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Resort Municipality Initiative

2019 - 2020 Report from the Fernie Nordic Society

This report covers the Winter Trail Maintenance program funded under the City of Fernie Resort Development Strategy in the amount of \$10,000.

Overview

This season of nordic skiing in Fernie was again very good with many skiers on the trail systems and several planned activities throughout the winter. The late arrival of the first snowfall delayed the use of our trails to the end of December near the end of the Holiday week. The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March altered some of our operations although the trails stayed open to skiers.

The use of some of the trails is continuing in mid-April which is later than was expected. Both club membership and number of trail passes sold are comparable to last season numbers in spite of the effect of weather and pandemic.

The trails at the Fernie Golf Course were groomed regularly during the season. A new snowmobile was purchased for the operations at the golf course. A team of volunteers and one contractor groomed the trails at the Nordic Centre daily. Additional drainage work was done at the Nordic Centre to prevent erosion of the trails and allow the grooming of trails earlier and later in the season. The program of trail ambassadors at the Nordic Centre was continued every weekend to welcome skiers during the season. The warming hut was open on weekdays but left unstaffed and this proved very popular with skiers.

The support provided by the City of Fernie and the Resort Municipality Initiative is very important to the Fernie Nordic Society and its activities.

The next sections of this report summarize the events and other activities hosted by the FNS, the statistics for the Society, and the amenities maintained by the Society.

Section 1: Overview of Activities

The regularly scheduled events such as the Pumpkin Hunt, Full Moon Ski and Socials, and Community Fun race were well attended again this season. A monthly Family Ski outing on Sunday afternoon proved popular with local families. The nordic challenge Snow-To-IceCream event was held again during Griz Days. A larger number of visitor and local skiers entered the renamed Fernie Flying Viking Challenge in March to make it a success.

The Nordic Society expanded the program of ski lessons to adults. Three qualified coaches gave 42 group and individual lessons to adults during the winter. Also the physical training program for adults aged 50+ was expanded to 13 weekly ski lessons for this age group.

Section 2: Budget Status

The next table provides a status of funds spent during the financial year starting on June 1st. The main expenditures are the costs related to the trail maintenance at the Fernie Golf Course and at the Nordic Centre. Other costs include the parking lot maintenance and daily preparation of stadium area.

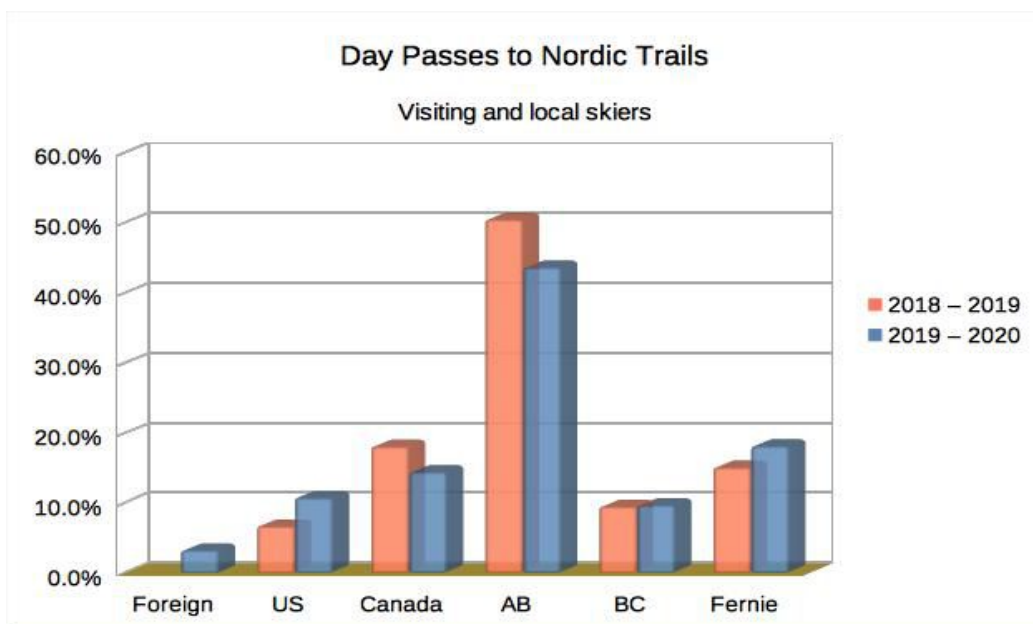
02 Dec 2019	\$ 3,000	Grooming at Golf Course (January to April 2020)
29 Dec 2019	\$ 342	Grooming at the Nordic Centre (Dec 2019)
07 Jan 2020	\$ 845	Clearing of Nordic Centre parking lot (Dec 2019 – Jan 2020)
21 Jan 2020	\$ 1,080	Grooming at the Nordic Centre (Jan 2020)
18 Feb 2020	\$ 720	Grooming at the Nordic Centre (Feb 3-14, 2020)
01 Mar 2020	\$ 1,848	Fuel used for grooming at Nordic Centre (Dec 2019 - Feb 2020)
07 Mar 2020	\$ 2,165	Clearing of Nordic Centre parking lot (Jan – Feb 2020)
TOTAL:	\$ 10,000	

The Nordic Society spent \$21,000 on trail grooming, parking maintenance, fuel and portapotty rental cost during the winter season. Nearly half of these expenses was covered by the funds from the Resort Municipality Initiative.

