

Sovereign Futures

A Strategic Plan



Sovereign
Lake
NORDIC CLUB



SKIING
FAMILY FRIENDLY
COMMUNITY DRIVEN
ACTIVE LIFESTYLES
SKIER DEVELOPMENT
HISTORY
TRAILS

SOVEREIGN FUTURES

A STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE SOVEREIGN LAKE NORDIC CLUB FOR 2012-2017

Message from the Board

Environmental Scan

- Cross Country Skiing Participation Trends
- Demographics of the North Okanagan Region

Mission Statement

Statement of Values

Goals and Strategies

1. Club Development
2. Trails
3. Facilities
 - Day Lodge
 - Core Area Improvements
 - Cabins and Huts
 - Access Road
4. Skier Development Programs
 - Programs
 - Training Centre Concept
5. Competitions and Events
6. Snowshoeing and Tobogganing

Appendices

History of the Sovereign Lake Nordic Club
References

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Welcome to *Sovereign Futures*, the Strategic Plan of the Sovereign Lake Nordic Club for 2012 – 2017.

During the winter of 1938, Carl Wylie, along with the Taylors, the Jones, and their contemporaries came to Sovereign Lake in search of an outstanding natural environment and abundant snow. They began ski touring in what is now Silver Star Provincial Park and, over time developed ski trails and warming cabins.

More importantly they had a vision for a place where like-minded outdoor enthusiasts and families could come together to celebrate their passion for skiing.

Since that time, three generations of ski club members have spent tens of thousands of volunteer hours to produce over 50 kilometers of the finest cross-country ski trails in North America.

Many things have changed over the years. Lodges and cabins have been built, trails have been expanded, world-class events have been hosted, but the vision of our founders and our club members' passion for skiing endures.

As we approach our 75th year we give a shout out to our pioneers, who had a vision, and celebrate the current generation of families and volunteers who continue to make Sovereign Lake Nordic Club a great place to be.

Sovereign Futures was developed following extensive input from and discussion with our club members and our many guests over the 2011-2012 ski season. This document outlines our Mission and Values and establishes the priorities of the Sovereign Lake Nordic Club for the next 5 years.

Cross Country Skiing Participation Trends

The sport of cross country skiing is growing. Industry research for North America points to consistent growth in skier visits over the past several years, with an increase in participation of 10% between 2005 and 2010, (a 2% annual growth rate).

From an operator perspective, the Cross Country Ski Areas Association reports that 75% of its members experienced better overall business in 2010-2011 with 67% of its members experiencing increased skier visits and 32% breaking skier visitor records. Equipment manufacturers reported a rebound in sales of 9% from 2009 to 2010 with re-orders up 20% in 2011-12. There are new products being developed and some new industry players are entering the North American cross country ski market.

Participation in events is also increasing. The American Birkebeiner, for example, which for many years struggled to reach the 7000 participant mark, in the past couple of years has exploded to 8000, then 9000 and is now flirting with 10,000 participants. The average age of Birkebeiner participants has actually come down by a couple of years to 39 from 42, which speaks well to the health of the sport.

Cross country skiing is family-friendly, accessible and affordable. It is a life-long sport that invigorates the body and soul.

Although the sport continues to grow it is still a narrow niche activity and is heavily influenced by seasonal weather. As such, cross country ski area operators need to offer high-quality venues, programs and services and continue innovative marketing.

Demographics of the North Okanagan Region

According to the 2006 Census the average age of Vernon's population is 45 years old, up from the 2001 figure of 42. Vernon's average age is 4 years higher than the B.C. average of 41. Among twelve benchmark communities in B.C. only Penticton and White Rock have higher average ages.

Between 1976 and 2006, the proportion of Vernon's population aged 65 and older had increased from 14% to 22%. This trend is expected to continue as the Baby Boom generation ages. This will be compounded as Baby Boomers continue to come to the Okanagan from across Canada to retire.

