

**Business of the Village Board
Village of Saranac Lake**

SUBJECT: Ski Race Discount Passes

Date: 1/27/2025

DEPT OF ORIGIN: Village Manager

Bill # 11-2025

DATE SUBMITTED: 1/23/2025

EXHIBITS:

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Village Attorney

Village Administration

EXPENDITURE
REQUIRED: \$

AMOUNT
BUDGETED: \$

APPROPRIATION
REQUIRED: \$

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

Authorize the Village Manager to approve the proposal for discounted Day tickets for registered ski races at Mount Pisgah

MOVED BY: Williams SECONDED BY: Scollin

VOTE ON ROLL CALL: TO AMEND

MAYOR WILLIAMS yes

TRUSTEE SCOLLIN yes

TRUSTEE BRUNETTE yes

TRUSTEE RYAN yes

TRUSTEE WHITE yes



Proposal for Discounted Day Tickets for Registered Ski Racers

Objective:

We are requesting the Village Board's approval for a 50% discount on day tickets for registered ski racers participating in races hosted by the Saranac Lake Ski Club. While the Ski Club is organizing 3 races this season, we are seeking approval to offer this discount for all races hosted by the Club going forward. Discounted tickets for racers were previously offered, but this benefit has not been available for the past several years. We are asking the Board to reinstate this discount for future races, starting with the 2025 season.

Proposal Details:

Event Participation:

Ski races can attract 150-200 racers to Mt. Pisgah, generating a significant profit for the mountain even with the discount. Additionally, families attending the races will pay the full ticket price. A ski race with 150 racers paying \$20 each could generate \$3,000 in ticket sales, in addition to the revenue from other patrons enjoying the rest of the mountain.

Standard Practice:

Providing discounted or special pricing for registered ski racers is a common practice among ski resorts to encourage participation and support the racing community. Mt. Pisgah previously offered discounted day ticket rates for racers, but this benefit was discontinued two years ago. The removal of this discount has negatively impacted our ability to attract larger ski races.

Long-Term Benefits:

Introducing racers and their families to Mt. Pisgah fosters familiarity and encourages future visits, potentially increasing long-term patronage.

Discount Specifics:

We propose offering a 50% discount on day tickets exclusively to registered racers during event days. Racers would need to present their race bib to Mt. Pisgah staff in order to receive the discount, or tickets could be purchased in bulk by coaches ahead of race day.

Financial Considerations:

Although racers would receive discounted tickets, accompanying family members and spectators will still purchase full-priced tickets. Additionally, the discounted tickets could attract more ski teams to train at Mt. Pisgah, as our White Stag run offers the ideal length and pitch for slalom training.



Overview of Ski Club Races and Their Impact:

White Stag Ski Race:

- A decades-old Winter Carnival tradition, this race is deeply rooted in Mt. Pisgah's history. The White Stag is an event for all ages that embodies everything Saranac Lake represents — coming together as a community and celebrating a shared love for the outdoors. It is also an affordable entry point into ski racing for community members who cannot afford NYSEF. By growing ski races at Mt. Pisgah, we are building a foundation for the sport in the region, ensuring the mountain's long-term viability.

Top of the Mountain:

- The Top of the Mountain Race, held in March, is a proud milestone for our youngest skiers, offering them the chance to conquer the mountain's peak. Leading up to this event, our weekly Candy Bar Races allow skiers ages 2–12 to practice their turns on the gentler Buttermilk slope. Each week, the course is extended, and its difficulty increases, preparing participants to tackle the steeper White Stag side by season's end. This race fosters confidence, skills, and a love for skiing.

NYSEF:

- There has not been a sanctioned NYSEF race at Mt. Pisgah for several years, but the efforts of FOMP and the Saranac Lake Ski Club have rebuilt one of the most vital relationships that generate income for the mountain. Since many racers and their families visit the area for competitions, hosting NYSEF races at Mt. Pisgah — instead of exclusively at Whiteface — encourages additional spending in our community on lodging, dining, and other local expenditures.

Conclusion:

Implementing a 50% discount for registered ski racers aligns with industry standards and offers both economic and community benefits. By not offering any discount for racers, we risk limiting one of the key drivers of the skiing industry — attracting competitive races — which ultimately impacts the mountain's ability to grow and sustain its long-term viability.

Friends of Mt. Pisgah submitted our initial request for a 50% discount on race-day tickets before the Friday 12 PM deadline. However, after discussing with the head of NYSEF and debriefing following the U14 NYSSRA race held on Saturday January 25th, we'd like to propose revisions.

The 50% discount would bring race-day tickets to \$20, but we've since learned Whiteface charges just \$22.50 for race-day tickets during sanctioned NYSSRA races. The U14 race marked the first NYSSRA-sanctioned event at Mt. Pisgah in over a decade. NYSSRA stands for the New York State Racing Association. Both the Saranac Lake Ski Club and Friends of Mt. Pisgah (FOMP) have worked hard to rebuild relationships with the ski racing community, aiming to generate more revenue for the mountain.

I'd like to take a minute to explain to the board and village residents why ski racing is so important for Mt. Pisgah viability. Our community hill offers unique advantages that larger mountains like Whiteface cannot. While Whiteface is an Olympic-level facility, its steep terrain is challenging for younger athletes, forcing them to focus on slowing down rather than developing technical skills. At Pisgah, racers benefit from the optimal pitch and length of the White Stag trail, ideal for U14 slalom events like the one held Saturday, as well as modified GS races for U10 and U12 racers, such as the Empire State Kombi race this coming weekend. Additionally, Pisgah's compact layout allows athletes to complete more runs during training, accelerating their progress.