Section 3: FNS Statistics and Program Delivery Summary

The popularity of nordic skiing is still great in Fernie in the current 2019-2020 season. The number of trail passes sold and the number of members supporting the club is very similar to last season. Visitors purchased 847 trail passes from the kiosks, online or from ambassadors at the Nordic Centre. Most of these passes (82%) were sold to skiers from outside the Elk Valley region: many visitors are from Alberta (44%), others are from other provinces (14%), from other parts of BC (10%), from the U.S.A.(10%), and Switzerland, U.K., Argentina, Denmark and Australia (3%). Although these numbers are similar to the previous year, there was a notable increase of visitors from the U.S.A.

Nordic ski information is available at several local hotels and ski rental outlets for visitors.



The club membership is currently at 944 with 76.5% from the Elk Valley, 22% from Alberta and 1.5% from other areas in Canada.

Season	Trail Passes	Memberships
2019-2020	847	944
2018-2019	860	985
2017-2018	655	848

The ski programs for local young skiers are continuing. The weekly ski lessons of the Skill Development program were attended by 79 children. Sixteen young skiers in the club race team took part in various racing events in the Kootenays and elsewhere in B.C. during the season.

All the activities of the Fernie Nordic Society are organized and run by volunteers. The planning and scheduling of the activities started in August in order to have them listed in various calendars of local media outlets, websites and print media. The information about these events was available to visitors in the FernieFix, The Free Press, Fernie.com, Tourism Fernie and our own website throughout the winter.

Our website www.fernienordic.com received 41 inquiries this year from visitors. The Elk Valley Nordic Centre page at Google received about 1,000 monthly visits between December and March as a result of searches. This led to 800 visits to our website where visitors find more info about trails, trail fees and ski events. Our volunteers again answered many phone calls about equipment rentals by visitors to Fernie. These inquiries were redirected to the three local shops that offer daily rentals of ski equipment. The Nordic Society also started to distribute advertising cards throughout Fernie for displays in hotels, rental shops and the visitors' bureau.

