

Warm weather, pricey diesel give ski resorts glum outlook

- Source: Global Times
- [08:53 November 30 2010]



A machine creates artificial snow at the Huaibei International Ski Resort during a night last week when temperatures dropped to below freezing. Photo: Hu Xuebai

By Huang Shaojie

Ski resorts in Beijing's hilly suburbs are anticipating a tough season this year, brought on by a warm winter and rising costs. An early Spring Festival in 2011 may also cut the ski season short, resort managers fear.

"I got very hopeful when people talked about a cold winter for this year, but it has been fairly warm since November," said Wang Shitong, manager of Beijing Huaibei International Ski Resort in Huairou district.

Huaibei opened three of its seven trails last Friday, one week late compared to last season, Wang told the Global Times.

Wang waited until mid-November for temperatures to drop below freezing, then turned on his 11 snow machines, churning out about 20 cubic meters of snow nightly.

"The machines work slowly when it's not cold enough," Wang said. "I don't expect all seven trails to be open any time before mid-December."

Rising prices for food and diesel also threaten to hurt the profit margin of the ski resort, Wang said. "Trail flatteners running on diesel maintain nice slopes, but the fuel is becoming hard to get," he said.

Another factor is the 2011 Chinese New Year, which falls 11 days earlier this year. "Business dips quickly two weeks after the holiday," Wang said.

A skiing boom that saw an average of two resorts being built outside urban Beijing each year since 2000 was put to a halt in 2007, when the city government banned any future development of ski resorts over water conservation concerns.

Twelve ski resorts have been operating in Beijing as of 2006, guzzling 640,000 cubic meters of water annually, according to the Beijing Water Authority, a government agency for water conservancy and flood control.

The amount of groundwater absorbed by these resorts is enough to satisfy the daily needs of 42,000 people, reported the Market News, an economics newspaper under the People's Daily.

Wang says at his resort this is not the case. "With Huaibei, the water used to make snow comes from rainwater kept in four reservoirs, holding 50,000 cubic meters each," he said. "As an industry, skiing is by no means a great water consumer. Spas use a lot more."

Huaibei is the only suburban ski resort in Beijing to rely completely on rainwater, according to Wang.

All resorts now recycle water, a Beijing Water official surnamed Yu said. His agency started supervising water use of ski sites in 2006. But Yu could not specify how many resorts are still using groundwater.

"The water table under Beijing is sinking by 0.5 meters a year," the Market News claimed - a number the authorities refused to confirm.

"The water table is sinking," said a geologist surnamed Ye at the government-backed China Institute of Geo-Environment Monitoring. "But the government does not allow the release of accurate information as to how fast, for fear of causing a panic."

http://www.globaltimes.cn/beijing/society/2010-11/597626_2.html