



P.O. Box 1354 • Choteau, MT 59422 • (406) 466-2209

2/8/2024

Fellow friends and patrons,

It is with a heavy heart, that I am writing this letter today. I have made the tough decision to not continue trying to operate Teton Pass Ski Area for the 2023/2024 season. We fully intend to operate as normal for future seasons, but we are faced with many insurmountable challenges this year.

Firstly, to all the loyal passholders and many customers, I am not blind to the financial commitments you have made for this season. I hope you know that personally wanted to offer as worthy of a season as I could possibly provide. Given that we, as a business, have fallen short of our side of the deal this year by only operating 4 days, we absolutely intend to take care of you. We will carry all season passes and pre-purchased lift ticket vouchers over until next season (no need to do anything on your part.) We want everyone to be satisfied. Please reach out to our email if you have questions or concerns. We do maintain a comprehensive list of passholders and products that each person has purchased.

Those who know me, know that I am optimist, and that this choice was not made lightly. If you would like to better understand the details that went into this decision, please continue to read...

If the issue was simply a matter of needing to put in the time and the hard work, my crew and I would gladly do any amount of difficult work. We hope that we have proven over time that we are not afraid of the incredibly hard work that goes into operating a uniquely challenging business in a sometimes-hostile environment. We don't see ourselves as quitters, and we recognize that this decision might be viewed that way by some now, or in the future. This decision will linger, but we have weighed the alternatives.

There are a multitude of reasons that I am basing my decision on; notwithstanding, the obvious elephant in the room, the weather. We are simply experiencing the lowest levels of moisture ever recorded at our site in 55 years of recording data!

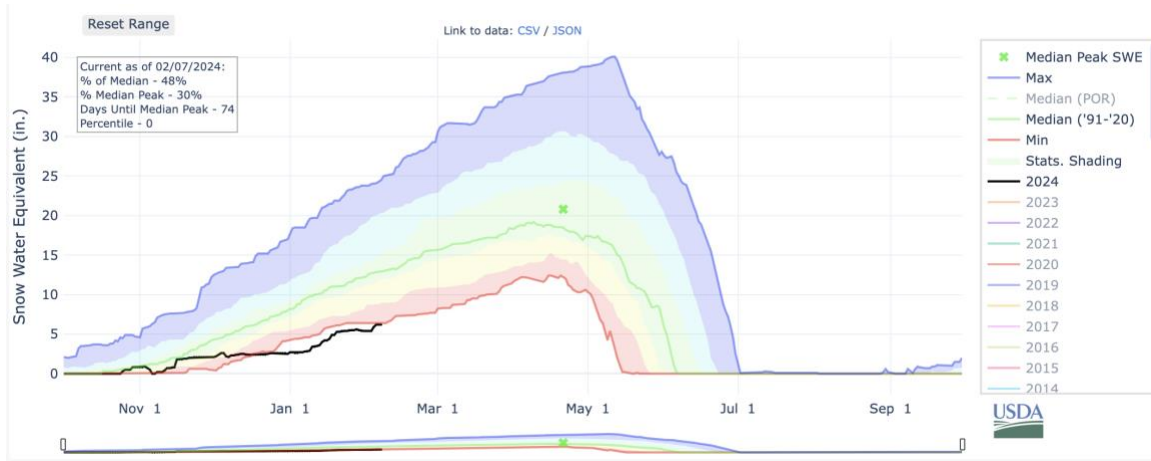


Figure 1. Mt. Lockhart Snotel SWE information

Additionally, the watershed data for our specific region within Montana (Sun, Teton, and Marias Rivers) is showing we are the driest river basin in the entire State right now at 42% of median for the Snow Water Equivalent. So, all that to say we have received very limited snow this season, and the current conditions are not good.

