

Human Powered Snowsports Trends and Economic Impacts

A Growing Trend

Human-powered snowsports are the fastest growing segment of winter recreation and include backcountry skiing, alpine touring, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. According to SnowSports Industries America (SIA), nearly six million human-powered skiers and snowboarders explored the backcountry during the 2013/2014 season.¹ During the 2015 calendar year over 4.6 million people participated in cross-country skiing, more than 2 million went backcountry skiing or splitboarding, and over 3.9 million people went snowshoeing.^{2,3} The Outdoor Foundation's 2016 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report found that telemark skiing is among the top 10 activities for growth in participation rates over the past 3 years.⁴ Of all forms of active outdoor recreation studied, telemark skiing had the eighth highest rates of growth. In addition, the latest Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring Results report states that 3.1% of visitors to National Forest lands participated in cross-country skiing or snowshoeing and 2.4% of visitors reported that cross-country skiing or snowshoeing was their primary activity.⁵ The Forest Service does not differentiate between cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and other forms of ski touring. Finally, a 2012 study released by the Physical Activity Council showed single digit annual growth rates in human-powered snowsports, while noting a decline in participation in motorized snowsports.⁶

Internal USDA research predicts a similar trend into the future, with undeveloped skiing (which includes ski touring) projected as one of the top five growth activities in the next several decades while motorized snow activities will see one of the lowest rates of participation growth. The number of participants in undeveloped skiing, according to Forest Service research, is projected to increase by 55% – 106% by 2060.⁷ The number of people participating in backcountry skiing and splitboarding increased 21% between the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 seasons and sales of backcountry ski and snowboard equipment increase substantially each year.³ Conversely, new snowmobile sales have been on the decline since at least 1997.⁷

Economics

This ever-increasing interest and participation in human-powered backcountry snowsports has a significant economic impact. During the 2015/2016 winter season sales of backcountry ski and snowshoe gear surpassed \$50 million, continuing a trend of increasing each year.³ Ski touring gear alone topped \$54 million.¹ SnowSports Industries America reported that the amount of backcountry equipment sold grew 14%, while sales of backcountry accessories grew 52% compared to the previous season.³

Outdoor recreation is a significant, and growing, segment of the American economy. In 2012 the Outdoor Industry Association reported that the outdoor generating \$120.7 billion in product sales and \$524.8 billion in trips or related spending, and was responsible for creating or sustaining 6.1 million jobs.⁹

In addition, this sector of the economy has been growing steadily, even during the recent Recession.⁹ Snowsports constitute a substantial portion of the outdoor recreation economy. In their 2012 report the Outdoor Industry Foundation stated that over \$53 billion is spent annually on snowsports. This spending supports over 500,000 jobs, contribute \$3.2 billion in federal taxes, and \$3.7 billion in state and local taxes.⁹ While these figures do include motorized in addition to non-motorized snowsports, as well as spending related to ski areas, the human-powered segment of this group is not insignificant. Between 2008 and 2011 the percentage of

Americans over the age of 16 who participated in winter recreation grew by 4 million people.¹⁰ As of 2012, 7.2% of American adults, 10.2% in Western states, participated in human-powered snowsports.¹⁰ This includes 4.3 million cross country skiers, 4.1 million snowshoers, and 2.1 million backcountry ski/snowboarders.¹⁰

Local Impact

Americans spend over \$4.8 billion each year on equipment, clothing, and services related to non-motorized winter recreation.¹¹ With the exponential rise in sales of backcountry ski boots and bindings, skis, splitboards, and other backcountry equipment this figure is only projected to increase.³ This activity has a real impact on local economies. For example, the Gallatin National Forest in Montana analyzed the economic impact of non-motorized winter sports as part of a recent travel planning process. In this study the Forest Service estimated that cross country skiing on the Gallatin National Forest generated approximately 30 local jobs and had an economic impact of over \$400,000.¹¹ In addition, researchers who study forest service visitor use data have found that on average, people who travel to National Forests to cross country ski (a category that includes snowshoeing and ski touring) spend \$97/day or \$537 per overnight trip.¹² Locals, meanwhile, spend an average of \$27/day for day trips and \$259 per overnight trips.



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In 2013, the Winter Wildlands Alliance released a report detailing the economic impact of winter backcountry recreation in the Teton-Yellowstone region. This report is the first of its kind to specifically examine the economic benefit brought on by non-motorized winter recreation. The authors found that winter backcountry recreation contributed over \$20 million to local economies in the Teton-Yellowstone region and attracted both residents and visitors to the area.¹³ Direct sources of revenue that stem from backcountry winter recreation include guide and instruction services; equipment rentals, repairs, and purchase; apparel and other gear

purchases; food; and lodging.¹³ The economic impact of local residents who take part in backcountry snowsports is \$6.4 million. Meanwhile, visitors who are drawn to this region for its backcountry winter recreation opportunities contribute \$12 million to the local economy, including generating almost



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\$3 million in wages and \$1 million in state and local tax revenues.¹³ The indirect economic impacts of these activities are considerably greater.¹³

These studies demonstrate the value of human-powered backcountry winter recreation for state and local economies. Human-powered snowsports fuel economic growth and create jobs. Trends indicate that these activities will continue to increase in popularity, bringing economic growth and opportunity to areas with opportunities for quality, non-motorized, backcountry winter recreation.

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Winter Wildlands Alliance is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting winter wildlands and a quality human powered snowsports experience on public lands.

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