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China's Fledgling Ski Industry Soaked Over Water Use



Barry Huang/Reuters

A man falls while skiing down an artificial slope in front of the national stadium in Beijing.

Even as China tries to [challenge Japan](#) as the Aspen of Asia, an environmental lobby is complaining that country's ski industry sucks.

Water, that is.

Friends of Nature, the country's oldest environmental NGO, issued a report Tuesday lambasting China's ski resorts as wasteful enterprises aggravating an already severe water shortage in northern China, the state-run China Daily [reports](#).

The NGO, which has in the past helped to protect endangered species and nudge a major Beijing steelmaker to relocate operations outside the city limits, said the 17 or more ski facilities in or around Beijing use at least 1 million tons of water a year, equivalent to the amount used by 8,300 households.

It's not so much the amount of water the resorts use so much as the area in which they use it – arid, thirsty Beijing – that aggravated Hu Kanping, a co-author of the Friends of Nature report, who also took China's lifestyle-obsessed media to task for promoting wasteful behavior.

“The media should consider their social responsibility when promoting activities (like skiing and golf) so that the people are aware of the cost of consumption,” Hu told China Daily.

Slurping up scarce water supplies isn't skiing's only environmental sin. The industry also chops down trees, the NGO noted, which leads to soil erosion and dust storms, and eats up almost 500 kWh of electricity a day.

In terms of energy use, the ski industry does not, by a long stretch, number among the big boys in China. By way of comparison, China produced 16 million tons of aluminum last year at an energy cost of around 1,500 kWh per ton. On the other hand, aluminum production isn't exactly a recreational pursuit.

The Friends of Nature report comes as Beijing's ski resorts wind down a mostly parched season during which snow guns worked overtime to keep the country's growing numbers of ski enthusiasts happy. The group has yet to train its crosshairs on the bigger ski cluster in China's northeast, where Club Med just set up shop, but water is also in short supply there.

Criticism from environmental groups represents a new challenge for an industry that has barely begun to find its legs in China, but it's nothing new for skiing in general. Environmentalists in Colorado have frequently [attacked snowmaking](#) as a water-polluting nuisance while one ski resort in Arizona found itself embroiled in a [legal battle](#) involving environmental issues despite using reclaimed water to feed snow guns.

With water supply a perpetual concern in northern China, the country's ski resorts are likely going to have to get used to defending themselves against accusations of waste, but they may be done dealing with Friends of Nature for now. As noted by China Daily, the NGO's water activists like to vary their targets from year to year. Last year, they took their cudgel to saunas, spas and other parts of the popular “bathing” industry. Next year's target? According to the newspaper, it's golf. Tee up.

– *Chuin-Wei Yap*

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