



April 8, 2004

Earth Day event focuses on fighting global warming

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN, CA – Mammoth Mountain Ski Area will recognize Earth Day this Thursday, April 22, by drawing attention to an environmental issue near and not-so-dear to its business operations – Global Warming.

Plans for Mammoth's "Keep Winter Cool" Earth Day event include a greenhouse educational booth located outside (weather permitting) next to the Lower Gondola Building at Main Lodge with solar heater demonstrations and information about specific ways that everyone can help combat the looming threat. A biodiesel-powered snowcat will also be on hand offering free rides to the public and 'cool' gifts provided by Mammoth Mountain and Banana Boat Suncare will be available (while supplies last) for those who stop by to check it out.

The "Keep Winter Cool" campaign is part of a nationwide effort led by the National Ski Areas Association in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to highlight the impact of global warming on winter recreation.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, the science of global warming is well understood and generally accepted throughout the world's scientific community. The main culprits are "greenhouse gases" (GHGs), which are large molecule air pollutants building up in the atmosphere and holding in too much of the sun's heat, thereby causing the earth's surface to warm up beyond natural temperatures. Like a greenhouse, the earth's atmosphere is supposed to trap heat to make life as we know it possible, but most scientists now believe that human-caused air pollutants are rapidly building up the atmospheric gas walls and effectively changing the world's climate.

Researchers can now accurately predict the level of warming resulting from increased GHGs in the upper atmosphere and have identified carbon dioxide (CO₂) as the principle culprit, mainly from the burning of fossil fuels. Atmospheric levels of CO₂ are predicted to be double pre-industrial amounts by 2100 and are currently as high as they've been in half a million years, based on ice core measurements. What the scientific community doesn't agree upon, however, are the consequences of global warming; precisely what will happen to weather patterns, crop

yields, regional temperatures and rainfall amounts.

“Global warming is a tough challenge, but we know how to fix it,” said Dr. Daniel Lashof, deputy director and chief scientist for the NRDC Climate Center. “The problem is pollution from cars and power plants, which traps heat in the atmosphere. The answer is cleaner, smarter energy technologies that pollute less. The ski industry is calling attention to the threat, and more important, the solutions that exist right now to fight global warming.”

As part of its commitment to environmental protections and GHG reductions, Mammoth Mountain has been running pilot projects using alternative biodiesel fuel in snow-grooming machines at Tamarack Lodge and solar thermal air panels for back-up heating in on-hill lift shacks. According to Bob Bradbury, MMSA’s Energy Manager, energy audits have also been completed on over 100 of MMSA’s facilities to increase the efficiencies of traditional energy systems, thereby significantly decreasing the amount of energy needed to power the systems, as well as decreasing related emissions. According to Bradbury, the audits have been so successful that Mammoth is now conserving significant amounts of electricity and over 70,000 gallons of propane a year compared with 2001 usage amounts.

Many of MMSA’s employees have also been doing their part to conserve resources and help reduce GHG emissions by conserving fossil fuels. For some, carpools are the ride of choice. Noelle Sharp, a member of Mammoth’s Unbound Terrain Park crew, regularly carpools to work from Town with other Unbound crewmembers. “I like it. I get to hang out longer with my friends,” she explains.

Others prefer the free public bus service provided by MMSA’s Transportation Department. “The majority of my staff do not even have vehicles because they can depend on the bus service for all of their needs,” noted Launa Strickland, the Executive Housekeeper at Mammoth Mountain Inn.

MMSA also provides transportation for employees who live outside of Mammoth Lakes. Dena Dill, a buyer for Mammoth’s Purchasing Department, regularly rides the employee bus with about 20 other Bishop-area residents. “I like the atmosphere. Everyone is really friendly and the drivers are awesome,” she says. “I’m saving money by not using as much gas and I’m not contributing to the pollutants in the air. Sometimes it’s not so convenient, but I still do it because the benefits outweigh the inconvenience.” And those who work at June Mountain have a choice between carpooling and riding an employee bus. About 30 employees a day regularly take advantage of alternate transportation modes to and from June, notes General Manager Carl Williams.

When combined, all these employees – whether carpooling or riding a bus – are preventing a huge amount of GHGs from entering the atmosphere. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, driving an automobile that gets 25 miles per gallon 50 miles a week (about the amount an employee would drive commuting from Town to the Main Lodge) results in emissions of about 2,597 pounds of CO₂ per year. If the commute is extended to Bishop (about 450 miles per week), the amount is a whopping *23,372 pounds per year or almost 12 tons!*

“When you consider how many employees are carpooling or riding the bus to work, hundreds of tons of CO₂ are prevented from entering our air basin every year,” notes Lisa Isaacs, Mammoth Mountain’s Environmental Programs Manager. “And when you add in all our guests who ride the bus, the savings are mind boggling. What a wonderful way to recognize Earth Day.”

To learn more about how GHGs are affecting climate patterns and what you can do to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, plan on attending the “Keep Winter Cool” activities on Earth Day at Mammoth Mountain’s Main Lodge. For more information, please contact MMSA’s Department of Environmental Programs at (760) 934-0773. For more information about NSAA’s “Keep Winter Cool” campaign, go to: www.nsa.org.

To calculate your own GHG emissions, go to: www.climatestar.org or www.ucsus.org/carboncalculator.html.

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