Population growth rates are projected to decrease from 2% in 2011 to 1% by 2016. The Greater Vernon population of 55,000 (2006) is projected to increase to 81,500 by the year 2031.

This demographic suggests that SLNC can expect a modest increase in local skier numbers. The challenge will be for SLNC to remain vibrant by continuing to offer a high quality venue and programs that cater to young families and youth and by marketing Vernon as a major cross-country ski destination particularly for residents of British Columbia, Southern Alberta and the Northwestern United States.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Sovereign Lake Nordic Club is dedicated to the promotion of cross country skiing as a lifelong activity. Committed to the provision of high quality facilities, programs and services, the SLNC operates a world-class cross country ski centre within Silver Star Provincial Park for the recreational, social and economic benefit of Vernon and the North Okanagan Region.

STATEMENT OF VALUES

Community-Driven SLNC will be guided by the vision and the needs of the cross-country ski community.

Working with Others SLNC will collaborate with government, sport governing bodies, local business and industry partners in the realization of its mission.

Family-Friendly SLNC will operate a family-friendly venue with a focus on quality programming for all age groups including children and youth.

Non-Commercial SLNC will fulfill its mission on a not-for-profit basis as a social enterprise for the benefit of the cross country ski community.

Affordability As a non-profit society, SLNC will ensure an affordable, high quality skiing experience.

Health Promotion SLNC will contribute to broader community health objectives through the promotion of active lifestyles.

Environmental Protection SLNC will support BC Park's goals of protecting natural environments and providing outdoor recreation and will operate in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Tourism Promotion SLNC will work with local government and business partners to promote Vernon as the pre-eminent North American cross country ski destination.

Good Governance SLNC will be governed with openness, transparency and accountability.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

SKI CLUB DEVELOPMENT

The Sovereign Lake Nordic Club is many things to many people. First, it is a volunteer-driven club providing for the needs of its members. It is also professional ski area operator, working in cooperation with BC Parks in running a world-class cross country ski centre.

Strategy:

- The Club will remain governed by an elected Board of Directors which will be policy-driven. The Board will operate with openness, transparency and accountability.
- The Board will set priorities annually and oversee all development, management and operations.
- The Club will review governance issues periodically. The Board will also conduct a periodic review of training needs for staff, board members and volunteers.
- The Board will foster a climate of inclusiveness and a sense of common mission amongst the members and staff by encouraging social activities including the running of events.
- The Club will encourage volunteerism in the delivery of programs and events. To this end the Club will establish a Volunteer Coordinator function at the Board and staff levels to provide a more proactive and planned approach to volunteer recruitment, succession, training and recognition.
- SLNC will target an annual membership growth rate of 3% which will enable SLNC to remain vibrant and continue to offer high quality programs that cater to all ages.
- SLNC will work with the City of Vernon and other partners in developing a marketing plan aimed at positioning Vernon as a pre-eminent North American cross country ski destination.

TRAILS

In 1938, the founders of the SLNC recognized that the major attributes of Silver Star Provincial Park were the outstanding natural environment and abundant dry snowfall. This has not changed over 75 years. Over the long-term, the high altitude of

Silver Star Provincial Park may also give SLNC an advantage over ski areas at lower elevations as it may insulate us from the negative effects of climate change. These attributes, along with our world-class grooming, continue to provide some of the best cross country skiing in the world.



Maintaining high-quality cross country ski trails is our core business. It is what brings people to SLNC and keeps them coming back. Of all the comments received during the development of the strategic plan, continuing to provide high-quality ski trails was most consistently mentioned.

Additional comments regarding trails included:

- Continue improvements to existing trail surfaces for early season access
- Realign Gold Mountain Trail for easier access to Silver Star Mountain Resort village and trails
- Develop a Terrain Park for skill development programs
- Develop a new “multi-use” trail for walkers, snowshoers, dogs and sleds.
- Expand the lighted trail network
- Modify some existing backcountry trails to provide narrow, groomed classic-only trails
- Build a biathlon penalty loop
- Develop a paved roller ski trail for summer training and walking.

