

# Climate changing taking a toll on California ski industry

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

A warming climate is melting California's winter tourism dollars.

That's the conclusion of a new economic analysis released Thursday.

The study – titled “Climate Impacts on the Winter Tourism Economy in the United States” and written by two University of New Hampshire researchers – said California and 37 other states have lost an estimated \$1 billion and up to 27,000 jobs over the last decade alone due to less snowfall and shorter winters that research indicates are linked to global climate change.



Snowmaking at Tahoe resorts helps supplement the natural white stuff. Photo/LTN file

The report warned that a continuation of the global warming trend could result in the loss of thousands more jobs at ski resorts and create numerous related economic setbacks, costing

billions in lost revenue and tax dollars.

The report, released by the advocacy groups Protect Our Winters in Pacific Palisades and the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York, offered this grim look at the future: "Without intervention, winter temperatures are projected to warm an additional 4 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century, with subsequent decreases in snow cover area, snowfall and (a) shorter snow season. Snow depths could decline in the West by 25 to 100 percent ..."

The related effects would include economic and job losses in the restaurant/hotel industries, grocery stores and gas stations, as well as a reduced tax base, possible winter resort closures and sharp declines in sales of winter sports equipment.

The report calls for the winter tourism industry to press federal lawmakers and the Obama administration for further action to reduce carbon pollution. Officials particularly focused on a revised pollution standard for large power plants.

The report cited an industry survey that said 50 percent of responding U.S. ski areas opened late in 2011 and 48 percent closed early.

"This spells significant economic uncertainty for a winter sports industry deeply dependent upon predictable, heavy snowfall," said Elizabeth Burakowski, co-author of the report.

For California's winter sports industry, the potential downfalls are significant.

During the 2009-10 winter sports season, the most recent measured by the report's authors, nearly 24,000 jobs were supported by the industry in California, providing an economic boost of \$1.37 billion statewide. Labor income alone that year was put at \$787 million.

The report cited evidence of reduced activity as a result of low snow years. It said California saw a nearly 5 percent loss in skier visits to resorts between high and low snowfall years from November 1999 to April 2010, with a projected economic loss of \$75.2 million over that period.

Burakowski said California stands to be one of the most affected states, noting that "snow is currency."

The Lakewood, Colo.-based National Ski Areas Association released a statement Thursday saying that "resorts nationwide are taking meaningful steps toward combating climate change."

That includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions through investments in wind, solar, geothermal micro-hydro and other sources.

"Ski areas have not been on the sidelines when it comes to climate change," said Michael Berry, NSAA president.

"The ski industry took a leadership role on this issue over a decade ago, and we continue to advance that mission."

Berry added that the industry remains optimistic about the future. He said U.S. winter resort areas have enjoyed the best 10-year average on record, with 57.5 million skier and snowboarder visits on average nationally.