

Non-profit Groups Collaborate to Run Bethel Village Ski Center

The cross country ski center based at the Bethel Inn Resort will be operated by a team of three non-profit groups this winter. Mahoosuc Pathways, Bethel Outing Club, and Gould Academy plan to open the Bethel Village Ski Center on December 23rd, according to Bethel Inn Resort General Manager, Allen Connors. The center will continue to offer skiing, snowshoeing and fat biking on the Inn's scenic trails, as well as Gould Academy's adjacent campus trails and its Pine Hill Competition Trails. Said Connors, "We have enjoyed offering top notch trails and service to our guests for years, but this partnership with these dedicated, local organizations will create noticeable improvement this year."

"The groups saw the ski center as a critical recreational amenity for the community, and there is huge excitement among all of the partners," said Gabe Perkins, Executive Director of Mahoosuc Pathways, which will orchestrate the collaboration. Perkins stated that the initiative could expand to a network of year round, multi-use trails encompassing venues like Sunday River and Mt. Abram.

The Bethel Outing Club (BOC) will provide programming, including ski lessons, clinics, special events, and presentations for locals and visitors. Major events include the New England Nordic Ski Association Women's Ski Day on January 22nd, Flying Moose Classic February 4th, and the New England Bill Koch League Ski Festival March 3-5. "The Bethel area has built a reputation in the Northeast for hosting successful Nordic events", said BOC board member Carlie Casey. Casey, a veteran technical delegate for the International Ski Federation, cited the 2012 USCSA National Collegiate Championships held at the Bethel Inn and organized by former Nordic Center director Mike Cooper.

The collaboration will integrate the Gould Academy trails, which in recent years have been widened, graded, and standardized under the supervision of the school's Nordic coach and Trails Director, Jeremy Nellis. Nellis and BOC members recently tested a two-gun snowmaking system that Gould and the BOC purchased two years ago. According to Nellis, "All the ingredients are here for us to make a big leap forward as a trails community." Gould and the BOC jumped in "at the eleventh hour" as a backup site to host the regionwide U16 championships in March 2016, thanks to a heroic volunteer effort during a year with scarce natural snow.

The groups all realize the enormity of the challenge, given that they were not approached until Thanksgiving, leaving less than a month to organize a collaborative plan, raise start-up funds, and tap local skiers and trail supporters for a largely volunteer project. "We think the nonprofit model gives the Nordic operation the best chance for long-term sustainability, and so far the community is jumping in with both feet," said BOC Community Coach Wade Kavanagh.

Volunteer opportunities, season pass purchase options, wish list and information regarding tax-deductible donations can be found at www.mahoosucpathways.org and by contacting Mahoosuc Pathways at 207-200-8240 or info@mahoosucpathways.org.