Some of these trail suggestions, such as improvements to the existing trail surfaces are part of our annual capital planning and operations. Others may require trail realignment and re-designation, while others constitute major capital expenditures and possibly new and ongoing trail grooming costs to the club.

Strategy:

- SLNC will continue to groom and maintain the existing trail network with the same high standard that members and visitors have come to expect.
- Operations staff will continue to improve existing trail surfaces and provide for minor realignments within annual trail maintenance budgets.
- The development of a Terrain Park and the realignment of Gold Mountain are recognized as being a priority for members.
- Due to the capital and operating issues to be considered, it is beyond the scope of the Strategic Plan to set priorities or timelines on new trail development with any certainty. The Board of Directors and operations staff will need to examine the issues in more detail and adopt a trail strategy that fits with SLNC overall capital planning priorities. Some of these initiatives may be most economically addressed as part of site planning and construction of a new day lodge.
- The SLNC will consult with potential partners to see if there are opportunities for cost-sharing on some of these trail initiatives.



FACILITIES

Day Lodge

The current day lodge was built in 1992-93 and has served the club well over this time. Growth in the number of members, day skiers, programs and events have created congestion in the lounge areas especially on weekends, holidays and event days. This congestion has also resulted in operating inefficiencies in the rental and main counter areas to the extent that customer service is compromised.



The status quo is not an option. The club needs to take action to address the long-term needs of the club and the skiing public.

Any addition to the existing day lodge would trigger compliance with the current building code. This would be costly as it would entail significant upgrades to the existing structure and mechanical systems.

BC Parks has expressed interest in partnering with the Sovereign Lake Nordic Club in the construction of a new day lodge which would more fully meet the needs of park users, the Sovereign Lake Nordic Club and BC Parks.

Information was provided, special meetings were held and the day lodge issue was discussed extensively through the Sovereign Futures planning process. A strong consensus has emerged within the membership that the Club pursue opportunities to replace the day lodge. The SLNC is currently debt-free. We are well governed and operate on a strong and growing financial footing. We are professionally managed and are well positioned to take on this challenge.

Strategy:

- SLNC will pursue the current opportunity to partner with BC Parks in the development of a new day lodge and will keep the membership informed as new information becomes available.
- The Board of Directors will appoint a Building Committee to liaise with BC Parks and oversee the development process.
- There will be a planning phase which will include site planning, environmental review and facility design. The Building Committee will provide opportunities throughout the planning phase to consult with club membership on site and facility design.
- Any new day lodge will be well designed to meet the long-term needs of the skiing public and will be cost-effective to operate.

“Core Area” Improvement

There are a number of identified needs relating to the developed “core area” of SLNC and Silver Star Provincial Park. These include:

- construction of a new day lodge
- expanded parking
- development of a Terrain Park for skill development programs
- realignment of the Gold Mountain trail
- development of a “multi-use” trail and a biathlon penalty loop.

Some of these initiatives may be most economically developed as part of a comprehensive redesign of SLNC’s core area.

Strategy:

- Parking issues will be addressed as part of the site planning associated with the construction of a new day lodge. A significant increase in parking spaces will be a priority in site planning.
- Other identified core area improvements will be examined as part of site planning and associated with development of a new day lodge.

Cabins, Huts and Outhouses:

SLNC currently has the use of the Black Prince Cabin as a strategically located warming hut with outhouse facilities. Some skiers have suggested that our trail system would benefit from the placement of an additional cabin or warming hut as well as additional outhouse facilities on our trail network. There are significant development and operational factors to consider including daily maintenance and heating, security and vandalism.



Strategy:

- The SLNC will not pursue the development of new cabins or huts at this time. This is in consideration of operational issues and the priorities the club will have over the next 5 years in the development of a new day lodge and trails.
- SLNC will consult with BC Parks to determine the feasibility and development issues associated with additional outhouse facilities on the trail network.

