



Fernie Nordic Society
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Resort Municipality Initiative

2020 - 2021 Report from the Fernie Nordic Society

The Fernie Nordic Society is very appreciative of the funding from the Resort Municipality Initiative obtained through the City of Fernie for the Society's operations during the 2020-2021 season.

Overview

Nordic skiing and related activities have proved very popular this season in spite of the current pandemic restrictions. Although no formal events or races were held, interest in the sport has grown from previous seasons. More local residents as well as part time residents and visitors have purchased season memberships. As a result more people used the nordic ski trails in the Fernie area this winter.

The RMI funds were used for winter maintenance of the trails at the Fernie Golf Course and Elk Valley Nordic Centre. This grant supported regular machine grooming of nordic ski trails.

The large club membership made it important to have good communication directed at the public about club activities and the latest grooming of trails.

1. Activities

The maintenance of the trails and the winter grooming is performed on a regular basis by a team of volunteer and paid part-time groomers. Daily trail grooming started at the end of November and is expected to continue until early April. The Fernie region received much less snow than in the two previous seasons. As a result, grooming at the Golf Course ended abruptly in early March due to low amounts of new snow.

None of the usual winter events were scheduled this winter. Due to the restrictions related to the pandemic, ski lessons for children, full moon skis, ski races and the like were cancelled. Instead other activities were planned for individual skiers and family groups to participate on their own and at their chosen times:

Scavenger Hunt	Family activity	Nordic Centre	January 2021
'Moose on the Loose'	Arts Station exhibit	Nordic Centre	February 2021
Lighted Kids Loop	Kids & Family activity	Nordic Centre	on Saturdays March 2021
Full Moon Skis	Adults and Families	Nordic Centre	throughout season

Although the number of participants in each event is not known, each one was well publicized through social media, our website, local media and email messages to the club members.

The racing team of the club includes sixteen young skiers. They continued their regular physical training three times a week without taking part in any event outside Fernie unfortunately.

The children's ski lesson program was cancelled this year. On the other hand the club's junior ski gear was still made available for rental to 88 young skiers in 49 families at low cost.

One coach scheduled individual ski lessons for adults each week between January and March. No group lessons were organized.

The trail ambassador program was still in operation during the Holidays and the subsequent weekends. Less interaction with visitors was possible due to the COVID guidelines of social distancing. These guidelines kept the warming hut closed so it could not be used as a meeting point.

2. Budget Status

The \$9,000 funding from RMI was used for expenditures of trail grooming at the Fernie Golf Course and the Elk Valley Nordic Centre.

Fuel	\$2,016	Fuel used for grooming at Nordic Centre (Dec 2020 - Feb 2021)
Grooming	\$3,150	Grooming at Golf Course (Dec 2020 to March 2021)
Grooming	\$3,834	Grooming at Nordic Centre (Dec 2020 to Feb 2021)
TOTAL:	\$9,000	

The total cost of grooming, fuel, portapotties rental and snow clearing of parking lot is estimated at about \$22,500 for the entire season. The funding from RMI thus offers a great support to our operations.

Other funding through the Fernie Trails Alliance

An additional RMI funding of \$18,250 provided by the City of Fernie special grant for the winter trails maintenance was used to enhance the winter use of the trails around Fernie. It allowed the Fernie Nordic Society to cover the expense of more snow clearing of parking lots and the maintenance of public toilets at several locations in the provincial park. \$5,000 of this amount helped with the purchase of a new snowmobile to replace an older grooming machine.

3. Statistics of 2020-2021 season

The first twelve months of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased interest in winter sports such as nordic skiing throughout British Columbia. This year 1,603 members joined our ski club. This is a 69.8% increase over the 2019-2020 season.

Season	Memberships	Trail Passes
2020-2021	1603	686
2019-2020	944	847
2018-2019	985	860

Club members from Alberta make up 27% of the membership, an increase from 22% during last season. Elk Valley residents represent 71% of the total. Members from BC and other parts of the country accounted for 2% of the membership. Other notable statistics: Adult 18+ members 81%, Adult 55+ members 32% and the male-female split 44/56%.