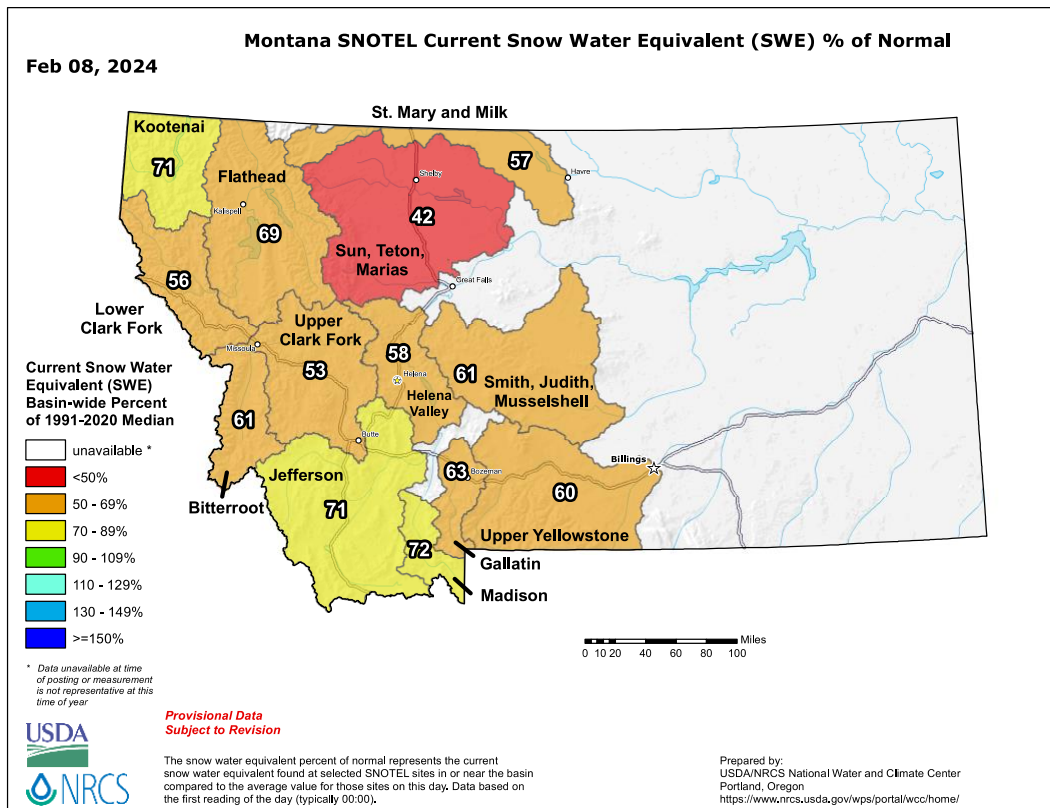


Figure 2. NRCS Basin Index %

Last week we saw temps north of 50 degrees all week combined with intermittent rain. This destroyed what little snowpack we had. (See Photo 1 and 2)



Photo 1. February 1st, 2024



Photo 2. February 1st, 2024

The forecast for the weekend was promising, and we really wanted to wait to make this decision, and Saturday we received 8" of snow, which was the bottom end of what was expected. Unfortunately, that storm started out as rain, and fell on unfrozen ground. The ski slopes looked mostly white and pretty, but the last 2 days of sunshine has settled that snow down to 3-6". I plowed the road on Sunday, and without frozen ground, quickly realized it was becoming a mess. The plow blade hooked on the mud under the snow and revealed what was still laying beneath. I held off on packing the snow on the slopes, as I knew what the mountain looked like before the storm, and I was only going to make it worse by driving a snowcat on it. It was destined to turn out like the plowing did.

So, here we stand today, with a bit of white coverage, with no base underneath it, and a 10-day forecast that is not getting us excited. It is more representative of a September snowpack than mid-winter.



Photo 3. Plowing muddy parking lots



Photos 4 and 5. Sunday 2/4/24 vs Wednesday 2/7/24 – snow settlement

I spent a bunch of time this week looking at longer range weather models of the jet stream, and everything I can see from 16-30 days out is more of the same “El Niño” pattern, which does not favor Montana for significant moisture. I’m sure we will see more snow in February, March, and April, but I don’t feel confident that it would change the course of our trajectory. Links provided if you are weather nerds like us.

- <https://www.windy.com/?500h,47.216,-101.951,4,i:pressure>
- <https://www.netweather.tv/charts-and-data/global-jetstream#2024/02/08/1200Z/jetstream/surface/level/overlay=jetstream/orthographic=-114.03,27.93,944>
- <https://natgasweather.com/15-day-300-mb-jet-stream-forecast-sfc-high-temperature/>
- <https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/>

We as a business are suffering, and have been since December. Ski areas “gamble” every year by fronting large financial commitments that they hope to pay-off with the business of that coming season. We commit that money to early season payroll, insurance premiums, property tax, large scale maintenance, and significant startup costs such as; food, beverages, fuel, and even explosives for avalanche mitigation work. We are becoming delinquent on all of that, and the weight of that stress is real. Continuing to wait for winter, feels like continuing to gamble, but now we are gambling with someone else’s money. It does not feel financially responsible. We have now surpassed the halfway point of the season, and this particular ski area does not have a history of strong revenue potential in the Spring. When the weather turns nice in the valley, we see a decline in visits.

All that to say, the financial hole we have dug is large, and we don’t think we could operate our way out of it even if the snow showed up. The correct decision from a truly non-emotional business perspective is to “cut off the limb, to save the life” or in other words end this season now, so we can ensure more seasons in the future. My hope is that making this decision will allow me to start working on solving problems within my control, rather than continuing to wait on something I can’t control (i.e., the weather)

We know you all support this place as much as possible, and we are eternally grateful. Your investment in our operation is what allows us to keep this place going despite the challenges. Please know that the Teton Pass staff wanted so badly to help facilitate at least a few awesome weekends of powder skiing and good times to bring this ski-community together. This season is just proving to be an anomaly, an outlier, and we are trying to think long-term.

Thank you all! Much love from your fellow friends at Teton Pass Ski Area!

Charles Hlavac
Owner
Teton Pass Ski Area, Inc.
Charles@SkiTetonMT.com