Access Road

Several comments were received about the condition of the Sovereign Lake Access Road especially in the spring. The access road is maintained by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure as part of the basic infrastructure of Silver Star Provincial Park. As the road is managed by the province, SLNC would have to demonstrate a significant need to initiate a discussion on realignment and resurfacing.

Strategy:

- Improvements in the grading and the surface of the Sovereign Lake Access Road are recognized as a long term need. SLNC will examine opportunities for road improvements as part of site planning and redevelopment.

SKIER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Skier Development Programs including Bunnies, Jackrabbits, Track Attack, Junior Development, Biathlon and Masters are core components of the SLNC. These programs are essential to our mission of promoting cross country skiing as a lifelong activity.



The underlying philosophy of the SLNC programs is to continue to develop the skills and abilities of participants through the promotion of “fun, friendship, fundamentals and excellence.” Program staff and volunteers will provide a supporting environment where having fun is encouraged, the building of friendships is nurtured and fundamental skills are developed.

It is recognized that skiers have a variety of interests and needs especially as they enter the teen years and continuing to adulthood. As such SLNC needs to provide a variety of programs to meet these needs.

Strategy:

- The priority will be to deliver comprehensive programs that reflect the needs of club members. Led by quality, NCCP certified coaches, SLNC programs will provide a supportive environment that will allow for all skiers to meet their goals.
- SLNC will offer a full range of programs in accordance with Cross Country Canada’s (CCC) and Biathlon Canada’s Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Models.

Childrens programs: The first three stages, Active Start (Bunnies), FUNdamentals (Jackrabbits) and Learning to Train (Track Attack) will be common to all skiers and will address needs up to 12 years of age.

Teen and Adult Programs: For skiers over the age of 12, SLNC will offer a variety of programs that support individual skier goals from continued participation and skill development to competitive ski racing and biathlon. Teen and adult programs will vary depending on individual skier goals and costs will vary depending on the program duration (number of weeks), the number of training days and additional support required.

- In order to ensure quality, and to comply with the coaching requirements of CCC and Biathlon Canada, SLNC will continue to develop a proactive coaching recruitment and development strategy that will ensure that an adequate number of trained coaches are available at the Community Coach and Competition Coach levels.
- SLNC will continue to seek funding from a variety of sources which support SLNC skier development programs.

SLNC as a High Performance Training Centre

It has been suggested by many people that the Sovereign Lake Nordic Centre and the Vernon community have many of the attributes required to support a High Performance Training Centre for ski racing and biathlon. These attributes include high quality trails and facilities, extended season, affordable housing, post-secondary education opportunities and a supportive cross country ski community.

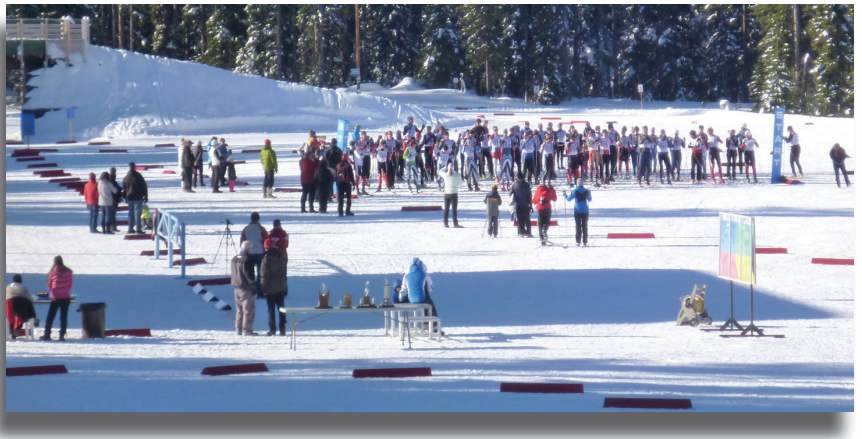
Providing the necessary resources to support a high performance program is a very costly enterprise and can only be realized with significant support from government and the corporate sector normally available through national sport governing bodies. Biathlon Canada supports National Training Centres in Valcartier and Canmore. Cross Country Canada (CCC), as part of its high performance (HP) program, partially funds National Team Development Centres in Canmore, Quebec City, Thunder Bay and most recently at Callaghan Valley/Whistler as part of the 2010 Olympic Legacy. The Alberta World Cup Academy in Canmore also fulfills this role. CCC has determined that the overall capacity of the NDC (National Development Centre) system is currently sufficient to support an athlete pool of a size sufficient to meet HP benchmarks.

