

Wapiti Nordic Ski Club:

A multi-seasonal recreational facility – “Near the City & Deep in the Woods...”

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Executive Summary

Wapiti Nordic Ski Club (Club) is a not-for-profit, primarily volunteer-run organization. A multi-seasonal recreation facility, it is located just 5 minutes south of Grande Prairie. Core activities include cross-country skiing, biathlon, snow shoeing, fat biking, mountain biking, trail running and walking. The Club maintains 35km of trails perfect for both recreational and competitive use. The Club prides itself on being family friendly and is open to people of all ages and skill levels. The facility is well maintained and has a heated day lodge, two timing towers and a large maintenance shed. Night skiing is facilitated with 5 km of lit trails. The club offers cross country skiing and mountain bike lessons by qualified instructors as well as winter equipment rentals to facilitate entry into the sports allowing newcomers to enjoy the Nordic outdoor experience.

Traditionally the Club has been very much volunteer-driven, with unpaid personnel doing most of the work required to operate the facility. The Club is guided by a board of directors who plot the course of the organization. Many of the board members are involved directly in operations and program delivery.

The board is striving to develop a structured plan for the Club and facility. The objective of creating the plan is to capture the Club's current status, while outlining an achievable and sustainable pathway for years to come. It is intended to be a living document that is referenced and updated regularly.

Vision

Wapiti Nordic Ski Club is THE go-to facility in the region offering outdoor family fun activities year-round. The Club is recognized as a strong contributor to the community providing a solid recreational 'footprint' in the area.

Mission

To provide inclusive and wholesome outdoor recreational experiences for all ages and abilities across all four seasons, while diligently maintaining our trails, lease and infrastructure for long term sustainability.

Values

The Club is the proud steward of the Crown land of which we are recreation lease holders. We have a deep appreciation and respect for our environment. We provide programs and activities to a wide range of individuals and skill levels, with the intent of giving them an outdoor experience that is both challenging and rewarding.

Our Key Values are:

- Community
- Health and Wellness
- Environmental Stewardship
- Growth & Development
- Fun

Leadership & Governance

Board of Directors:

The board consists of the following:

- President
- Past President
- Vice-President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Directors (not less than three nor more than ten)

It is the board's responsibility to set the organization's course now and in the future. The board monitors the operations of the organization and establishes Policy as appropriate to ensure consistent decision-making and management of risk for the club.

It is the board's responsibility to set the organization's course now and in the future. The board of directors is responsible to actively oversee the Club's governance including the structure, culture, systems, processes, policies and procedures used in directing and managing the Club's operations and activities. The board of directors are also responsible for:

- establishing purpose and planning
- meeting legal responsibilities
- creating a culture of inclusion and safe sport
- managing risk and liability
- meeting financial responsibilities

Many of the members of the current board are also program managers. While this helps to ensure that operational decisions are consistent with the direction set out by the board, it also creates difficulty in stepping back and focussing on the governance aspects of the role. The board is taking steps to ensure that both governance and operational functions are performed at a high level.

The board has begun to more effectively utilize subcommittees to help conduct the business of the club. In the future this can be enhanced through the creation of terms of reference and the recruitment of more committee members from the general membership.

Updating bylaws, as well as documenting and managing by policy, is the critical work of the board to ensure the effective and efficient running of the business of the Club

The board finds opportunities to interact with the membership while performing their operations responsibilities. General meetings with members occur in the fall and spring. These provide the opportunity to share the status of the Club as well as strategic policies, procedures and focus for the upcoming year.

Members

The Club is dependent on members to perform and support the business of the organization as well as their membership fees to generate a majority of the Club's annual revenues. Three options for membership are currently available; annual, summer and day pass. Prior to 2020, the number of annual members averaged 600-700 with an additional 100-250 summer option members. Almost 60% of annual members are older

than 41, and 22% are under 21. Female members outnumber male by 56 to 44%. The majority, 85%, of members reside in the City of Grande Prairie while 14% reside in the County of Grande Prairie. These demographics suggest that it is important that the club provide value to adult recreational members, particularly females.

