permitting to accomplish this to support the state's recreation economy. We believe that a diverse and connected ecosystem is more resilient, that conserved and managed lands can help to mitigate climate change through carbon storage and sequestration and help to maintain habitat connectivity in Vermont and the Northeast.

Ski areas are managed using an array of tools which include permanent conservation by fee ownership or easements by the State or the US Forest Service and through the Act 250 and Agency of Natural Resources permitting processes. These impose conditions that that guide how ski areas are operated in

harmony with the goals of ANR, providing significant protection for the lands, wildlife and plant species on managed and adjacent lands and has resulted in significant permanent conservation.

Vermont's ski areas exist on privately-owned lands, state lands and federal lands and usually combinations of private and state or federal land. And while Act 250 governs the use, development, management, and protection of lands where ski areas operate, often state and federal land use policies govern their management as well. Ski areas that operate on or partially on state lands must manage according to approved annual stewardship plans and the same is true for areas on federal lands.

Most ski areas utilize a master planning process for future development, management, and conservation. This is typically a lengthy and expensive process, but one which provides more certainty and predictability by creating a framework for individual projects, and ensuring that the ski area, the local community, the region, and the state all have a shared vision and agree on the goals and preferred outcomes for the managed lands.

Finally, snowmaking is an operational tool that improves resilience for resorts and mountain communities. For more than two decades, Vermont's ski areas have worked with Efficiency Vermont and within the Energy Savings Account pilot to improve operational efficiencies, quality, and coverage of their snowmaking systems. These investments in snowmaking infrastructure have made Vermont's ski areas industry leaders -- more competitive while lowering carbon emissions and freeing up energy for other uses. Ski areas are going beyond snowmaking projects, using renewable energy, and moving into larger thermal projects. Jay Peak Resort's recent installation of a smart 3-megawatt electric boiler which reduces their propane consumption by 60% and has helped to mitigate some of the electrical grid constraints associated with the Sheffield Wind Farm, so more renewable electricity is being used in the homes of Vermonters. This is one of the largest standalone carbon reducing projects in Vermont and it's truly a win for Jay Peak, the Northeast Kingdom and the state. Ski areas will continue more projects like this in the future as they seek to decarbonize their operations further.

Thank you.