



Are the Skiers Ruining Our Wilderness?

Amidst all the uproar for more ski areas, a stand must be made for preservation of a few areas of untouched beauty and peace. First in a series of two.

by Harvey Manning

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STATE'S NEWEST Recreation Area Being Carved From the Wilderness was the headline on a recent newspaper article. Before long there will be a "150-acre playpen in a hide-away valley... a village complete with shops, lodge, tennis courts, ice rink, and swimming pool." And soon a nine-hole golf course. (What, no bowling alley? How about a ferris wheel for the kids?)

The lifts extending upward from the "gemutlich atmosphere" (to quote an Alpentad ad) are planned to reach the very summit of Denny Mountain, amid enough phony Tyrolianism to make any patriotic Bavarian retch. Yodeling records, I'll bet, piped from loudspeakers, and instructors with blond hair from Toni and German accents from Berlitz. (A ski resort with a kibbutz atmosphere would be a welcome change.)

Let us all devoutly hope Alpentad offers decent skiing, because the price has been high. Some friends of mine raised their four sons in the heather basin under the summit of Denny, carrying them across creeks and through trees, up rockslides and snowfields, when they were too young to walk. The family made one last trip as construction was beginning, and came away sick. Ironically, the father spent many days of his youth in the forests and meadows of Mt. Pilchuck, also since converted into a ski area, and a fifth-rate one at that. As he lost Pilchuck, now his children have lost Denny. They can never go home again. A little piece of close-to-the-city wilderness, loved by these four boys and their parents, and over the years by thousands of summer and fall hikers and winter and spring skiers, snowshoers, and climbers, is dead forever.

See the view from the gipfelhaus. It is a nice view. Now swirl your bread in the melted cheese. Eat it all up. Drink your beer. It is good. It is gemutlich. Now swing your hips in time to the music. Down, down, swing, swing, dip and swing.)

Once having digested Denny Mountain and the lower valley of Source Creek, removing 1 million board feet of timber and substituting condominiums, cocktail lounges, and tennis courts, destroying the

quiet along miles of what until now was one of the most popular trails in the Cascades (part of the internationally-famous Cascade Crest Trail), Alpentad plans an aerial tram to Cave Ridge, to open "Mount Snoqualmie and Commonwealth Basin for a variety of lifts, as well as provide a summer tourist lookout and a bird's-eye view of three rival resorts..."

Jim Griffin and associates (that's the brother of the Griffin who kills killer whales) may have trouble annexing the publicly-owned lands of Mt. Snoqualmie and Commonwealth Basin, despite the predictable enthusiasm of the U.S. Forest Service.

Conservationists — preponderantly skiers themselves — recognize the need for more skiing room. After heaving a deep sigh, they did not oppose the Denny development, and probably will favor two other sites tentatively marked out adjacent to Snoqualmie Pass. However, though the Pass is ideal for mass winter recreation, they feel six public ski areas and two private hills will be just about enough. (The State Highway Department doubtless agrees.) Conservationists are a damnant that amid all this uproar ONE sanctuary of summer-and-winter quiet must be saved for the likes of the several score hikers, aged 2-70. I met along the Commonwealth trail on a Sunday last fall, and for the skiers and snowshoers who tour there winter weekends, seeking peace.

The peace must be kept in Commonwealth Basin, the entire valley with its rimming peaks of Guye, Snoqualmie, and Kendall. This last stand of Snoqualmie Pass wildlands must be included in the proposed Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area.

Of course, when the Commonwealth skirmishes begin, a year or two from now, the multiple-use gang will trot out tired accusations that wilderness advocates are hard-heads who refuse to compromise. As expressed by Forest Service hacks and their pals, the multiple-use formula recognizes wilderness thus: land usable for any other purpose should be so used; whatever scraps of rock and scrub and ice that nobody wants, and even a few trees if they're too remote to log economically, should be protected as wilderness; anybody who wants more wilderness than THAT is an uncompromising, antidemocratic birdwatcher. In the fullness of time flacks will call for a skier's crusade against the "selfish few" who would deny Commonwealth to the masses.

Are the wilderness preservationists trying to lock skiers out of the mountains?

