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NSAA RELEASES SKIER VISIT NUMBERS FOR 2019/20
Pandemic derailed what could have been a top 4 season

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) announced today that skier visit numbers to U.S. areas totaled 51.1 million for the 2019/20 ski season – down almost 14% over the 2018/19 season. A skier visit is counted every time a skiing or snowboarding guest visits a ski area or resort. The majority of the 470 U.S. ski areas closed prematurely in mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, eliminating the critical spring break visitation period. Had the season continued along its track prior to the pandemic, the 2019/20 season would have been the fourth best season on record since NSAA began surveying visitation in the 1978/79 season.

“To have two years in a row potentially rank in the top five seasons ever shows the strength of the industry,” said Kelly Pawlak, NSAA president and CEO, referring to the 2018/19 season and the truncated 2019/20 season. “That being said, it is astounding how quickly this season went from promising to a complete disappointment.”

Pawlak points out the industry’s resiliency when it comes to recovery in the face of COVID-19.

“Ski areas got to work immediately, making plans to bring back staff and guests,” she said. “We will rebound but the transition is packing a serious punch, requiring bold thinking and adaptation to new protocols while still delivering the same excellent guest experience.”

Additional data shows that the average U.S. ski area was only open for 99 days this past season, down from 121 days in the 2018/19 season. Forced closures most greatly impacted the Western regions, as many Midwest and Southeast ski areas were close to or had reached their planned closing days. However, skier visits were down across all [six geographic regions](#) of the country.

The spring break time period generally accounts for 20% of a ski area’s visitation and revenue, and is surpassed only by the Christmas holiday period. NSAA estimates that COVID-19 cost the U.S. ski industry at least \$2 billion, with estimates reaching as high as \$5 billion with the 2020/21 downturn included. This figure was derived from NSAA’s historical revenue and visitation data.

It is difficult to interpret how snowfall could have affected visitation this season, as many ski areas did not track accumulation after closing in March. The average U.S. ski area counted 149 inches of snow this season, down from an average of 210 inches last season. March and April are generally two of the snowiest months of the year, especially in the West.

“Imagine running a resort in the Sierras where it started to snow on the day they closed and kept on snowing, amounting to over seven feet in some areas,” said Pawlak. “The timing of the snowfall and the closures were unfortunate not only for our ski areas, but for skiers and riders across the country.”

NSAA conducts annual surveys of its members to analyze the position of the ski industry. The 2019/20 skier visit number release was delayed this year to allow time for ski area employees to return to work and compile the data. This year, two of NSAA’s flagship reports – the Kottke End-of-Season Survey and the Demographic Study – are being combined to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the state of the ski industry.

The full Kottke/Demographic report will be released to NSAA members in mid-July. For additional data and analysis, please email Adrienne Saia Isaac, NSAA director of marketing and communications, at aisaac@nsaa.org.

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The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) is a trade association representing the business interests of ski area operators, industry suppliers and affiliated members. Formed in 1962, NSAA designs and supports ski industry initiatives and programs covering safety, sustainability and growth from its Lakewood, Colo., headquarters. Learn more about NSAA’s mission and programs at NSAA.org.