

NSAA Reports 5 Percent Decline in 2014-15 Visits

U.S. ski areas tallied an estimated 53.6 million skier and snowboarder visits during the 2014-15 season -- down 5 percent from last season's 56.5 million total, and down 3.8 percent from the 5-year industry average of 55.7 million skier visits, according to The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA).

Despite a stronger economy, weather challenges across all regions of the country contributed to this drop in skier visits. Nationally, snowfall was 28 percent below average this season -- particularly on the West Coast -- and especially frigid temperatures in the Midwest and the East, along with sizeable snow storms in the Northeast, impacted the ability of skiers and snowboarders to even get to many ski areas.

NSAA's survey results also contained some particularly positive news. For example, the results from the critical Rocky Mountain region were well above the region's 5-year average. Similarly, both the Northeast Region and the Southeast Region also had seasons that surpassed their 5-year averages. While the three regions were each just slightly below last season's skier visits, both the Rocky Mountain region (where Colorado set an all-time record for skier visits last year), and New England (which had a very strong season in 2013-14) performed well despite weather challenges.

NSAA's survey results also showed strong growth in season pass sales, which were up 6.2 percent from the previous season -- an important indicator in the public's demand for skiing and snowboarding.

The Northeast region was barely off last season's strong skier visits numbers by 0.8 percent, and the Southeast region was also down slightly by 1.4 percent. The Rocky Mountain region was down slightly from last season by 2.1 percent. The Midwest region, which suffered from brutal cold spells, dropped 9.3 percent from last season. The Pacific Southwest was down 6.4 percent, and the Pacific Northwest fell by 36.3 percent over the previous season, declines driven largely by weather.

In the 24 seasons of available NSAA's Kottke End of Season Survey data (1991-92 to 2014-15), this season is estimated to have had the lowest snowfall on record for half the country (the Pacific Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and Rocky Mountain regions), and the second-lowest snowfall overall in the past quarter-century. By contrast, snowfall was slightly above average in the Northeast and Southeast regions.