The answer is NO. There are those who would like skiers to think so, and they churn out propaganda without care for facts, imitating the successful tactics of the Washington State Game Department, which keeps gullible hunters trembling with alarm by feeding them distorted versions of the proposals made by preservationists.

The case history of Snoqualmie Pass, and others that will be cited later in this article, are evidence that preservationists want due and proper justice for skiing. If space were available here, it could also be documented that certain prominent state bureaucrats who stake their jobs on the "fact" that preservationists oppose hunting are bare-faced liars, and that preservationists are better friends of wise multiple-use and the long-range health of the Northwest forest industry than the current crop of loggers. But those are a couple of other stories. At the least give the preservationists this: unlike many other participants in the public-lands controversies, they don't stand to make a nickel whichever way the decisions go.

Now for the other question: Are the skiers trying to steal our wilderness away? The answer to this is also a resounding NO — but a "no" that requires extended qualification.

First, there is no such group as "THE skiers." The teenyboppers in junior-high ski schools, the sleek stretchpants in the condominiums, the packed-hill flashes, the dancers and yodelers, the deep-snow nuts, the cornice-busters, the blizzard freaks, the quietland wanderers — put all these cats in one bag and you get nothing but blood.

Second, there is no organization that represents ALL skiers. The ski area operators and the professional ski instructors have associations that speak on behalf of "the skier," but the dollar sign is an obvious big monkey on their back. The Pacific Northwest Ski Association, which claims 6,000 members in all the states and provinces of the Northwest, would like to be accepted as official spokesman for "the skiers," but is so narrow in its concerns and so uninformed on basic public-lands issues that sophisticated skiers complain the group projects an image of monomania.

The other — motivated propagandists laboring to create a split between skiers and preservationist try to obscure the fact that the largest ski club in the State of Washington also is the largest preservation organization. Founded in 1906, and mainly responsible for popularizing skiing in the Cascades in the 1920's, The

Mountaineers number 5,500 members, most of whom ski; the club owns four ski lodges and two tow hills and presents an annual school in ski - mountaineering and schedules dozens of ski tours every winter. Membership is open to anyone who sympathizes with club purposes, which include: "To encourage a spirit of good fellowship among all lovers of outdoor life," as well as "To preserve by the encouragement of protective legislation or otherwise the natural beauty of Northwest America."

The dialogue between proponents of mechanized ski areas and proponents of wilderness has been underway in The Mountaineers for years. Often the words have been hot, the faces flushed, but a middle ground has been found. The Mountaineers, with more skiers assembled in one bunch than any other organization in the state, find it possible to reconcile mass skiing with wilderness protection. What's the problem? No problem at all when honest people sit down and talk it out.

Third and finally, there certainly are variously - motivated citizens doing their best to gut the wilderness - and some advertise themselves as spokesmen for "the skiers."

Milmanco Corporation, a Renton-based firm which grew up preparing technical manuals for the operation of tanks and missiles, is now wedging a big

camp, hunt, fish, ski, or participate in other recreational activities."

Now, everybody, how do you like that for a noble declaration? Here's a group that represents no single, selfish interest but rather stands up for the rights of all recreationists. (Repeat, "recreationists.") Let's hear it for the good guys.

As editor of The Wild Cascades, the much-denounced magazine of the North Cascades Conservation Council, I am on the mailing list of every U.S. National Forest in Washington to receive notices of public timber offered for sale. Being on these lists (which seem to be available to the forest industry) occasionally puts me in strange company for an irate bird-watcher.

I thus was not too surprised to receive a plea, on the letterhead of St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Yakima, signed by the Rev. Riley Johnson, who serves as president of Outdoors Unlimited when not ministering to the souls of his parishioners - among whom are executives of the largest lumber company in the town. The Rev. Riley wants me to join up, send money, and help fight parks and wildernesses. The reverend gentleman is fondly remembered by conservationists - with chuckles rather than scowls - for the amazing statements he read into the public record during his fruitless crusade against

those dangerous old trees that scare Mr. Lenihan.

In my opinion, a skier who is flatly opposed on principle to wilderness and parks should follow the call of duty and line up with Mr. Lenihan, the Rev. Riley, and Georgia-Pacific. Other skiers may wish to look behind the righteous anxiety of Outdoors Unlimited and ask: Is this my kind of folks? Is it the rights of skiers they're really concerned about?