Rudimentary member surveys conducted in 2020 via the monthly electronic newsletter suggest:

- **Main reason for being a Member at Wapiti Nordic:** 25% said it was great value for money; 25% said Guaranteed groomed trails; 16% said the variety of terrain; 16% said Other; 7% said Programs & Lessons; 5% chose lit trails; 5% said family environment; 1% chose heated lodge.
- **Ski Technique Type:** 58% identify as primarily Classic skiers, 23% use an equal combination of Classic and Skate techniques and 19% identify as primarily Skate skiers.
- **Feedback on multi use trails at Wapiti Nordic:** 61% said yes, it is good to offer people other options; 39% said "Maybe - so long as it doesn't impact XC trails."
- **How important are ski equipment rentals to you?"** 82% said "Somewhat important - I have my own equipment but can see how others might want to access it"; 9% said "Very important - I could not participate in WNSC activities without it" and 9% said "Not important - I have all my own equipment".
- **What do you use our trails for in the summer?:** 29% of respondents said "Trail Running"; 26% said "Mountain Biking"; 22% said "Hiking"; 13% said "Dog Walking" and 3% each said "All of the Above", "Nature Watching" or "Other"

The vast trail network and the skills required to ski and bike safely and efficiently can be intimidating to new members. Members are supported through skill development with registration in cross country ski or mountain bike lessons through our organized programs. Opportunities for improvement in assisting new members include; ambassador led activities, improvements in signage, welcome packages and orientations.

Due to multiple unsupervised trailhead access points, it is assumed that some non-members utilize the facility. Without a membership or day pass, a key thing that is missed is the acknowledgment of the assumption of risk and the coverage of the user (and Club) with liability insurance when using the facility. Educating non-members on the benefits of holding a membership or day pass, and removing barriers to purchasing memberships and day passes is a focus for the board.

Staff

Current staff consist of an infrastructure maintenance position (full-time), bookkeeper (contract position), operations coordinator (trial basis, contract) and seasonal lodge attendants (part-time). Coaching and instruction are provided by volunteers as well as paid contractors and individuals with honorariums.

Looking forward, there is an opportunity to document staff position descriptions, create an annual performance review process and re-evaluate the compensation structure. There is also a benefit to establish criteria for engaging coaches/instructors to create consistency in the coaching/instruction qualifications and approach across our programs. The Club and our program leaders/coaches/instructors could also gain valuable information on the success of programs and areas of improvement by conducting surveys from participants.

Volunteers

The biggest volunteer source are members of the Club. Members support the Club by volunteering for tasks such as; board members, program leaders, coaches, instructors, opening and closing the lodge, trail maintenance, grooming, snow clearing, fire wood collection/splitting/storing, machine and building maintenance/repair, supporting competitions, casinos, Banff Mountain Film Festival (BMFF), website, newsletters and social media.

In the future, recruitment and utilization of this resource will be improved with more effective processes. It is necessary to be more strategic in volunteer recruitment, relating it to the gap areas in terms of assets and skills needed. By quantifying volunteer hours spent, the Club will be able to leverage this information when applying for grant funding. Volunteer orientation and recognition are also opportunities to ensure that this valuable resource is effectively engaged.

Programs

The purpose of current programming is to create a family-friendly environment and provide outdoor programs that are challenging but, more importantly, fun and rewarding. Our objective is to create a sense of community and to provide programs that promote skill development while being inclusive and true to SafeSport principles. We are aware of the limited number of instructors available and are thoughtful and intentional about our program and event choices. We take into consideration factors such as the level of participation and ensure choices are aligned with the Club's goals and objectives. Where necessary, we limit the number of participants to allow for meaningful instruction. Cost effectiveness is also a consideration when proposing and conducting our programs.

