

BNSC POSITION PAPER

Proposed Lakeside/ANARE development

July 2022 –

This paper outlines a range of impacts and issues (not excluding others) identified by BNSC should the new proposal to clear the main artery of the trail network (the Bogong High Plains Road) during winter from 2023 proceed. BNSC considers that Falls Creek's status as Australia's Premier Cross Country Skiing Resort will be under threat if the main artery of the trail network is cleared during winter as proposed.

This paper includes:

- i. Preface
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PREFACE

The proposal by Falls Creek Resort Management (FCRM) to clear the BHP Road in 2023 from Windy Corner to the new Lakeside Development (ANARE Shed) will have a harmful impact on Cross Country Skiing and irrevocably damage Falls Creek's reputation as Australia's Premier Cross Country Skiing Resort. BNSC is concerned that:

1. A well-funded Strategic Plan for Cross Country Skiing has not been proposed or developed prior to the announcement.
2. The range of stakeholders impacted by the decision have not been identified and informed
3. Good process and public consultation have been limited.
4. A raft of issues, impacts and concerns have not been recognised and considered by FCRM

THE PROPOSAL

The Lakeside Precinct refers to the area between Panorama Corner and the Rocky Valley Dam Wall. It includes the ANARE (Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition) shed, the boat ramp, the AGL workshops and the car park and toilet block overlooking the Dam Wall.

Future development of this area for 'green season' use of the lake is an idea that has been around for many years. It is clearly identified in the 2016 Falls Creek Master Plan and complements the proposed Falls - Hotham Crossing summer walking route as the trail head for this activity. The Master Plan clearly states that the development of the Lakeside facility will be for commercial summer use only and Windy Corner will be retained as the Nordic Trail Head and winter access to the Alpine National Park. BNSC and the larger XC user group were heavily consulted through the development of the Master Plan with the final precinct activation plan well supported.

Key features of the project include

1. A refit of the ANARE building to create a public shelter with a café and toilets.
2. Raising the level of the lower road from the Dam Wall to the boat ramp so that it is above the water level when the lake is full.
3. A floating jetty including a sauna.
4. Parking for 114 cars on the bench overlooking the Dam Wall.

As a summer development the proposal would likely have little impact on cross country skiing, however, the latest proposal from FCRM is for winter snow clearing of the Bogong High Plains Road from Windy Corner to the ANARE building.

This is to provide 114 extra carparks for the resort with shuttle buses operating between Windy Corner and Lakeside, with a stop at the Nordic Bowl. The ANARE facility would operate as a public day shelter and café for cross country skiers and other day visitors.



BIRKEBEINER NORDIC SKI CLUB

The Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club is fortunate to have the clubhouse located at Windy Corner. Built by volunteers 25 years ago it provides members with the following benefits :

- Easy access from Windy Corner carpark
- Ability for families who XC ski and alpine ski, to meet up for lunch whilst others alpine ski for part of the day and then go XC skiing.
- Club programs (such as the Birke Junior Camp which has been running for over 30 years) have junior skiers use the clubhouse as a base and return for lunch
- Club members and families with young children can base themselves at the clubhouse. This facilitates sharing the carer's role, particularly when a personal or club Chariot is used.
- Sole parents managing a child and chariot find the transition between car park and club house doable.
- Elite athletes use the clubhouse as a base for rest prior to the second training session
- Storage for club snowmobile
- Meeting venue for Race Officials including the Kangaroo Hoppet
- Ski in / ski out access: benefits all club members. Falls Creek prides itself on ski in ski out in the village, and BNSC also values this feature

HOW THE PROPOSED CLEARING OF THE BHP ROAD FROM WINDY CORNER TO THE NEW LAKESIDE DEVELOPMENT WILL IMPACT ON BNSC AND CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

1. BOGONG HIGH PLAINS ROAD

The section of BHP road from Windy Corner to the proposed new Lakeside Development is ~1.6km long and is the main artery of the XC trail network. Impacts include:

- Loss of the home trail
- Loss of the ski trails links above and below the Bogong High Plains Road, and back into the Nordic bowl. While the cleared section of road is only 1.6km long, the impact to the broader trail system is significantly larger; some of the existing trails becomes unusable, and the trail network is essentially cut in two.
- Loss of sheltered skiing on the Bogong High Plains Road between Windy Corner, the Hoppet start, through to the McKay Road.
- Loss of protected and easy to access ski teaching / beginner terrain that the gradual uphill of the Bogong High Plains Road currently offers (especially the wide, gentle grade and sheltered section above the Nordic Bowl)
- Impact on the starting kilometre of the Kangaroo Hoppet due to trail constriction around the cleared road and car park.
- XC skiers from the village will be required to remove their skis to cross the BHP road to access the XC trail network
- Loss of FIS Homologated courses for National and State Championship events.
 - Considerable technical work has gone into endorsing the homologated sprint and distant courses. There are real concerns the clearing of the BHP road would create insurmountable challenges, the main one being to link up with and to return from the trails in the Pines area, which contain much of the vertical climb required for FIS homologation. If the course needs to stay to the east of the BHP road, meeting the technical components and finding the 150m of vertical climb required for a 5km loop would be very difficult.
 - Having homologated courses in Australia allows younger skiers to gain their early experiences of international racing and their first FIS point rankings without the time and expense of international travel during the northern hemisphere winter. The opportunity to gain FIS points is also an attraction for international skiers to train here and compete in their 'summer'. This has been of particular interest in pre-Olympic years for low ranked skiers from developing nations seeking to reach the minimum points requirement for Olympic participation.