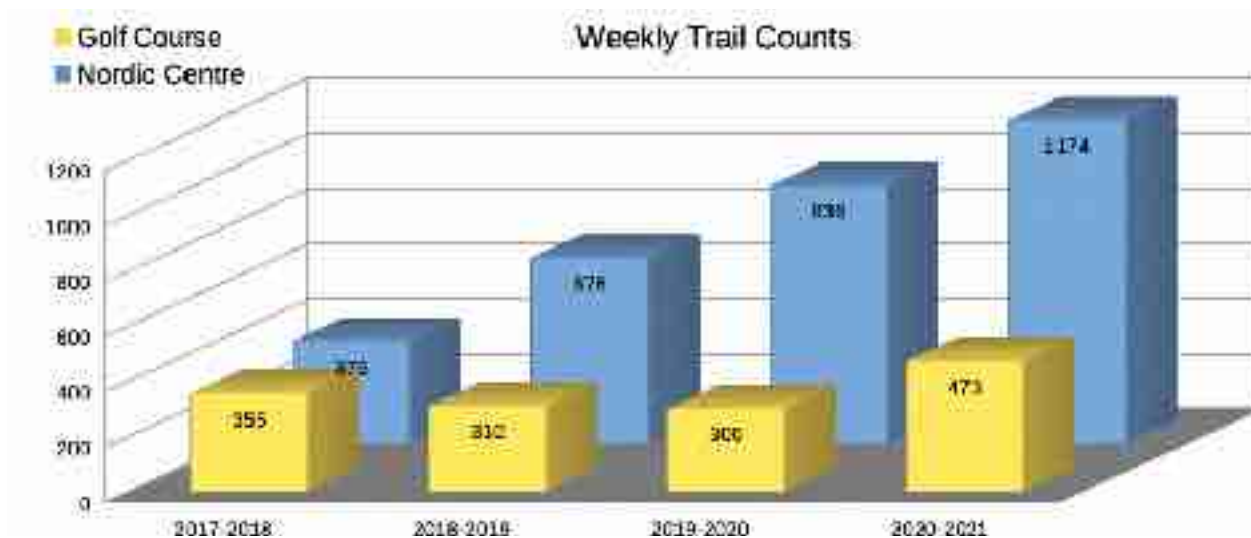
Trail passes

This year 686 single and family passes were sold. About 68% of day passes were sold to visitors to Fernie and the rest to Elk Valley residents. Visitors came from all provinces as far as Quebec with one visiting from New York state. Most passes were purchased online and some paid cash at the trailheads. The lower number of passes sold this year may be related to travel restrictions but also to more Elk Valley residents opting to purchase a season membership instead.

Trail counters

Counters were placed on the trails at the Nordic Centre and the Golf Course again this winter. As expected the weekly usage numbers were larger this year. The Golf Course showed the largest relative increase most likely due to more people getting into the sport but on more level trails.

The golf course was open for skiing during January and February only. Skiing at the Nordic Centre started in November and is expected to last into April. The average weekly counts are shown below:



Events and activities

The attendance to the few activities was not registered as skiers came at the times of their own choosing. Formal group events and races were not organized due to COVID-19 guidelines. The trail counters at the Nordic Centre registered an increase in traffic during events on Saturdays in March and on Full Moon nights.

Social Media

The Fernie Nordic Society takes advantage of social media to announce its activities. Events, grooming updates and club announcements are done on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, our own website and through direct email to our membership and other subscribers to our email list.

The Society also has a presence on TripAdvisor and Google Map. On average two phone calls a week came through these sources. Most calls were about ski rentals so callers were directed to the local ski shops. An average of 1,050 monthly visits to our website came through a Google search between January and March.

The nordic trails in Fernie were featured in a recent YouTube video made by a visitor from Vernon, BC. It may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFjSbJG3giU&t=5s>

Print and Online Media

Several local publications published articles about the Fernie Nordic Society and nordic skiing in the region. Stories published by The Free Press, FernieFix, online E-Know.ca and the Kimberley Bulletin are listed below:

- The Kimberley Bulletin 27Apr2020 Nordic Skiing in Fernie BC
- The Free Press 9Oct2020 The Fernie Nordic Society gears up for winter
- E-Know.ca 6Jan2021 CFKR Grant
- The Free Press 14Jan2021 Winter Trail Map
- FernieFix 22Jan2021 Moose on the Loose
- FernieFix January 2021 Best Winter Sports Awards
- FernieFix January 2021 Best Nordic Ski Award
- E-Know.ca 12Mar2021 East Kootenay Grant
- The Free Press 12Mar2021 Nordic Centre Lights
- The Free Press 14Jan2021 Winter Trail Map

Website fernienordic.com

Visitors to the website averaged 1,740 visits per month during the winter season. The largest traffic is seen in the 7-10 am time on Saturdays and Sundays. The most visited webpages were the trail grooming report and the trail maps. The grooming report includes other trails in the Fernie area and it was updated daily. An updated version was emailed to 1,200 addresses each Saturday morning as well.

The COVID-19 information and links were prominently displayed in several places on the website. This was kept up to date so that visitors would know what to expect on the trails and in the Fernie area.

