

Colorado resort sues over Salt Lake ski marketing

By Lindsay Whitehurst, AP

SALT LAKE CITY – A Colorado ski resort says Salt Lake City can't market itself as Ski City USA because the winter sports slogan is too similar to their decades-old nickname for Steamboat Springs.

Steamboat Ski Resort is suing Utah tourism officials, claiming a \$1.8 million campaign designed to lure tourists from Colorado violates their Ski Town, U.S.A. trademark.

"They're trying to leverage the value we worked hard to create for their own commercial benefit," resort spokesman Rob Perlman said.

Visit Salt Lake, the tourism-promotion group that created the campaign, declined to comment on the suit Wednesday, communications director Shawn Stinson said.

The package of online and print ads emblazoned with the new Ski City logo was announced last month in a press conference that drew local elected officials as well as tourism authorities and ski resort executives.

The name is designed to tout the Salt Lake area's restaurants, bars and night life a short drive from four resorts: Alta Ski Area, Brighton Resort, Snowbird Ski Resort and Solitude Mountain Resort.

The trademark infringement suit filed in Denver by the Steamboat Ski Resort and Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club names those four Utah resorts and Visit Salt Lake.

The lawsuit asks a federal judge to stop Salt Lake from using the Ski City brand and seeks unspecified damages and any

profits they make from the name.

No hearings have been scheduled in the case.

In September, Visit Salt Lake President Scott Beck said the new campaign is absolutely aimed at luring skiers away from Colorado, which annually registers about three times more skier visits than Utah, according to figures from the National Ski Area Association. Last season, Utah had 4.1 million day visits from skiers and snowboarders – compared to 12.6 million in Colorado.

Vicki Varela, managing director of the Utah Office of Tourism, said her office's research has shown that more than half of people who are shown a picture of Salt Lake City's skyline with the mountains behind it think it is Denver.

The campaign "gives us the story that we deserve to have on the national stage," Varela said last month.

The Ski City marketing is paid for by the private nonprofit Visit Salt Lake, which gets its revenue from a tax visitors pay when they stay at hotels. It isn't meant to replace the long-running statewide slogan, "The Greatest Snow on Earth," which is on Utah license plates and used throughout promotional materials.

The ads don't include three resorts near Park City, Utah, which are also a short drive from Salt Lake City. Colorado-based ski industry titan Vail Resorts Inc. last month purchased Park City Mountain Resort in a move that put an end to a legal battle between the two companies. It also paved the way for the creation of what could be the country's largest resort because Vail also operates the adjacent Canyons ski area.

Beck said the campaign wasn't a response to Vail's expansion in the market or an attempt to draw skiers from other Utah resorts.