Winter Programs

- Cross Country Skiing (35km of groomed trails):
 - ✓ Beginner programs like Bunnyrabbits, Jackrabbits and Children's Learn to Ski
 - ✓ Youth competitive & skill development programs
 - ✓ Adult lessons
 - ✓ Chicks on Sticks
 - ✓ Tanks on Planks
- Biathlon
 - ✓ Beginner program Biathlon Bears
 - ✓ Youth competitive & skill development program
 - ✓ Adult competitive & skill development program
- Equipment Rentals to support introduction to cross country skiing, our beginner programs and lessons
- School Programs
- Social programs such as 'Friends & family night' or 'Full moon ski', Family Day celebrations
- Snow shoeing

Summer Programs

- Mountain Biking
 - ✓ Youth competitive & skill development program

- ✓ Ladies competitive & skill development program
- Running and Hiking groups

Competitions/Challenges

- Provincial Races
 - ✓ Cross Country Skiing
 - ✓ Biathlon
 - ✓ Mountain biking
 - ✓ Trail running
- Wapiti Challenge Race Series
- Duathlon (winter-skiing and snowshoeing, summer-biking and running)
- Loppet (cross country skiing)
- Don't Get Lost in the Woods (organized trail running race)

Programming Opportunities

There is a tremendous opportunity to grow the programs and services offered. Key to that growth is determining what services are of interest to members and matching those with our values. One recent successful example is the creation of the winter multi-use trail system for snow shoeing, fat biking and walking. Offering these options has increased membership and may result in expanding our program offerings. It has also served to protect our dedicated ski trails by offering alternative trail use and access.

Optimizing our strong social media presence, utilizing public service announcements and sharing information with the smaller neighbouring municipalities in the region could further elevate our efforts to promote activities and programs at Wapiti Nordic. We are focused on programming that is in demand and has a high rate of return. Opportunities for expanded programming exist in lessons (private and group), equipment rental, running program, snowshoe program, and a fat bike program. However, without a staffed position or additional volunteer support, some of these may be challenging to initiate. Our rental equipment inventory is being assessed to ensure that supply is meeting the demand, and that revenue opportunities are being maximized. Improving our rigour in building and replacing inventory is an opportunity.

Trails

The Club boasts 35 kilometers of groomed cross country ski trails in the winter, designated winter multi-use trails as well as an extensive network of single track trails in the summer. Trail maintenance and building is completed with both paid staff and volunteers year round.

Signage and mapping are two key elements with a network as extensive as ours. The Club could benefit from a more structured approach to trail signs to enhance the new member/visitor experience as well as improve safety and emergency response.

Members have created a geo-referenced trail map that is usable with standard online tools like Avenza Maps. Other members have added routes to applications like Trailforks. There is an opportunity to keep maps current and educate members on the use of these tools.

As stewards of the land, there are many trees dead or dying from Pine Beetle infestation on the lease. This poses a risk of falling trees on the trails particularly during wind storms. The Club could benefit from a plan/process to mitigate risk in this area. In addition there are many areas with a significant biomass

build-up on the ground. The County is leading Fire Smart efforts and we will engage with them as appropriate.

Facilities and Equipment

Facilities

The facilities are a legacy from the 1995 Canada Winter Games. Although they have been maintained as needed, the Club would benefit from a structured plan for repairs, maintenance, or upgrading. The board has engaged the services of a consultant to do an inventory and create a Reserve Plan.

Over the years many people have been given keys for the facility without a process to document and track. This can pose a risk to the safeguarding of the assets located in the facilities. The board has discussed this and assessed the effort to replace aging locks and rekey. More recently, the Club has kept track of all keys distributed.

Equipment

The Wapiti Nordic Ski Club was first and foremost a cross country ski facility. It still remains the dominant sport engaged in at the club. There are no other cross country ski venues in the vicinity. Staff and volunteers groom the trails with an assortment of equipment and attachments for the current snow conditions. This equipment is integral to maintaining the trails for daily winter use. The Club could maximize grant utilization by having a replacement plan for the Sherpas, the key piece of equipment used for grooming the trails. The Club also has equipment for snow removal and summer trail maintenance.

Communications & Marketing

To ensure an engaged and informed membership, it is critical to maintain up to date information platforms, especially in an era of instant messaging and immediate response expectations. Today's recreational members seek to know trail conditions and program updates before they leave home – information posted in the lodge is no longer sufficient.