Skiers need leaders and spokesmen, because the sport is probably going to continue growing (though not necessarily at the present rate, which might partially reflect the passing fad) and thus will require more room. Unfortunately, the public agencies and private promoters currently playing the statistics game - counting skiers (how you do this is a dark mystery to me) and estimating how many there will be in 1999 - subscribe to the fallacy that a skier is a skier is a skier, and a ski area is a ski area is a ski area, and thus their already dubious numbers become virtually meaningless. Moreover, I have yet to see any of these people put down on paper an overall Master Plan for Washington skiing, even in rough preliminary form.

For their guidance in constructing such a Master Plan, it must be recognized there are at least three kinds of skiers, with rather different requirements. One class, which for lack of a better name might be called the "social skier," is characterized by the beginners, the bunnies, the lodge-lizards. Their wants are satisfied by 'ski rinks' which also serve the evening skier, the Sunday-afternoon skier, the family skier with little kids, and the like. Snoqualmie Pass is the best local example.

A second class, the runner, demands long slopes with lots of vertical drop and lots of variety; he is excited by several thousand or more feet of drop from the top lift to the bottom runout, and a choice of trails: if he visits an area with only 1,000 or so feet of featureless, monotonous, heavily-groomed drop, it is only for night or bad-weather practice to keep his muscles loose for the real thing. Stevens Pass and Crystal Mountain are his current favorites, with an occasional touch of White Pass and some curiosity about Mission Ridge.

A third class, the wanderer, the ski-mountaineer, enjoys - as does the runner - the ballet of what Sir Arnold Lunn has called "one of the most graceful forms of motion available to man," but is even more devoted to the white virginity above the topmost lift, the corniced ridges with horizons of cold winter, the secret basins beyond sound of yodeling records. He doesn't demand long or fancy tows, uses them only as shortcuts to the high quiet where the true sport begins, and often skis where none exist. Of present big-time developments in the Cascades, Crystal is his prime choice, but when there he may ride the lifts only once or twice a day. He likes Paradise in decent weather and Mt. Baker in the spring, checks out Stevens Pass and White Pass now and then, and often may be found trudging up through the forest, skis on his back, toward the Inspiration Glacier on Eldorado, the Sulfide Glacier on Skuksan, the summit of Mt. St. Helens, and a hundred other places the Pacific Northwest Ski Association never heard of.

Before any accurate estimate can be made of future requirements for skiing room, before any Master Plan can be proposed for discussion, the census-takers and prognosticators must refine their methods of counting skiers, and must realize - as no skier spokesman seems to do at this moment - that there is more than one sort of ideal ski resort. The Snoqualmie Pass operations are quite close to being ideal ski rinks, and the need for more of the same is great. Stevens Pass and Crystal Mountain are in the direction of satisfying the ideals of the runners and the wanderers.

