

# Man-made snow allows resorts to open before holidays

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Barrett Burghart can't cast thunderbolts or heal the Earth and doesn't wear a frilly dress. But he does play Mother Nature.

Where nature leaves off, Burghart and his staff fill in the gap, blanketing Heavenly Ski Resort with acres of man-made snow.

Boasting the largest snow-making operation on the West Coast, Heavenly's staff says it can cover a football field with 8 feet of snow in three hours.



Heavenly fired up its snowmaking guns in October.

Photo/Heavenly

With less than one week to go before the resort is scheduled to open, this is crunch time. Three shifts of snow-makers work – weather permitting – using more than 100 emitters, or “guns,” to turn million of gallons of water into snow.

Burghart and his team can create mountains – of snow – but they can't do it without help from nature. Air and water are

pushed through water cannons and when the ambient temperature is cold enough, the water freezes and gently falls as snow. When it is too warm, the operation shuts down. The recent cold weather has allowed snow-making to continue around the clock.

Snow-making used to be seen as a luxury for West Coast ski resorts, but it has become essential as resorts try to open earlier and stay open during drought years.

Buoyed by more than a foot of natural snow at higher elevations, Boreal Mountain Resort and Mammoth are already open. Heavenly is planning a Friday opening. The next day, both Squaw Valley USA and Northstar-at-Tahoe are opening.

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