



Press Release

Hay River Ski Club Faces Uncertain Future Due to GNWT Cuts

Summary: The Hay River Ski Club is losing its funding because of a surprise GNWT decision to withdraw financial support after the lottery program was changed.

Background

Shortly after its establishment in 1974, the Hay River Ski Club's (HRSC) operational budget has been based on monies generated from lottery sales in Hay River. The HRSC was classified as a lottery retailer, and revenues generated supported youth and recreation with annual contributions to organizations including the HRSC. This enabled the Executives of the HRSC over the years to develop its facilities and programming into the first-class organization that it is today.

In 2014, the GNWT started the process of taking control of Lotteries in the NWT and "excluded non- government organizations as being retailers as administering the lottery" because it "...could result in tax implications for these organizations" (*GNWT MACA - NWT Lotteries*). The then existent NWT Sport and Recreation Council implemented a 'Legacy Retailer Grant Program' in response and offered a five-year (2016-2021) contribution agreement to the HRSC. In November 2020, NWT Lotteries unexpectedly advised the HRSC that this arrangement was "interim" and that "the GNWT has no intention of continuing this legacy arrangement" (*GNWT MACA – NWT Lotteries*). What started as concerns over a tax liability in 2014 has now resulted in the total loss of the operational budget for the HRSC. As this funding covers the costs of our utilities, fuel, insurance and equipment repairs, the future of the Ski Club is at risk.

The revenue that the HRSC receives from Lottery Sales in our community accounts for approximately two thirds of our total annual budget, with the remainder coming from membership fees and programming support from our Territorial Sport Organization (Cross Country NWT). While the HRSC is considered to be a Town of Hay River asset, long term agreements with the Town are such that they are not responsible for any costs associated with the facility.

Who We Are

The HRSC is regarded as a first-class cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and biathlon facility that not only benefits the residents of Hay River but also athletes from communities across the NWT. In 2018, the HRSC hosted the ski biathlon, snowshoe biathlon and snowshoe events for the South Slave Arctic Winter Games. Our most renowned athlete is three-time Olympian and biathlete Brendan Green, and athletes from Hay River have gone on to represent the NWT at numerous Canada Games, National Championships and Arctic Winter Games.

The HRSC is a 100% run volunteer organization and is managed by an Executive that consists of 8 members. Many Canadian ski club boards have paid positions and a substantially larger volunteer base dedicated to trail grooming, marketing, event coordinating and grant writing. The volunteer hours logged by our HRSC Executive last season would be equivalent to two paid positions annually. This past winter saw a record 62% increase in membership to 260 members who took full advantage of our trail system and recreational programming. We offered weekly family cross-country skiing events, workshops, youth and adult ski lessons, youth biathlon training, and hosted the first annual Pat Bobinski Memorial Ski Races (PAB's) and Polar Cup Biathlon competitions. We also hosted numerous school classes throughout the season at the HRSC and offered two cross-country ski clinics at K'at'l'odeeche First Nation. Looking ahead, we were planning on hosting the AWG Biathlon Trials and biathlon teams for the 2023 and 2024 Arctic Winter Games.

Being a volunteer organization, it is simply not feasible for the HRSC to take on fundraising towards our annual operational budget in addition to being responsible for maintaining the trails and facilities and providing a wide variety of recreational and sporting programs. It may be impossible to continue offering these services to the residents of Hay River and the NWT, and the very existence of the HRSC may be at risk.

Moving Forward

The Executive of the HRSC appreciates the support that we have received from our Hay River MLAs, Rocky and RJ Simpson, who have lobbied for our funding to be restored from NWT Lotteries. Lottery sales in our community are as strong as ever, with the potential loss of approximately \$100,000 in revenue to our community. We do not accept that "MACA's budget, including the Western Canada Lottery, does not have the resources to do so" (GNWT MACA). It is our position that these funds are generated in our community, and therefore should continue to benefit youth and recreation at the HRSC.

The HRSC has been active in attempting to raise additional funds for our Club. We have partnered with the Hay River Golf Club to host the 'Chase the Ace' fundraiser with revenues being used to upgrade our aging grooming equipment and clubhouse renovations. We have applied on several funding programs with the GNWT, but with minimal success to date. We have also benefited from the local support and services provided by the local business community. The GNWT has offered 1.5 years of funding through the NGO Stabilization Fund, but conditions thereof are that this is the final arrangement from MACA and NWT Lotteries.

The HRSC is requesting that the five-year Contribution Agreement with MACA and NWT Lotteries be restored and increased accordingly. Provided that the HRSC is active and in good standing, this agreement be renewed on a five-year cycle and on a permanent basis.

The GNWT endorses active and healthy lifestyles and endeavors to promote positive mental health for NWT residents. During COVID-19, the HRSC has played a crucial role in supporting the mental and physical health of South Slave residents throughout the winter months. In addition,

the HRSC is a renowned winter tourism destination in the NWT. The HRSC contributes to families and retirees choosing to make Hay River their home.

We need your support to keep the HRSC alive!

Please email the Minister of MACA (Shane_Thompson@ntassembly.ca) and cc our Hay River MLAs (Rocky_Simpson@ntassembly.ca and RJ_Simpson@ntassembly.ca) and the HRSC President Karen Wall (ski@hayriverskiclub.com) to lobby for our core funding to be reinstated. Thank you!

For more information on the Hay River Ski Club, visit our website at www.hayriverskiclub.com and our Hay River Ski Club Facebook page.

For questions relating to the press-release, please contact Chuck Lirette (HRSC Trails/Facilities and Biathlon Coach) at 867-875-7849 or clirette@northwestel.net.