

Skiers, resorts cast hopeful eye toward El Niño

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

Forecasts of an approaching El Niño winter have ski resort operators dreaming of the kind of snowy peaks that were a common sight in California before a four-year drought dried up the state's \$3-billion ski industry.

But optimistic talk of powder-covered slopes may not be enough to persuade skiers to buy expensive resort passes, especially after being disappointed by limited runs and broad swaths of exposed dirt the last several seasons.

So this year resorts are trying something new: offering incentives if this year's predicted El Niño turns out to be a dud. They range from simple discounts to guarantees that give pass holders credit toward skiing next winter.

Some annual passes even can be used at affiliated resorts where snow is more consistent, including one Colorado-based operator that has expanded amid industry consolidation to extend its Lake Tahoe passes to resorts it owns in other states.

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