

Timely snowstorms help avert another disastrous year for California ski industry

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

Peter Smith is dreaming of a white Independence Day.

The longtime ski junkie from Claremont knows that the El Niño weather pattern has yet to put a significant dent in the state's drought, but a series of storms over the last few months has him fantasizing about a monster ski season that can stretch deep into summer.

If big snow dumps continue through spring, Smith said, his ski club could schedule an extra trip to Mammoth Mountain for the Fourth of July weekend.

Thanks to well-timed storms blanketing California peaks this winter, ski resort operators in the state say lift ticket sales have increased as much as 50 percent compared with the last few years, a feat that they attribute to pent-up demand among snow fans who have had to suffer through a four-year drought.

The season could even stretch for two or three more months if Mother Nature cooperates.

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