

By Ambika Chawla

**CAN THE OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY SAVE THE PLANET? THEY WILL CERTAINLY TRY.**

# The Outdoor Business Climate Partnership

**A POWERFUL VOICE TO PROTECT THE PLANET**

**A**t the end of January of this year, the Outdoor Industry Association, Snowsports Industries America, and the National Ski Areas Association, announced the creation of the Outdoor Business Climate Partnership (OBCP), which will work to raise public and political awareness about the detrimental impacts of climate change, with a focus on the impacts for winter tourism and associated businesses and communities.

With \$887 billion in annual consumer spending for the outdoor recreation industry, the Partnership has the potential to become a powerful voice to protect the planet.

*“The future of winter is under siege,” said Chris Steinkamp, director of marketing for the SIA. “It is important that the outdoor industry engage and do something about this. We must galvanize our voices if we are to have success in tackling climate change.”*

The OBCP will focus on policy advocacy at the state and federal levels.

**T**he National Weather Service has reported a 30% drop in snowfall since 1975. According to data collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the United Nations, spring snowpack in Washington state, Oregon and northern California has dropped by 50-70% since the early 1900's.

The five warmest years on record have taken place since 2010, with 2016 the warmest ever in recorded history. According to a recent policy report by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), without intervention, winter temperatures are projected to warm an additional 4-10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century, with subsequent reductions in snow cover area, snowfall, and snow seasons.

As a result of diminished snowfall, the winter tourism industry in the United States is in danger. The 2018 economic report by the non-governmental organization Protect Our Winters found that “in low snow years, reduced participation decreased value added by over \$1 billion and cost 17,400 jobs compared to an average season.”

New York's ski industry could lose half its season due to climate change according to a recent report by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The study noted that by 2050, climate change will cut ski resort winter seasons by half. Ski resort areas in the Pacific Northwest, Southwest, and Upper Midwest will be the hardest hit.

**“T**he NSAA is particularly concerned about climate change because human livelihoods in the winter tourism industry are at stake—livelihoods depend upon a healthy climate,” said Adrienne Saia Isaac, director of marketing and communications for the NSAA.

As the leading ski state in the United States, ski resorts in Colorado are likely to lose millions of dollars if climate change continues unabated. The EPA estimates that by 2090, in Colorado, some ski areas will see seasons shortened by as much as 80% from present day levels. According to a 2015 economic impact study conducted for the Colorado Ski Country USA and Vail Resorts, the Colorado ski industry generates a \$4.8 billion annual economic impact and supports more than 46,000 jobs year-round. The study also notes that ski industry workers earn \$19 billion on an annual basis.

A 2006 study by the Aspen Global Climate Change Institute found that over the last 25 years in Aspen, a beautiful ski resort town nestled in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, known for its abundance of aspen trees, average temperatures have increased by about 3-4 degrees F.

Future projections for the Aspen region indicate a trend towards shorter winters, and fewer days with below freezing temperatures. With the continued rise in temperatures, skiing in Aspen could be a thing of the past by the year 2100. Such a scenario would devastate the town where the economy and jobs are dependent upon winter tourism.

The OBCP will no doubt benefit from the existing innovative climate initiatives of its members. In 2007, for example, the NSAA adopted the "Climate Challenge," a voluntary program where ski operators engage in a multi-year process where they develop an inventory of their greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and from there, implement actions to reduce emissions.

And, in 2018, the OIA introduced its "Vote the Outdoors" campaign, which informs members on how elected officials are voting on issues related to the outdoors industry. The campaign includes an interactive tool on their website where members can look up their representatives' grades on what is called the "Congressional Scorecard."

Currently, the Outdoor Business Climate Partnership has a number of exciting initiatives underway, with the aim to push for bipartisan solutions to tackle climate change.

*"The Partnership grew out of this question of how we can unify our voice as outdoor businesses to create these bipartisan solutions to tackle climate change which is not just an environmental issue—it is an economic issue,"* said Andrew Pappas, policy manager for the OIA.

