

Dreaming of a new kind of ski area

By Devon O'Neil, ESPN

"I want to partner with the United Nations," says Jamie Schectman. "I want to have a family that's currently in Afghanistan come to one of our ski areas and see how we're running things and then go back to Afghanistan and start one of their own [ski areas] in collaboration with us. How's that for ambitious?"

Yes, it's ambitious. But he's not without a plan. Schectman recently co-founded the Mountain Riders Alliance, a group whose mission is to develop environmentally-friendly, rider-owned ski areas throughout the world. And sure, they have some abstract ideals, but it's key to remember that MRA was formed in response to a larger phenomenon, the big-business ski industry.

"We feel like the sport has taken a turn and forgotten about us. We're skiers first," says Schectman. "Some ski resorts come into a town, don't embrace the community, and drive out the locals and soul. We don't want to be like that."

Schectman, 41, and five partners are within a month of announcing their purchase of a North American ski area, which they plan to transform into a "ski-energy center" and operate on minimalist terms and with a mix of old-school, community-focused strategies as well as innovative, modern energy solutions.

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