The Club's website was overhauled in 2017 to create a more streamlined and user-friendly experience. It is a wealth of information for new and ongoing members. It includes an e-store, events calendar, survey capabilities and newsletter subscription option. It also serves to host board meeting agendas, minutes and bylaws for general member reference.

The Club's approach to communications and marketing has evolved significantly over the past three years becoming much more effective. Our Facebook page has built a strong sense of community and many of the 2,307 followers (2020) are extremely engaged and interactive. Several volunteers act as administrators and can boast a response time of which many businesses would be envious. The monthly electronic newsletter is distributed to 747 people (2020) and averages a 73% open rate compared to the electronic newsletter industry average of 10%. This infers that persons who subscribe to the newsletter are genuinely interested in club operations or programs and are happy with the content that they are receiving,

A more formalized marketing campaign could enhance the club's reach even further and a plan could be created to be focus on growth opportunities for the club, without sacrificing the quality of club operations or programs. Possible communication and marketing growth opportunities include:

- Revisiting the Club logo, ensuring that it reflects the Club today and that we exploit it to create brand identity
- Procuring magnetic road signs which can be used for events, deadlines and messaging
- Soliciting Sponsorship advertisements, signage, recognition
- Creating handouts and brochures
- Developing a design and inventory of select Wapiti Nordic “swag” to leverage the strong brand identify and identify our staff and volunteers
- Utilizing strategic partners and contacts to be a voice for and to promote the club by ‘word of mouth’
- Increasing online presence such as social media (Google Reviews) and Search Engine Optimization

Financial Plan

As a not for profit society, the current financial model is essentially break even. The club has a history of practices related to solid financial oversight. This organization’s financial procedures include:

- Establishing what the desired operational budget should look like given the economic climate and current financial position
- Conducting a complete review of the current operational budget submissions
- Looking for areas where expenses could be trimmed while looking for opportunities to increase revenue streams
- Reporting the status against the budget through the year to ensure all expenses and revenue are within budget
- Processes to have any non-budget items and capital assets approved by the board of directors.
- Internal auditing of the finances by two club members

Increasing annual and summer members, encouraging the purchase of day passes for weekend warrior users, expanding facility and equipment rentals as well as creating new programming will contribute to revenue generation to support current operations.

The operational budget needs to be expanded to provide for longer term facility maintenance expenses and capital asset renewal. This would include the creation of a plan and funding reserve for these expenditures.

Revenue Opportunities

- Increase in annual and summer memberships
- Expanded programming
- Revenue generating events such as regional and/or provincial racing
- Lodge rentals
 - ✓ Leasing or renting the facility for non-Club activities
- Training capability
 - ✓ Coaches/instructors obtaining certification to train new coaches/instructors both within and beyond the Club
- Photographers

- ✓ Market the facility as an excellent setting for photoshoots
- Incremental price Increases for programs, memberships, and events (ie. Banff Mountain Film Festival)
- Casinos

Funding Development Opportunities

- **Private Sponsorships**
 - ✓ Build a comprehensive sponsorship program/package that can be marketed to Corporations in the Region whose employees benefit from our facility and programs
- **Municipal Programs**
 - ✓ County of Grande Prairie (capital & operating funding)
 - ✓ City of Grande Prairie (capital & operating funds)
 - ✓ MD of Greenview (operating funds)
- **Service Clubs**
 - ✓ Grande Prairie Rotary
 - ✓ Swan City Rotary
 - ✓ Allocations of other Rotary Clubs
- **Provincial Programs**
 - ✓ Community Initiatives Program (CIP)
 - ✓ Community Facility Enhancement Program (CFEP)
- **Major Events Hosting**
 - ✓ The hosting of many major events is associated with the opportunity to apply for funding, the club has successfully utilized this avenue in the past associated with the Canada Winter Games, Arctic Winter Games, Alberta Summer and Winter Games and Western Canadian Ski Championships

The Club could benefit from documented financial policies and procedures to assist in financial decision making. This also ensures financial decisions are consistent with the Clubs purpose.

Partners & Collaborations

The board will continue to reach out to businesses and organizations to assist in funding and support. Key support groups/organizations include the County of Grande Prairie, City of Grande Prairie, Nordiq Alberta, Biathlon Alberta, the Alberta Bicycle Association, the Grande Prairie Regional Sport Connection (GPRSC), Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association (GPRTA) and the Wapiti Trail Association.