Survey

An online survey was conducted from March 22 to 31, 2021. The survey was open to the general public and it was promoted through social media and the club website. In addition a message was sent to visitors and to the current membership.

The survey included seven questions plus an open area for comments. We received 294 submissions. Several highlights are shown below:

- 86% skied most often at the Nordic Centre or at the Golf Course
- One third did ski several times a week, the rest once or less often
- Eight skiers always ski with their dog. Others do not own a dog or do ski without one sometimes.
- 96% of respondents felt safe while cross country skiing during the pandemic.
- Most entries (87%) stated they would likely renew their season membership next season
- 81 visitors and part-time residents added up to 32% of the respondents. The median stay in Fernie was 51 nights. Of these, 18 (22%) stayed from 0 to 7 nights.

Most of the comments were very positive and included many grateful words about the grooming of the trails and the work done by volunteers. This is a selection from our visitors specifically:

"Beautiful grooming, very nice trails, nice to see ambassadors on the trails and the young ones training on the trails. So happy to not have dogs on the trails and that is why I choose Nordic over the other trails. worried I will get hurt as the dogs run at you and

jump, most often in a friendly manner but they knock you down. Looking forward to the lights. Kudos to all the volunteers, superb job, so much appreciated.”

“For my wife and I, the Nordic Centre has added so much to our Fernie experience (which has been going strong for over 20 years).”

“I live in Cranbrook and skied at the Nordic center once this year. Had a good time. The trails were in good condition and scenic :).”

“I really like that we can skate ski everywhere, I don't have this opportunity in Elkford”

“I was very impressed with the facility and the grooming on the trails. Will be back.”

“It was awesome to have so many different terrains and locations to ski on that were well maintained”

“It was my first season in Fernie and first season doing cross country. It was my favorite activity this year. If I am ever back in Fernie for a season I will be getting a membership for sure.”

“We live in Edmonton and just skied once. Track setting was excellent, esp given tough spring conditions. We were a bit disappointed with the length of the trails (shorter than expected).”

“We skied at the Elk Valley Nordic Centre every day of our vacation from Feb. 4 until Feb. 7 th. The conditions were perfect .. new snow and all the trails were beautifully groomed. We definitely will be back next year!”

“We were just visiting Fernie and loved your trails. They were the best ones we have skied. We are novice skiers and enjoyed them.”

The complete results of this survey are included in the attached digital package.

4. Amenities

Grooming Equipment

The club retired a 13 year old Yamaha snowmobile and replaced it with a new ArcticCat groomer. A new wide roller was also acquired to pack easily the fresh snow on the trails as part of the grooming. Both items are being used at the Nordic Centre.

The Bombardier snowcat had a major refurbishment done in the off season. It performed well during the winter.

Ski Trails

An additional 900 metre long trail was groomed regularly this winter at the Nordic Centre. A volunteer work party had cleared the old Lizard Creek Loop trail during

the off season. It provided a challenging trail section to the more advanced skiers. Comments from skiers were positive.

Stadium area

This wide and flat area is located next to the warming hut of the Nordic Centre. It is mostly used for ski lessons, training of the race team and for race events - in normal times. The trail grooming equipment is stored in this area. New spot solar lighting was installed to facilitate the evening grooming by our volunteers.

Trailhead kiosks

A new self serve kiosk has been installed along the Fernie dyke at an alternate entrance of the Golf Course.

Two kiosks were lit by solar power so the trail maps and other signage could be consulted by skiers in the evening.

Signage

Some signage was added to three parking areas in the Mt. Fernie Provincial Park. This was done in cooperation with Tourism Fernie as part of the additional RMI funding made available through the city of Fernie. Parking areas and public toilets were highlighted on these signs.

New COVID-19 related signage was posted at each trailhead and on all five kiosks. Hand sanitizer was available at each location.

New directional signs were posted at the new Lizard Creek Loop trail.

Portapotties

A rental unit was placed in the parking areas of each of the Golf Course and Nordic Centre locations. The club has rented these units in all previous winter seasons.

5. Photos



COVID Trail Signage



New Grooming Equipment



Lighted Kids Loop Trail



New Kiosk along the Fernie Dyke



Mt. Fernie from the Golf Course



Moose-on-the-Loose Exhibit



Firewood Work Party

Summary

This winter season was a great one for nordic ski enthusiasts. The reduced snowfall made the grooming more challenging but the feedback from local and visiting skiers was very positive as confirmed by the survey.

This time of COVID has seen a larger number of skiers using the nordic ski trails this winter. This number may decrease once the pandemic subsides but it will likely be higher than in recent years as more people have been exposed to the sport.

An updated winter trail map was championed by Tourism Fernie. The participation by the other clubs using the trails in Fernie led to a good detailed winter map.