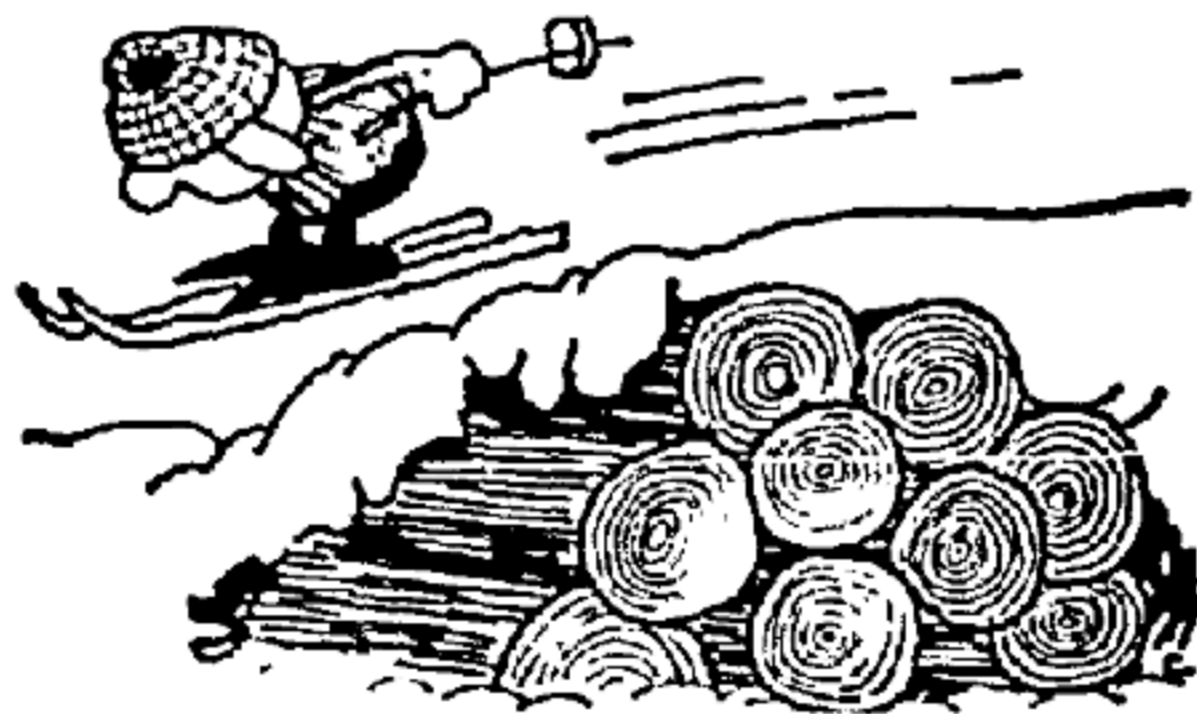
Another factor most current ski spokes-

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toe into recreation planning. The company has distributed a Recap of North Cascades Considerations, cited by true believers as The Gospel Revealed by Honest-to-Gosh Experts. One of the considerations is this: "To achieve the greatest use for the greatest number of people, we cannot afford to limit use of our mountain resources to a few persons for but one to two months of the year." For another: ". . . conservationists cannot continue to alienate winter sports interests by ignoring the needs and desires of that hitherto sympathetic group." It sure is news to 5,500 Mountaineers, and to thousands of Spokane Mountaineers, Cascadians, Alpine Clubbers, Sierra Clubbers, etc in the state, and to tens of thousands of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Campfire Girls, and countless high-country fishermen and ramblers, that they are a "select few" that use the mountains only "1 to 2 months of the year;" a book published by the Mountaineers in 1966, 100 Hikes in Western Washington, sold 20,000 copies in a single year. Mountaineers are also surprised to learn they are "ignoring the needs and desires" of skiers; among other things, next fall they are publishing a book called Northwest Ski Trails.

Milmanco's "Solution to the Problem" is to leave all public lands wide open for wheeling and dealing. Let the logging continue while recreation planners plan, and plan, and plan - for a fee.

Milmanco may not know much about mountains but at least honestly admits its profit motive. The same cannot be said of some supporters of another outfit that crept out from under a rock late in 1966 and now claims a membership of more than 50,000 rooting-tooting foes of a "lock-up" of the public lands. Of the five stated purposes of Outdoors Unlimited, the first gives an adequate summary: "To sponsor educational programs designed to facilitate the maximum development and use of recreational facilities and resources within national forests and other publicly owned lands for all people who may wish now, or in the future, to travel therein by



foot, horseback, boat, airplane, or motor vehicle, and for all people who wish to the 1960 creation of the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area.

I have also received two bulky, expensive pitches from Georgia-Pacific Corporation, appealing to my self-interest (as a presumed lumber entrepreneur, or why would I be on the Forest Service list?) and urging me to join Outdoors Unlimited, send money, and recruit my employees. Georgia-Pacific, which must feel public timber is cheaper than that grown on tree farms, assures me Outdoor Unlimited is just the ticket for us loggers.

At last spring's Senate hearings on the proposed North Cascades National Park, the general counsel of Outdoors Unlimited, William P. Lenihan, said, "We are not against national parks. We are not against wilderness areas. But we are against wilderness areas that are unrealistically large." What does he mean by "unrealistic"? Others of his remarks are suggestive: "A virgin forest . . . is a darned dangerous place to be . . . In fact, in many respects, I think there is more beauty in the vigorous growing, rather than the dying, rotting. The dying, rotting trees are rather a dangerous area." He also favors "road systems in wilderness areas" - a nice trick.