- For clarification: U14 is the age group for racers between 12 -13 years old, U12 is for children between 10-11 years old and U10 is for children 8-9 years old.

While NYSEF coaches recognize the benefits of hosting races at Mt. Pisgah, we've learned from the head of NYSEF that parents often pressure him to hold events at larger mountains like Whiteface and Gore. These bigger mountains offer more lodge space and diverse terrain for parents to enjoy while their child is racing. Without competitive pricing for race-day tickets, they may feel compelled to choose these larger venues, since families face additional costs beyond the ticket price. As a result, many parents prefer to spend their money at these bigger mountains.

Considering this context, we propose a tiered race-day ticket pricing structure:

- **\$15-~~\$17~~** for sanctioned NYSSRA races.
- **\$10-~~\$12~~** for non-sanctioned races, such as the Empire State Kombi race happening this Saturday.
- **50% off** for races hosted by the Saranac Lake Ski Club, such as the White Stag Ski Race and Top of the Mountain races.

Saturday's U14 race brought 152 racers from over 10 clubs, providing Mt. Pisgah with an opportunity to generate additional revenue from full-price tickets purchased by family members. Many families expressed interest in buying tubing tickets for their younger children who weren't racing, but unfortunately, the tubing hill was closed. Despite this, our concession vendor reported significantly increased sales thanks to the race, which he noted was a much-needed

boost after lower lodge traffic this season due to the tubing hill closure. The race also drew dozens of families and coaches from places like Windham, NY, and Jersey City to Saranac Lake, benefiting local hotels and restaurants. Races like this one can bring business to our community that might have otherwise gone to Lake Placid.

It's also important the board recognizes the additional costs borne by NYSEF and families beyond the lift ticket. Racer fees are added to cover head taxes to NYSSRA and USSA - the New York State Racing Association and US Ski & Snowboard Association. For the U14 race, NYSEF paid for three ski patrollers from Whiteface, as Pisgah lacks its own patrol. They are also forced to transport some of their timing equipment from Whiteface to Pisgah and spend time setting up the equipment, something they could avoid by hosting at Whiteface since the equipment is already set up there. These added expenses further justify competitive ticket pricing to attract races.

While lower prices might seem counterproductive to revenue goals, the ski racing community already contributes significantly to Mt. Pisgah's financial health and we can't afford to alienate ourselves from the industry. I can tell you myself as someone at Pisgah 4-5 times a week, I see firsthand that a large percentage of visitors are there because of ski racing. The Whiteface NYSEF team trains dozens of racers at Pisgah weekly, generating dozens of season pass sales annually. If Pisgah was able to offer a \$15 race-day ticket at events like the U14 race, the village would still earn almost \$3,000 in ticket sales — that is equivalent to nearly 60 full-price tickets. From my observation, weekends do not consistently see that many visitors unless a racing event is happening.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate FOMP's mission: to support Mt. Pisgah by offsetting the cost of capital improvements and introducing new skiers to a sport that can enrich their lives for years to come. Equally important is our deep connection to the ski racing community, which plays a crucial role in the long-term viability of skiing as a sport and therefore Mt. Pisgah's future. Small hills like Mt. Pisgah are essential to this ecosystem, providing an affordable entry point for skiers who might not otherwise have access to the sport.

I'd like to share the perspective of two-time Olympic medalist Andrew Weibrecht:

“Community ski centers are unfortunately becoming less and less common in the US, but they're vital to the future of the sport,” said Weibrecht. “Having spent years racing and training in Europe, a large part of why Europeans are so good at snow sports is because almost every community has a rope tow or t-bar locally where kids and families can go learn to ski and ride affordably. Night skiing at Pisgah is a family favorite for me and my kids and has given us all the opportunity to ski multiple days throughout the week without having to worry about disrupting school or work schedules.”

I want to thank the board for considering this proposal and for allowing us to adjust our original request before voting on the matter.

NOTES:

- The difference between NYSEF and NYSSRA:

NYSEF (New York Ski Educational Foundation): A nonprofit organization that provides training programs and support for ski racers and winter athletes of all levels, from youth to elite competitors. Think of NYSEF as a developmental organization aimed at fostering athletes and ensuring they have access to top-tier training environments.

NYSSRA (New York State Ski Racing Association): A governing body for ski racing in New York State, operating under the umbrella of **US Ski & Snowboard** (the national governing body for skiing and snowboarding). NYSSRA oversees the structure and rules for competitive ski racing in the state, including sanctioning races, maintaining race schedules, and coordinating with ski clubs (like the Saranac Lake Ski Club) and organizations (like NYSEF).

- In my research for a presentation I'm giving on Mt. Pisgah and skiing in the Adirondacks for the Saranac Lake Historical Society 1/29 I found an Adirondack Daily Enterprise article reporting around 3,000 visitors to Mt. Pisgah to attend the Golden Skis Ski Race - with parked cars wrapping all the way back down Trudeau Rd.
 - I'm not saying we want to have that many people since the mountain cannot currently handle that amount of people but I did want to underscore what Mt. Pisgah and the Village of Saranac Lake have been able to accommodate in the past as we discuss our current goals for the mountain today.