See Appendix A for trail maps showing impact of clearing the BHP Road.

2. SKI IN/SKI OUT ACCESS FROM THE WINDY CORNER TRAIL HEAD

Falls Creek prides itself on ski in ski out access. This applies equally to cross country skiing as it does to downhill skiing. This will be lost. Access to cross country ski trails from the Windy Corner would be by shuttle bus or by walking up the ramp to Wombat's Ramble, up the edge of Wombat's Ramble, with a final accent up a steep ramp to the aqueduct. This is dangerous, especially for

inexperienced xc skiers due to the risk of a collision with beginner downhill skiers. We currently have amazing ski in, ski out access.

3. YMCA SKI SCHOOL

YMCA cross country ski hire, ski school and retail would remain at Windy Corner. There are genuine concerns the ski school will no longer be viable. BNSC engages instructors from YMCA for the junior program, as does the Victorian Junior XC Ski Team. Lessons are typically 90 minutes in duration. With the clearing of the road, lessons will no longer be able to commence at Windy Corner. The clients and the instructor will need to wait for a shuttle bus and unload at the Nordic Bowl. If there are issues with equipment (skis not matching boots, etc) the client concerned would need to catch a return shuttle bus back to Windy Corner and then another bus back up. The lesson would also need to conclude early and be timed to catch a shuttle bus back to Windy Corner. Anywhere from 20 minutes to 45 minutes of a 90 minute lesson will be lost either waiting or catching a shuttle bus. On arrive at the Nordic Bowl the clients would need to walk down into the bowl as the entry is too steep for beginners. For those who are unaware, a gentle climb at the beginning of a session is advantageous to first time skiers.

4. BIRKEBEINER NORDIC SKI CLUB CLUBHOUSE

The clubhouse will become a stranded asset for BNSC:

- Loss of ski in, ski out access from outside the clubhouse door
- Loss of the clubhouse as a base for elite athletes and families (especially young families)
- Loss of storage for the club skidoo (used extensively by various organisations for events)

If the BHP Road was cleared, concerns include:

- How will members safely access the clubhouse without walking along the side of the cleared road?
- How will members access the XC trails?
- How will sole parents and carers manage chariots and small children
- Birkebeiner members would continue to use the Windy Corner carpark (assuming they can safely access the clubhouse). Many members either downhill and XC ski during their day visit or have family members who downhill so they would also park at Windy Corner.

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

- Families who both downhill ski and XC ski will not use the new Lakeside carpark. They will continue to park at Windy Corner.
- It is highly likely the new carpark and ANARE Shed will only receive visitors when the weather conditions are favourable. During a blizzard, day visitors are likely to park at Windy Corner rather than risk the drive above the snowline to the Lakeside carpark or risk being snowed in. When the weather is wet and windy it is likely visitors to Falls Creek will not drive to the Lakeside carpark, thus questioning the commercial viability of the ANARE café as a winter operation.
- Are there plans for a chain fitting bay at Windy Corner? The new carpark will be above the snowline, and it is anticipated that chains will be required for this section of road when the road to the village does not require chains.

- Interaction between pedestrians, including children carrying ski equipment, and vehicles on the cleared road is a safety issue.
- Interactions between oncoming vehicles on a narrow road is a safety issue.
- The exposed nature of the Dam Wall car park, no treed skiing for visibility aid, exposure to high winds and the difficult route back into the Nordic Bowl in poor weather presents a safety issue. This carpark will receive severe weather coming from the north-west and the south-west.
- Ability of the shuttle bus system to cope with demand on weekends and frequency of service in quiet times.
- How the 2,000 people involved in the Hoppet reach the Nordic Bowl by 9am or earlier on race day? The shuttle buses will not be able to couple with moving this amount of people in the required timeframe.
- Access to the ANARE shed during snow storms due to heavy drifting caused from the western ridgeline.
- Questionable ability of FCRM to manage snow clearing of the Bogong High Plains Road during snowstorms. The proposed car park is prone to high winds and drifting snow. Potentially day visitors will be forced to “chain up” to drive back to Windy Corner.
- Damage to ski trails by walkers and snow play guests around the Lakeside car park and ANARE building, possibly extending for kilometres.
- Damage to ski trails by walkers and snow play guests at the Nordic Bowl as they will now be able to arrive there by shuttle bus.
- Safety issues arising from inexperienced visitors approaching the Rocky Valley Dam, and walking out into the National Park, especially in low visibility conditions.
- The snow adjacent to the proposed trail head next to the carparking will be contaminated by snow clearing operations.
- A Quantity Survey is yet to be engaged for this project. Given the ~40% increase in build costs over the last 6 months there is a real concern the \$3.5M budget will not be sufficient for the planned works.