Mr. Lenihan devoted pages of testimony before the Senate Committee to the danger to skiing interests implicit in parks and wildernesses, which, he said, is a major reason "Outdoors Unlimited is advocating the retention of the status quo." Keep the chainsaws humming, eliminating

men are slow to face is economics. The Forest Service, which traditionally never gives up an acre of its multiple-use empire without biting and scratching, is prone to dream about that pie-in-the-sky day when everything is on the house. But a fully-equipped modern ski resort costs like hell. Public subsidies are available in the form of road construction and-or winter road maintenance, and every existing resort in Washington depends on subsidies for its life; yet private capital has to build the tows and all, and at the moment not many enterprisers are getting as much return on their investment (idealism and-or hope of future profit aside) as they could by socking their dough in the bank—or even, in some cases, by sticking it in a tin can buried in the garden.

Several Washington ski operations are rumored to be in trouble, including at least one big one. Overbuilding is always a threat in a growth industry. When offered a tantalizing vision, the skier must ask, who's going to risk the cash? And how soon? In my lifetime?

What surprises me is that all the dreaming and scheming is devoted to relatively-remote, broad-gauge resorts that would serve every breed of skier, ignoring the evidence at Snoqualmie Pass that the social skier is less concerned about the length or variety of slopes, or the quality

temperature is below freezing but the skies are clear. What skiers slide down at many an American rink, especially in the Confederacy, is already semi-artificial. Next will come machines that make snow at any air temperature — treated snow that hardly melts in anything less than a heat wave — and then perhaps a snow substitute that lasts for years and years and doesn't make you shiver when it gets inside your pants. Any competent engineer would invent all these things tomorrow if the number of skiers were large enough to make their use practical.

If skiing continues to grow in popularity the technology will keep pace, and in a dozen years or so an imaginative operator might well develop a ski resort on Tiger Mountain, rising above Issaquah to an elevation of 3,000 feet, the same as Snoqualmie Pass. Tiger doesn't receive enough natural snow for intensive use or a long season, but has a wealth of northern and eastern exposures ranging from easy to intermediate, largely on state-owned land, just waiting for establishment of a Tiger Mountain State Park, intensive grooming, and a heavy investment in snow-making machinery.

Why drive all the way to Snoqualmie Pass for night skiing? Why not catch the shuttle bus or tramway at Issaquah, 10

you can flounder around every weekend in a bowl of milk and be lucky ever to see your skis. Further, what we in the Cascades and Olympics call powder is known as slop in the cold continental climate of the Rockies.

Patriots expect that when the ultimate sites are ready in our home hills their fame will travel round the world, and thus they don't feel ridiculous glowing about the interior North Cascades. But fellows, it's not in the cards. Puget Sound skiers of modest finances have long been going to Sun Valley, a day's drive from Seattle. In this golden age of the affluent society (after us, the deluge?) when a swinging pair may spend \$100 for a first-class weekend at a first-class resort, the price of an airplane ticket to Colorado looms small in the expense of a winter vacation. The classic powder is not now and never will be in our dark, wet, gloomy, beloved Cascades and Olympics.

As the ski population of Washington grows larger, the world will be growing smaller, and the level of affluence (at least in the upper and middle classes, which do nearly all the mechanized skiing) will be rising. Any planning for the future of Washington skiing should take into account: (1) More Washington skiers will be flying away to Idaho, Utah, Montana, Colorado, and Alberta, and later to Alaska and the Yukon, not to forget the Alps, the Andes, and New Zealand; (2) Not many skiers, and then only scenery buffs and curiosity seekers, are ever going to fly in to Washington from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or West Berlin.

About every 5-10 years, I'd guess, we'll need another Cascades area on the pattern of Crystal Mountain — maybe three to five or so between now and 2000. But let's not get delusions of grandeur. These resorts will only be economic if they give us home folks good weekend skiing. Forget the fly-ins from Baltimore and Hong Kong. Remember the fly-outs to Alta and Aspen and by SST to Antarctica.

Look for slopes within a 2-3-hour drive from Seattle, be skeptical of those 4 hours away, and don't clutter your head with 5 hours. Really, all this is academic: dreamers can propose far-out areas until they blow their minds, but somebody has to lay a big dollar on the line to make it happen, and baby, it ain't likely at Washington Pass in THIS century.