Strategy:

- SLNC will, as a priority, strive to meet the needs of our club athletes. We will also continue to work with Cross Country Canada and Biathlon Canada to determine how SLNC may best contribute to national athlete development goals.

COMPETITIONS AND EVENTS

The hosting of competitions and events is important to the realization of our mission of sport promotion and to establishing a sense of teamwork and camaraderie amongst club members. Over the past decade the hosting of major competitions has resulted in significant legacy infrastructure for SLNC.



Competitions at Sovereign Lake have contributed to national athlete development and have served in showcasing SLNC and Vernon as a premiere cross country ski destination. This was evidenced most recently in our hosting of the 2011 Sparkling Hill Masters World Cup.

While there are benefits, the hosting of competitions requires a significant commitment of volunteer effort. As

such it is important that SLNC adopt a balanced approach to selection and management of events. On average, SLNC hosts competitions on 5-6 days out of a 160 day ski season.

Strategy:

- SLNC will maintain its' capacity to host events by developing a proactive and planned approach to the recruitment and training of chiefs, volunteers and officials.
- The Competitions Committee will annually select local, provincial, national and international events as opportunities present.
- Within the next 5 years, SLNC will consider a bid for the National Ski Championships to coincide with the anticipated opening of a new day lodge.
- Race organizers will ensure that opportunities continue for recreational skiing on event days and will minimize the kilometers of trail and time requirements for races while maintaining athlete safety.
- SLNC will strive for events to be revenue generating. At a minimum, events will be conducted on a revenue-neutral basis.
- SLNC will promote increased participation of club skiers in local events such as the Tips-Up Cup (Club Championships) and the SLNC Loppet.

SNOWSHOEING AND TOBOGGANING

Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing is a rapidly growing winter recreation activity and provides for a diverse experience. It is affordable, easy-to-learn and also contributes to SLNC's family focus as it provides an alternate activity for family members who may not be skiers. Snowshoeing is also a significant and growing revenue source for SLNC which can be provided with minimal operating expense.

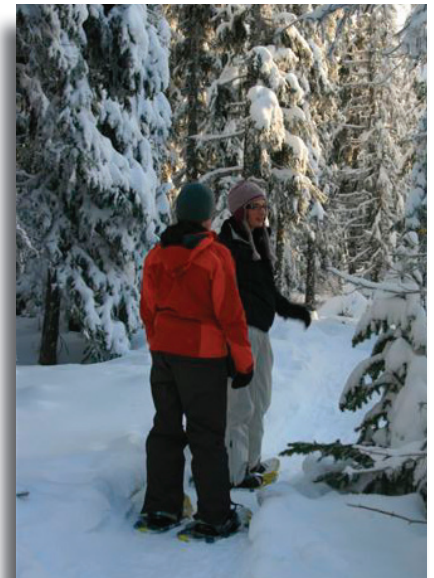
Strategy:

- SLNC will continue to offer snowshoe trails, rentals and lessons as part of our core business
- SLNC will help grow the sport by including snowshoeing in our promotional and marketing material.

Tobogganing

Tobogganing was originally provided as a supplementary activity primarily for club members with young families. In the past few years tobogganing by non-member families has increased substantially, particularly on weekends. This has given rise to operational challenges including safety, liability and parking.

SLNC operates within Silver Star Provincial Park and is engaged in a social enterprise for the benefit of the broader Vernon community. As such, SLNC will continue to offer this low-cost recreational opportunity on a managed basis.



