

Being green at a ski resort isn't a simple process

By Patrick Doyle, Mountain

When Squaw Valley installed electric vehicle charging stations back in 2013, the resort ran into an immediate problem: The electricity it received from its provider, Liberty Utilities, was dirty, generated in part by the burning of Rocky Mountain coal at the North Valmy Generation Station, a hulking power plant in Northern Nevada. North Valmy, according to the Sierra Club, spews the equivalent of 2.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year, a figure equal to the annual emissions of nearly half a million cars. It is the single largest greenhouse-gas emitter in the state of Nevada. Although well meaning, by choosing to power electric cars off that soiled wattage, Squaw would only be perpetuating climate change.*

Around this time, Chris Steinkamp, executive director of Protect Our Winters, reached out to Squaw CEO Andy Wirth. A California-based nonprofit started by pro snowboarder Jeremy Jones, POW has built powerful allies in the snowsports community by combating climate change, an enormous threat to the ski industry. After a handful of conversations on the best way to tackle the energy problem, POW and the Squaw executive team approached Liberty Utilities with a simple, yet powerful argument: We are some of your largest customers—running ski lifts and resort operations, after all, takes a good chunk of power—but coal and climate change are killing our industry. Can you find a cleaner source of energy to use instead?

Liberty Utilities was surprisingly open to the conversation. Nudged along by the ski industry partners as well as the Sierra Club of California and Nevada, Liberty announced in April 2015 that it was ending its contract with North Valmy.

What's more, Liberty proposed to build two solar plants near Hawthorne, Nevada, to boost its renewable portfolio.

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