I take it as my duty to inform skiers that many of the self-appointed skier spokesmen busy inventing myths about the Big Rock Candy Mountains are making their proposals for reasons other than those they express in public.

Because the Forest Service promises to flip you out of your skull at Washington Pass does not mean you or any American now living will ever ride a chairlift there — but it does mean the Forest Service hopes to gain skier support for multiple-use (logging) of Washington Pass. No need to speculate on the motives of the ski area operators, the ski instructors, the recreation planners, the Rev. Riley, Outdoors Unlimited, Georgia-Pacific. In asking that no land be "locked up" in national parks or national wilderness areas, that the status quo be maintained for 20 or more years until careful surveys of all potential ski terrain have been completed, they are asking for precisely what the Forest Service and its buddies want — log it all to hell and then fit in some picnic tables and tows among the stumps.

Why is it, I wonder, that "skier spokesmen" are hyperactive in discovering great runs amid lands proposed for wilderness and parks? How come they never turn up a good thing on the mountain lands held in Washington by timber companies and railroads, which in total are almost exactly equivalent to the state acreage in National Forest lands outside any controversy? I accept the conspiracy theory only as a last resort; I would prefer to believe the people are simply dull. Good-hearted but dull.

'Many skier spokesmen are busy inventing myths about Big Rock Candy Mountains for reasons other than those they express in public...'

of snow or scenery, than he is about how long it takes to get there. I find it incredible professional experts don't realize much of the projected growth in skiing can only be properly served by ski rinks within a 60-90-minute drive (by private car or rink bus) of major population centers.

Now that Snoqualmie Pass is nearing saturation, the search should begin for similar locations, even if public subsidy by new road construction is required. Where ranges of the Cascades, which rise to elevations as high as any attained by Snoqualmie tows, receive about equal snowfall, offer innumerable slopes at least as good as anything at the Pass, and are as close or closer to downtown Seattle.

The ridges above the lower reaches of the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River, including such tributaries as Pratt River, deserve a look, and also the drainage of the Snoqualmie North Fork, and valleys in the Index vicinity flowing to the lower Skykomish River. Roughly 25 per cent of the total acreage of King County (and perhaps half or more of the total mountain acreage) is locked up tight (except for loggers) in the watersheds of the Tolt, Cedar and Green Rivers: ultimately the Seattle and Tacoma City Water Departments will be forced to open this enormous empire of pure water for recreational purposes, and long-range planners would do well to start scouting.

One of the first ski areas in the Northwest was that of The Mountaineers at Stampede Pass. Forty years later Meany Hill remains popular, and according to the bugs has better snow and a longer season than Snoqualmie; two friends of mine once drove all the way from Palo Alto, where they were then living, for a weekend at Meany — insane but true. The surrounding terrain might be worth inspecting, as well as the peaks around Cle Elum.

The steadily-advancing technology of managing snow is making, and will make, ski rinks feasible in places nobody now has in mind. Mechanized rollers pack the snow after each storm, chemicals retard melting, sprayers spew out ice crystals when the



minutes from Bellevue and 10 minutes from the summit of Tiger? Kids could go skiing after school, as they now go ice skating, and get home only a bit late for supper.

Frankly, I doubt ski-dreamers will be thrilled enough to start a boom for Tiger Mountain, or Pratt River, or Cedar Lake, or anywhere in the front ranges. Even if economically practical in the near future (unlikely) there's no glamor. However, the big-time experts supposedly concerned about the needs and desires of all skiers should stop looking down their noses at the social skier and include ski rinks in their comprehensive plans for the year 2000 — though admittedly it's more fun to spin fantasies about a Valhalla for the elect in the remote North Cascades.

Even if the technology ultimately advances to the point that there is an indoor ski rink at every shopping center, next to the bowling alley and the rifle range, alpine resorts will be required for the runners and the wanderers, as well as for bunnies and beginners who are turned on by scenery and snowflakes and aspire to the swifter life. But at the risk of being lynched by loyalists, I must point out that when the most magnificent of all possible ski areas has been developed in the Cascades, it will still be in the Cascades.

Maritime ranges such as ours enjoy the full bounty of the snow gods — but the gods are idiots, once they start they lose their heads; in a "good winter for the glaciers"