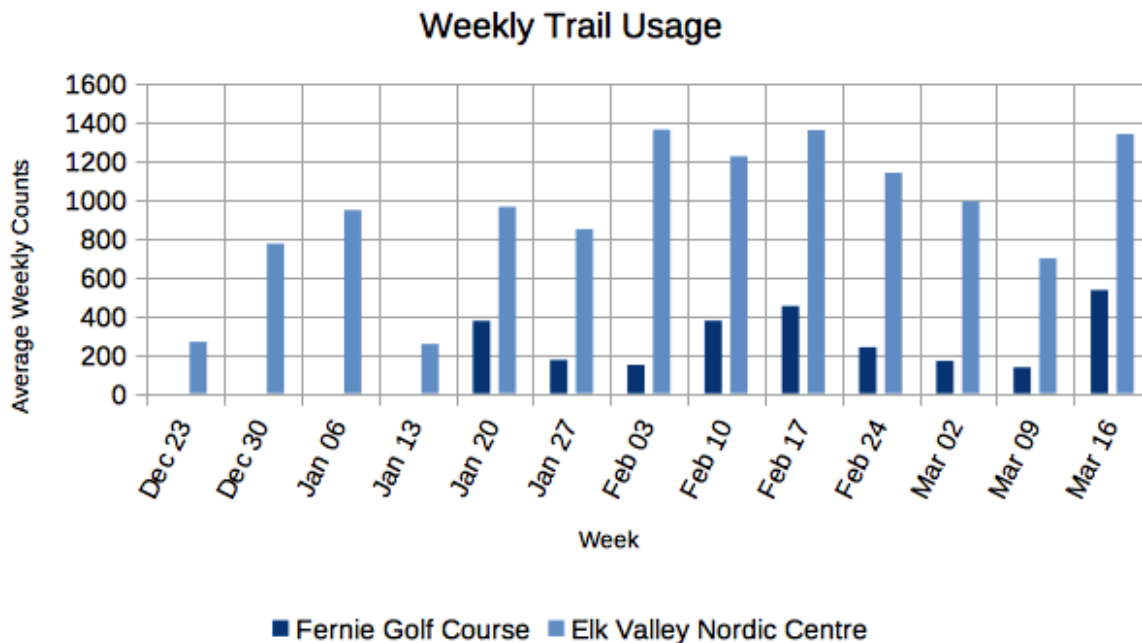
Trail Usage

Trail grooming started at the Nordic Centre on Dec 13 although the rain made the trails unusable until Dec 28. The trails are still open to skiers as of April 13. The golf course opened its trails on January 6 and closed them on April 8. The pandemic reduced the level of services to the skiers in mid-March. The warming hut was closed indefinitely and all planned lessons were canceled. On the other hand, all trails stayed open as skiers could practice safe distancing while enjoying the outdoors.

Trail counters were installed at both locations. Each counter was in place for 12 weeks starting on December 28. The current season saw an increase in activity at the Nordic Centre over the previous season although the total includes an increased activity due to lessons to adults and children. The counts below are the average weekly counts at both locations:

	Fernie Golf & Country Club	Elk Valley Nordic Centre
2019-2020	300	936
2018-2019	310	676
2017-2018	355	375
2016-2017	235	789

The chart below shows the weekly figures over the period. The sharp increase in mid-March happened as the pandemic resulted in the closure of the FAR ski hill and social distancing rules went into effect.



The Fernie High School and the Isabella Dicken Elementary School both offer nordic skiing as a physical activity to their students. Several groups of their students have used the trails of the Fernie Golf Course again during the season.

Events and Activities

The calendar of events and activities is planned early in the fall and these events are published in several local print publications, on Tourism Fernie’s website and posters. All events are planned and run by volunteer club members. They are open to club members, non-members and visitors alike.

Event	Details	Attendance
Pumpkin Hunt	This is an annual event aimed at young kids. Pumpkins are hidden in the stadium area and bushes at the Nordic Centre. This is the first opportunity for many families to visit the Nordic Centre.	The event is open to the public at large and the majority of the 283 participants are local children with their parents. The fourth edition of this popular event was held on Oct 19, 2019
Full Moon Skis	Monthly evening casual ski event for adult skiers with apres snacks at the Nordic Centre.	Between 10 and 20 adult participants at each of four events. These evening events were well attended by locals and visitors alike.
Fernie Flying Viking Challenge	A 25/50 km long distance nordic ski event held in conjunction with the Fernie Alpine Resort. The event is aimed at both adult and youth skiers.	The third running of this event was held in Fernie on March 15, 2020. 32 local and 5 visiting skiers from Ontario and Alberta entered and completed the course successfully. About 10 spectators were on hand during this long event.
Family Friendly Skis	Monthly Sunday outing in the afternoons as a fun activity for skiers of all ages.	Between 10 and 30 participants at each of 3 events
Griz Days Snow-to-Ice challenge	Participants choose to snowshoe, fat bike or ski to each of four locations on local trails and bring back a selfie as proof of each completed challenge.	Only 13 participants completed the full challenge over the 3 day event this year. Participants were mostly local enthusiasts.
Community Fun Race	Fun competitive event open to anyone – club members and non-members. Free of charge to enter. A hot chocolate run for very young skiers. All ages can participate in 4 laps of a relay race. Short sprints were added. This year was the 8 th edition of the annual event.	The hot chocolate run involved 29 children. 30 participants took part in the relay race. 17 of the same participants entered the sprints. Two skiers were visitors from Sparwood and one from Scotland. About 25 family members and friends were on hand to watch the event.

Surveys, media coverage and user feedback

An online survey was prepared and it resulted in 132 responses. The link to the survey was sent by general email to the mailing list which includes club members as well as other subscribers to regular trail grooming reports. The survey was also promoted through social media. A few

highlights from the submissions include:

- ◆ Full-time resident 67%, Second Home 20%, Renter 4% and Visitor 9%
- ◆ Visiting skiers also stopped at many local restaurants, shops and businesses (12 entries)
- ◆ 7 visitors out of 12 responses spent at least three nights in Fernie
- ◆ Most improved services listed: trail grooming at the Nordic Centre, grooming report/website and adult ski lessons

The survey collected many positive comments and constructive ones. The full survey results and comments are included in the attached documents.

Media coverage this season included three articles in The Free Press and Black Press Media about events. In addition, the Free Press and the FernieFix published several short articles about the Fernie Nordic Society:

- ◆ The Free Press 28Oct2019 Nordic Centre Pumpkin Hun a smashing success
- ◆ The Free Press 25Feb2020 Fernie Nordic Society hosts Community Fun Race
- ◆ The Free Press 18Mar2020 Flying Viking challenge hits Nordic Centre trails
- ◆ The Free Press 27Oct2019 Nordic Society glides into winter with fundraiser
- ◆ FernieFix 02Nov2019 Full Moon Nordic Ski Social
- ◆ FernieFix 22Dec2019 Best place to nordic ski
- ◆ The Free Press 08Jan2020 Fernie nordic skier qualifies for BC Winter Games
- ◆ FernieFix 12Feb2020 Elk Valley Nordic Centre and the Elk Valley River Trail

A few of the comments collected during the survey:

We loved the trails and can't wait to come back.