Strategy:

- SLNC will continue to provide a tobogganing area and will establish a user fee/permit system which will be enforced. This permit system is necessary to track use, manage risk and offset costs.
- Guidelines to ensure user safety will be developed and posted and SLNC will assess this activity periodically as part of its overall risk management.
- Additional parking will be addressed as part of site redevelopment associated with the construction of the new day lodge.
- Tobogganing will remain an ancillary, non-core activity. There will be no marketing or promotion of tobogganing.

APPENDICES

Board of Directors 2011 - 2012

Pat Pearce - Chair
Bob Advent
Chuck Austin
Gerry Brenneman
Sharon Clarke
Hugh Hamilton
Alex Lane
Don Reimer
Patrick Tobin

Staff - Scott Lemon , General Manager

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HISTORY OF THE SOVEREIGN LAKE NORDIC CLUB

Sovereign Lake, the site of the old Silver Star Ski Club cabin, was the centre of skiing activities on the mountain during the period from 1938 to 1958. Silver Star Provincial Park was established in 1940. The first trails cleared by pioneers like Carl Wylie, were narrow and primitive by today's standards. In 1958, after the road was plowed and new development started at what is now Silver Star Mountain Resort, interest in skiing shifted to downhill and “ski touring”, as it was then called, fell by the wayside.

The early 1970's saw a renewed increased interest in cross-country skiing, starting in Ontario and Quebec. In 1974, the North Okanagan Cross Country Ski Club was formed under charter president Keith Brewis, who continued to guide its activities for several years.

By 1978 the Ministry of Parks developed a master plan for Silver Star Provincial Park and undertook overall responsibility for the development of the ski trails. Park planners at Kamloops worked closely with ski club members who went to work cutting the new routes. BC Parks also created two parking lots, one for snowmobiles and one for cross-country skiers.



The area proved to be popular right from the start, and the increase in skiers caused a steady expansion of the trail system. In 1983 the first warming hut was built. In 1984 and 1985 the ski club undertook construction of a major trail to the summit, now called the Aberdeen trail. 1987 saw the completion of Centre Star (now Lars Taylor) and Gold Mountain trails.

During 1986 and 1987 a trail system west of Sovereign Lake was constructed. Now known as the Montezumas and White Elephant, the original purpose was to provide a challenging group of trails suitable for racing and training which was separate from the main recreation area. It was completed in the fall of 1988 the year in which a beautiful log warming hut, the Black Prince Cabin was built.

In 1989, in keeping with government policy that the area was required to be self-supporting, the Sovereign Lake Nordic Club was offered the opportunity to operate the ski area. In 1990, a Park Use Permit was signed and an operating committee of the club was formed under the very able leadership of Ed Devlin. In 1992, the Club acquired a second twin-trac snowmobile and a PB170 groomer. In the summer of 1993 a day lodge was built with the help of a jobs grant, much donated material and many hours of volunteer labor.

Over three generations, Ski Club members have spent tens of thousands of volunteer hours to produce over 50 kilometers of the finest cross-country ski trails in North America.

In 1991 the Club, in conjunction with Silver Star Mountain Resort sponsored Vernon's first World Cup race. Over two hundred Club members held key positions in this event which has been acclaimed as one of the best ever by the International Ski Federation. Sovereign Lake Nordic Club hosted a World Cup in 2005 and the Masters World Championships in 2011.

The Sovereign Lake Nordic Centre continues to evolve and mature and now provides over 50,000 user days of cross-country skiing annually. The Club has contributed to Vernon being viewed as one of the premiere cross-country skiing destination within North America.

In 2013 SLNC will celebrate its 75th Anniversary. While we now have paid staff, the Club is still largely volunteer-driven. So as we celebrate our 75th year, we give a shout out to our founders, who had a vision, and celebrate the current generation of families and volunteers who continue to make Sovereign Lake Nordic Club a great place to be.

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