The board sees value in increasing our support network by formalizing our engagement of businesses in the region whose employees benefit from our existence. There is also an opportunity to expand our collaboration with organizations which also offer outdoor programs and events, or formalize relationships with some of the local outdoor activity social media groups. Nitehawk is a prime example of this and we already compare approaches/processes and services offered. However, it is the board's intention to focus and capitalize on those programs that are unique to Wapiti Nordic and that set us apart.

Targets/Goals/Opportunities

Targets and Goals are broken down into 3 categories:

- Immediate (action in progress)
- Short Term (next one to two years)
- Long Term (three – five years)

- **Immediate – Engaged in 2021 & 2022**
 - ✓ Engage with Alberta Transportation to ensure minimal impact to the Club's trail infrastructure and / or secure fair compensation for assets impacted, create alternatives where there is impact
 - ✓ Hire a part-time operations coordinator to assess the value that this position could provide to the Club
 - ✓ Establish summer pilot programs (ie running program, hiking program, photography) to explore opportunities and resources needed to have permanent expanded group opportunities
 - ✓ Increase the number of working groups/subcommittees to spread the load for those core members doing much of the work, and establish terms of reference for each committee.
 - Trail Enhancement
 - Risk Management/Emergency Preparedness
 - ✓ Renew and secure the recreation leases
 - ✓ Explore and commit to an electronic sales and rental system through either online electronic commerce or by securing the services of a POS (Point of Sale) provider to create the most effective payment system
 - ✓ Develop key policies for core operations and employees
 - ✓ Develop and design new trail maps
 - ✓ Update the bylaws

- **Short Term (2023-2024)**
 - ✓ Review program fees to ensure they are consistent and reasonable
 - ✓ Develop a new logo
 - ✓ Focus on increasing Membership promotions and sales by increasing awareness of the organization via a more robust marketing strategy, signage, community involvement, social media presence and collaborations
 - ✓ Create a system for 'Gift in Kind' tracking for volunteers including parents with kids in programs
 - ✓ Develop a compensation structure for existing employees, coaches and instructors as well as prospective additional employees (i.e. operations coordinator)
 - ✓ Consider pursuing sponsorships for signage – points of entry, chalet, all of the way finding signs
 - ✓ Create a Safety Program and Manual
 - ✓ Create a working document outlining all goals, both short term and long term. Include the description of the goal, what person or committee is accountable, a timeline for implementation and expectations of progress reports to the board
 - ✓ Create a formal sponsorship program/package
 - ✓ Develop evening recreational programs for youth and adults

- ✓ Create incentives for coaches/instructors/program leaders (remuneration, passes, branded wear, etc.)
 - ✓ Review program fees to ensure they are consistent and reasonable
 - ✓ Review rental operations
 - ✓ Review of fundraising sources, build on the Banff Mountain Film Festival and casinos
 - ✓ Increase parent involvement and get more families actively participating
 - ✓ Target 2 events for youth (13-18 years old)
 - ✓ Complete the Reserve Plan
- **Long Term (2025 and beyond)**
 - ✓ Northside development
 - ✓ Include a new paid position such as an executive director or manager to steer operations and business development, coordinate existing programs and guide the creation of new programs and services
 - ✓ Review school programs like cross country skiing and determine where the club can attract participants
 - ✓ Increase equipment rentals and accessory sales (pro shop look) and perhaps solicit a third-party to be a vendor for such services
 - ✓ Continue to increase membership
 - ✓ Develop a plan to engage more existing members to be more involved
 - ✓ Lobby for more Provincial, Western Canadian and National events by working with the Grande Prairie Regional Sports Connection and our Provincial Sport Organizations
 - ✓ Add food services to the operation, potentially through third-party food vendors
 - ✓ Secure a potable water source
 - ✓ Collaborate with the other recreational facilities like Nitehawk to look for synergies and help one another grow in the region
 - ✓ Provide leadership development for coaches/instructors/program leaders