FEATURES THAT MAKE FALLS CREEK A UNIQUE XC SKI DESTINATION

1. AUSTRALIAN CROSS COUNTRY SKI TEAM NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

Falls Creek is currently Australia's premier cross country skiing resort and has been a major partner of the Australian Cross Country Ski Team and the official National Training Centre since 2004. Falls Creek has a long tradition of cross country ski racing, with many locally grown athletes representing Australia in international competition going back to Dick Walpole at the Winter Olympics in 1960. More cross country Skiing Winter Olympians have called Falls Creek their home resort than any other Australian resort.

The establishment of the Australian Birkebeiner in 1977 and inclusion of the Kangaroo Hoppet in the Worldloppet series in 1991 cemented Falls Creek's place on the international citizen racing map and more recently as part of the FIS International Marathon Races attracting FIS points.

The Worldloppet series attracts around 130,000 skiers annually and is the premier winter event in the Australian skiing calendar. On-snow training camps are held at the end of June and September, while daily training is overseen throughout the winter by National Team coaches.

The USA cross country ski team (including Olympic Gold medallist Jessie Diggins) will train this winter at Falls Creek. Over the years many international skiers have come to train at Falls Creek during their off-season. These include members of the Norwegian, Swedish, Swiss, German and USA National Teams. Numerous World and Olympic champions have trained at Falls Creek in preparation for major competitions. The attraction of so many elite skiers mixed with members of the public and aspiring junior athletes makes our sport a unique and welcoming attraction.

2. TRAIL NETWORK

Falls Creek currently boasts a world class trail network with over 70km of groomed trails, making it one of the largest cross-country areas in Australia. The network commences from the trail head at Windy Corner, with a gentle climb up the sheltered High Plains Road to the Nordic Bowl. From the Nordic Bowl there is an extensive network of trails to explore. A large part of the trail network uses the sheltered roads, which are unique to Falls Creek, allowing skiers of all abilities to ski in any weather.

The wide, sheltered, gentle grade of the BHP Road section above the Nordic Bowl (see image 1 below) is frequently used for instruction and coaching, and is irreplaceable, especially in poor weather conditions and is wide enough to allow two-way traffic.



Section of BHP Road above the Nordic Bowl

3. NORDIC BOWL

The Nordic Bowl is one of nature's greatest gifts to cross country skiing. Sheltered from the weather, it provides the perfect place to learn, play and have fun. The Nordic Bowl has a large open base with sloping sides of different degrees of difficulty, perfect for learning basic skills. The Nordic Bowl is perfectly suited as the start/finish area for events (e.g., Kangaroo Hoppet, National Championships, Citizen races and School events) and event management equipment is stored in the Race Hut and the Horse Yards Hut adjacent to the bowl.

4. THE CROSS-COUNTRY TRAIL HEAD

At the Windy Corner trail head, the Nordic Centre provides a café, toilets, ski shop and equipment rental. Beginners can grab a coffee and something to eat, rent their gear, and sign up for a lesson. The lesson can commence right outside the door and has many advantages including no wasted time travelling to the venue, (allowing lessons to run efficiently, and cost effectively) and should the skis or boots don't fit, they can be quickly and easily swapped. The gentle climb up to the Nordic bowl is advantageous to first time skiers. Image 2 shows the trail head at dusk after a recent snow fall in June 2022.

The trail head currently includes an easy access toboggan slope that provides countless first-time snow travellers with exposure to the most affordable recreational snow activity in Victoria.



Windy Corner Trail Head

5. NURTURING GROUND FOR SKIERS TO EXPLORE THE ALPINE REGION

Many skiers have honed their skills in the sheltered home trails in Falls Creek before progressing to experiencing the true alpine winter landscape. Countless school groups, outdoor education groups, emergency services, defence personnel have all started with basic instruction on the home trail system in sheltered conditions that is centred on the High Plains Road. This basic instruction then develops into broader skills that makes accessible the Bogong High Plains. This type of skiing is crucial to local and regional school groups to provide an equitable and affordable activity in an alpine resort. Few school groups from regional areas can afford to run alpine skiing days for their students. Affordable XC skiing is at the centre of the alpine resorts being available for all Victorians and including regional and local schools.

6. HOMOLOGATED SKI COURSES

Falls Creek boasts homologated ski courses, commencing from the Nordic Bowl. Homologated courses required for FIS (International Ski Federation) races and championship events have been surveyed and certified to meet the requirements for FIS events enabling participants to receive international ranking points.