**O**n May 21-22, representatives of the Outdoor Business Climate Partnership, in collaboration with the non-profit organization CERES, will convene in Washington D.C. to educate members of Congress about the importance of carbon pricing initiatives to tackle climate change.

CERES is a nonprofit organization with offices in San Francisco and Boston which works with investors and leaders of private companies to design solutions to tackle climate change.

In addition, the team will present to lawmakers the outdoor industry's position on legislation considered most effective to address the climate challenge, with the aim to come to

consensus on how to work together to achieve mutual goals for sustainable development.

*"Another initiative at the federal level is the NSAA's current push for the adoption of Bill H.R. 763 - the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019,"* says Adrienne Saia Isaac of the NSAA. Bill H.R. is currently in the House of Representatives and if enacted, will impose a fee on the producer and importers of fuels, such as crude oil, gas, and coal. According to the non-governmental organization GovTrack, the bill would introduce a fee on carbon at the point of extraction, beginning at \$15 per metric ton and would then transition to \$10 a year.

**T**he bill aims to reduce carbon pollution as energy companies and consumers move towards more environmentally friendly, cheaper forms of fuel.

*"The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act of 2019 is an important initiative to tackle climate change and has the support of the 4 ski associations and over 20 ski resorts,"* said Adrienne Saia Isaac.

Individually, the OIA, SIA, and NSAA will collaborate closely with ski organizations engaged in advocacy for climate-friendly policies at the state level. When the OBCP was formed in January, in tandem, a group of state ski associations released the statement "State Ski Trade Associations United Behind Climate Action." The statement was created by leading ski area trade associations such as the Colorado Ski Country, Ski Vermont, and the Pacific Northwest Ski Areas Association.

According to the joint statement, *"As economic drivers in our respective states we urge policy makers to understand that we can't wait for lasting, bipartisan action to reduce carbon emissions, promote energy innovation, and support a rapid, responsible transition to a clean energy economy."*

State ski organizations such as the Colorado Ski Country look forward to collaboration with the members of the Outdoor Business Climate Partnership. Colorado Ski Country currently coordinates a lobbying initiative which both monitors climate-related legislation relevant to the ski industry while advocating for policies and legislation aimed at reducing carbon emissions.

*"Colorado Ski Country's policy and lobbying team monitors all legislation at the state Capitol including all climate change-oriented legislation. We work with legislators and other interested parties to support policies that expand renewable energy in Colorado and mitigate the impacts of climate change. We also monitor all proceedings at the Public Utilities Commission where many of the legislative policies passed at the Capitol are actually implemented by utilities and weigh in on behalf of our members on those proceedings,"* said Chris Linsmayer, public affairs director of the Colorado Ski Country.

**C**olorado Ski Country USA lobbies on behalf of our members on all climate related bills and initiatives at the capitol.

While it is unlikely that climate change legislation at the federal level will be enacted in the near future, the partnership believes that it is important to engage

members of Congress in a dialogue about the importance of passing climate change legislation as such legislation is critical not only for the health of the planet, but for the economy as well.

*"It is important to continue to be part of the dialogue on climate change policy in Washington D.C, knowing that even if climate legislation is not going to move for the moment, that we are talking about its importance to the outdoor industry. And, looking towards the 2020 elections, you already see that climate change is increasingly a part of the political platform of candidates,"* says Pappas.

Thus far, nearly every Democratic presidential candidate for 2020 has expressed their commitment to address the climate challenge. Candidates such as Jay Inslee, Cory Booker, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, and Elizabeth Warren have all flagged climate change as a top priority. *"This, to me, is an existential crisis that impacts not just you and me and our generation but our kids and our grandchildren, and we must accept the moral responsibility of leaving these kids, future generations, a planet that is healthy and habitable,"* Sanders said in a CNN town hall. Our nation's outdoors industries agree. **YS**