

# Progressive plan by Vail Resorts to use 100% renewable energy, create zero waste by 2030



Vail Resorts is initiating a companywide policy to thwart climate change. Photo/LTN file

**By Kathryn Reed**

California and Colorado-based Vail Resorts on Tuesday each took significant steps in the fight against climate change.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation to extend the state's cap-and-trade program to 2030. The legislation, which gives companies incentives to pollute less, was set to expire in 2020.

Vail Resorts is implementing a plan at all of its ski resorts – including Heavenly, Kirkwood and Northstar in the greater Lake Tahoe area – to have zero net emissions by 2030, zero waste to landfills by 2030 and zero net operating impact to forests and habitat.

“This initiative is smart for our business and good for the planet. Being energy efficient results in immediate and lasting reductions in our company’s operating costs and improves our energy resiliency,” Kevin Cooper, spokesman for Heavenly-Kirkwood, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Our investments in renewable energy can lock in very competitive rates well into the future, which provides cost certainty. Our efforts to achieve zero waste result in considerable reductions in both hauling and landfill costs. And managing the health and resilience of our forests and habitat is sound, long-term planning for our critical mountain environments and for watersheds.”

The cost to implement the plan and any long-term savings are not being disclosed by the ski conglomerate.



Improving the snowcat fleet will help reduce emissions.  
Photo/LTN file

While California and Vail Resorts tout their environmental

initiatives, the United States as a whole will not attain the goals set forth in the Paris accord without other states and large companies following their lead.

At the ski resorts there will be no immediate impact to skiers or other guests. What they are likely to notice is information being provided to explain the program, and food being served in recyclable or compostable containers.

*Lake Tahoe News* asked: How can there be zero waste to landfills when guests bring their own food/waste? The answer: silence.

Today, about 60 percent of Vail's waste ends up in a landfill. By 2020, the goal is to reduce that to 50 percent, with 100 percent diversion planned for 2030.

More efficient grooming practices is one way to help reach the company's goals.

"Our commitment to energy efficiency includes reducing fuel usage in our mountain operations vehicles – from snowcats to shuttle buses to Colorado Mountain Express. As the mountain resort industry leader, we've had the opportunity to pilot the latest technology for grooming, hybrid-electric snowcats and are working with vendors to improve those technologies," Cooper said. "We've also invested in state-of-the-art grooming efficiency software which is being piloted in Colorado in anticipation of a companywide roll out."

Another way to be more energy efficient is with better chairlifts. This will happen at Vail, Beaver Creek, Keystone and Breckenridge in Colorado before next season. No chairlift upgrades are planned this year for any of the California Vail-owned resorts. Considering Kirkwood Mountain Resort mostly has outdated infrastructure and Heavenly still operates a two-person lift, there is plenty of room for improvement locally.



The goal is in 13 years to not have any food product go to a landfill. Photo/LTN file

New lifts often require the elimination of trees.

“Under our commitment, any tree removal would be offset by replanting or restoring forests and trees equivalent what may be removed acre for acre. We’re partnered with the National Forest Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the U.S. Forest Service, to identify and prioritize opportunities for reforestation and improving the health and residency of existing forests in or around our resorts,” Cooper said.

However, he would not say if the replanting would actually occur in the same forest where the trees were removed.

Whistler Blackcomb’s progressive environmental policies helped push its new owners to make this similar commitment companywide. It is being called the Epic Promise for a Zero Footprint. Vail bought the Canadian resort a year ago.

“For our zero net emissions goals, we are working with Ceres, Rocky Mountain Institute and RE100. To accurately track our progress toward zero waste, we are piloting a new waste tracking software solution. For our commitment to zero net operating impact to forests and habitats, we are partnered with the National Forest Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service and will continue to leverage their established



methodology for identifying opportunities and managing forestry projects,” Cooper said. “We will work with these and other third-party organizations to study and report on the long-term impacts of these projects. We will plan to share the company’s progress in an annual sustainability report, following the close of the fiscal year ending July 2018, which will follow the Global Reporting Initiative’s standard.”

RE100 is a group of companies with the same goal of using 100 percent renewable energy; including Anheuser-Busch InBev, Coca Cola, Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Nestle, Nike and Starbucks.

This is how Vail plans to achieve its goals:

- Reduce electricity and natural gas use 15 percent on top of the 19 percent already achieved since 2008 by improving operating practices and investing \$25 million in innovative, energy-saving projects, such as low-energy snowmaking equipment, green building design and construction, and more efficient grooming practices and equipment.
- Purchase 100 percent renewable energy equivalent to Vail Resorts’ total electrical energy use and working with utilities and local, regional and national governments to bring more renewable energy to the grids where the company operates its resorts.
- Investing in programs such as tree planting to offset the use of other types of energy like gasoline and diesel.
- Engaging with vendors and suppliers to reduce their emissions and environmental impact.