



Justification for an increase in The Great Minnesota Ski Pass fees

The Great Minnesota Ski Pass program consists of the sales of daily, one year, or three year passes with all revenues dedicated to the improvement, maintenance, and grooming of public cross-country ski trails. Passes are required at all grants-in-aid (GIA) ski trail sites, with enforcement by the DNR Enforcement Division. The ski GIA system covers ski areas and trails in nearly all of the snowbelt counties. The 39 ski GIA grants support more than 700 miles of trails, sponsored by counties and cities, and groomed by local clubs. In addition, more than 350 miles of trails located in 31 state parks and state trails are also benefitted by revenue from the Ski Pass, and as such, The Great Minnesota Ski Pass allows skiing at any of these trails.

Grants are made to local government units, who administer them directly or disburse them to local clubs. The total grant amount is set each year by the DNR, but must be then earned on an hourly basis at rates established by the DNR Parks and Trails Division. The funds are used to pay for the heavy duty snowmobiles or track machines needed for grooming, grooming attachment equipment, insurance, labor, fuel, repairs, and other equipment and expenses related to grooming, trail maintenance, and trail improvements.

The fees for the Great Minnesota Ski Pass were established by the Legislature in 1983; were updated in 1999; and increased to the current levels in 2010.

Currently the Ski Pass fees are:

Daily \$6
Annual \$19
3 Year \$54

The proposed new fees are:

Daily \$9
Annual \$24
3 Year \$69

In 2018, 9372 Ski Passes were sold (1980 daily; 6069 annual; and 1323 three year) for total revenue of \$196,653. Grants were made in the amount of \$286,073. Although not all of the grant money was earned due to poor snow conditions, the DNR Parks and Trails Division has projected that the account balance in the cross-country ski dedicated account, (the account where all proceeds of sales of the Minnesota Ski Pass are directed), could be depleted in a few years if all grant monies are expended without meaningful additional revenues. In general, improvements to the trails, which can be reimbursed under the GIA system, have not been funded in order to save more funds for grooming. Similarly, very few new trails have been added to the ski GIA program for many years due to concerns that the available funding would be spread too thin.

Since the last increase in the Ski Pass fees nearly 10 years ago, the costs of grooming equipment, skilled labor to operate the more expensive equipment, insurance, fuel, and other related costs have continued to increase. The improved grooming equipment that is available now is more costly but results in higher quality ski trails over a range of snow conditions. Cross country skiers expect first class grooming and are willing to pay more in user fees to have them.

In 2017 the Legislature passed the Omnibus Environment and Natural Resources Budget and Policy bill which included increases in hunting and angling fees, state park permits, snowmobile trail passes, and ATV trail passes. Although the Governor's request included a similar increase in The Great Minnesota Ski Pass fees, the request for an increase in Ski Pass fees was not included in the final legislation.

The Minnesota Nordic Ski Association (MNSA), which represents Nordic ski interests statewide, is strongly advocating for the inclusion of the proposed increase of the Ski Pass fees in the 2019 Legislative session.

In summary, the Minnesota Ski Pass system is overdue for a fee increase. Your support of this legislation would be greatly appreciated.

Proposed amendment to MN Ski Pass fees

Minnesota Statutes 2008, section 85.42, is amended to read:

85.42 USER FEE; VALIDITY.

(a) The fee for an annual cross-country ski pass is ~~\$19~~ \$24 for an individual age 16 and over. The fee for a three-year pass is ~~\$54~~ \$69 for an individual age 16 and over. This fee shall be collected at the time the pass is purchased. Three-year passes are valid for three years beginning the previous July 1. Annual passes are valid for one year beginning the previous July 1.

(b) The cost for a daily cross-country skier pass is ~~\$5~~ \$9 for an individual age 16 and over. This fee shall be collected at the time the pass is purchased. The daily pass is valid only for the date designated on the pass form.

(c) A pass must be signed by the skier across the front of the pass to be valid and becomes nontransferable on signing.

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