I was grateful for the trails during the covid 19 crisis!

Love your well maintained trails and Club ambassadors

Great trail maintenance this year! Kudos to all at the Nordic Society!

Many skiers left comments in the visitors' book and by email:

Beautiful spot, great to be on the trails. (W.C. Kalispell MT)

Thank you! We love our first time here. Happy New Year! (J.M. Argentina)

Came to Fernie for the downhill season, tried your trails & we are hooked! (M.P. Scotland)

Love it! Thank you! (A.M. Libby, MT)

Beautiful trails on a perfect morning (G & DD Mississauga, ON)

Sweet, sweet trails!! (K.M. Dauphin MB)

Great trails, great views, interesting signs about the history of Fernie (K & R Waskesin Lk SK)

Thanks for the wonderful BC hospitality! (MW & G Salt Lake City and Denver USA)

Thank you for the fantastic grooming!! (spring grooming L & S Fernie)

Section 4: Amenities

New area for weddings

One section of the trails overlooking the Lizard Creek was widened in the fall 2019 as an area appropriate for weddings and outdoor parties. This addition is also available for rental to groups from outside Fernie.

Trail networks

The Fernie Nordic Society grooms about 10 km of trails on the Fernie Golf Course, a section of the Fernie dyke and a loop within the RV Resort – new this season. The 11 km long trail network of the Nordic Centre includes a connector trail to the Fernie Alpine Resort plus a short loop and rollers near the warming hut for young skiers.

Warming hut and stadium area

The area around the warming hut was enlarged in the fall 2019 by cutting down several trees. This allowed to level the area and to make it more useful for children and adult ski lessons. It is also more welcoming to skiers and visitors.

The hut at the Nordic Centre has a wood stove and interior lighting. Electric power is supplied by a generator. The hut and its surrounding area is available for rental to groups for events year around. The volunteer trail ambassador program at the Nordic Centre is in its fourth season. It runs on weekends all winter and the Holidays week. It has proven useful to visitors who come to inquire about the trails, to purchase a trail pass and also to ask about other attractions in Fernie. The hut was open during the rest of the week although it was unattended so it could provide a resting area for visitors.

Trailhead kiosks

One kiosk is located next to the clubhouse of the Fernie Golf & Country Club. Two kiosks at the Nordic Centre are placed at the entrances of the ski trails. The fourth kiosk is located along the connector trail between the Fernie Alpine Resort and the Nordic Centre. Each kiosk has a large scale map showing the trail network. Its signage provides additional information about purchasing a trail pass, trail etiquette and a locked cash box.

Portapotties

These temporary facilities were set up at both the Golf Course and the Nordic Centre during the season. They are maintained by a local vendor.

Interpretive signage

Five large interpretive signs at the Nordic Centre were erected along the trails during the autumn of 2016. Each one follows the theme 'Legacies' about the Fernie area and its past history.

Directional signage

Most of the signs along the trails were mounted on permanent posts before the start of the ski season. The connector trail to the Fernie Alpine Resort is well marked.

Section 5: Photos



Left & Right: Participants in the 2020 Fernie Flying Viking Challenge



Left: View from the Cedar Loop trail
Right: Late afternoon ski at the Nordic Centre



Left: 2020 Community Fun Race – hot chocolate run
Right: 2020 Community Fun Race – sprint race



Left: 2020 Community Fun Race – relay race
Right: participants at one of the Full Moon Ski events



Left: Improvements in the stadium area – Nordic Centre in fall 2019
Right: Ski lesson for 50+ adults

Summary

Nordic skiing continues to be a popular winter activity in the Elk Valley. Fernie has several excellent areas for visitors and locals to practice the sport. The trails of the Fernie Golf Course and Elk Valley Nordic Centre offer a variety of conditions to skiers with different levels of experience.

The club runs several activities during the year and the calendar of events is published widely. It has become easier for visitors to Fernie to find information about nordic skiing in Fernie and about the activities of the Nordic Society. The many activities scheduled during the winter attract visitors to Fernie in addition to local skiers.

The Fernie Nordic Society wishes to thank the City of Fernie for the access to these funds under the Resort Municipality Initiative.

Survey results, photos, media articles and additional materials are on a disc included with the printed copy of this report.

This report was prepared on April 25, 2020
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