The California Ski Boom:
Tourism, Urban Growth, Environmentalism, and Social Diversity in Sierra Nevada Ski Areas, 1960-1980
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A 1987 New York Times article asks readers "Want to swim, or maybe shop? Try a ski resort." The author continues by delivering a brief history of America's ski industry, which gained huge popularity after the 1960 Winter Olympics at California's Squaw Valley and then adopted new luxury resorts with tennis, golf, and pools as a way to supplement income. A listener may jolt at the story of people exploring the mountains on skis in the 1960s and 1970s, but by 1987 a new era began where "people who vacation at resorts also bring skis."[1] Although ironic, it was common for American families to pack the car and visit the nearest ski resort to find entertainment including but not limited to skiing. Beginning in the 1960s, ski areas transformed into an enormous industry that in turn changed the mountains around them forever. Although ski areas were by no means the single factor contributing to growth in remote mountain destinations during the "long-1970s decade" (1960-1980), the changing and growing ski industry created dramatic social revisions in their localities.

Studies on the ski industry contribute to and complicate scholarly discussions about development, regulation, and culture in the 1960s and 1970s. Changes in the ski industry occurred amid the tumultuous 1970s which were characterized by shifting economic and social norms across the United States. Neoliberal economic policies encouraged deregulation and reduced government spending on social programs, causing historians like Thomas Borstelmann to reveal rising individualism and economic inequality.[2] Similarly, contemporary ski resort growth in the United States represented a new chapter of economic and social western settlement. Ski industry growth fostered discussions paramount to understanding distinctly 1970s themes like increased urban development, new highway infrastructure, new industrial technology, and real estate development. Despite the national trend for deregulation in industries elsewhere, government regulation grew in outdoor recreation due to environmental concerns.

Judith Stein remarked that postwar prosperity ended due to the 1970s recession, which pinched the increasingly marginalized middle

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[1]Marialisa Caltabolton, "Want to Swim, or Maybe Shop? Try a Ski Resort." *New York Times,* January 4, 1987.
[2] Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

class.[3] Likewise, rising prices for lift tickets and gear at ski areas cultivated an economically elitist perception that frustrated middle class skiers. However, California's ski industry is exceptional for experiencing enormous growth despite the national recession. Furthermore, Jefferson Cowie and other researchers assert that shifting social class norms during the long-1970s contributed to internal division within political parties, external showdowns between republicans and democrats, and progress for minority groups.[4] This pattern was consistent during the outdoor recreation boom, which provided a forum where gender and minority rights grew on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement. Analyzing growth in the ski industry also contributes to a range of 1970s social discussions including environmental regulation and rapid community growth.

Much has been written about Colorado's use of the ski industry to transform its economy in the decades following World War Two. Annie Gilbert Coleman's research reveals that the growing Rocky Mountain ski industry created remarkable changes in Colorado's infrastructure and political landscape during the 1960s and 1970s. Further, Michael Childers examines the pressure placed on Colorado ski areas by state and federal governments amid the long-1970s' environmental movement.[5] Winter recreation had a similar impact in California, although that state's ski industry is less discussed by historians. While Colorado is renowned for its rural wilderness, California's mountain recreation is often an afterthought at the expense of popular coastal vacations and urban sightseeing in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. Despite the topic's evident relevance to politics, environmental policy, and economics, the same winter sports phenomenon has not been examined in California's Sierra Nevada mountains. Colorado's winter recreation success is not unique. Outdoor winter recreation was a catalyst for tourism, urban development, technological innovation, environmental regulation across the west coast in the 1970s. The interest in environmental, social, and economic questions raised by skiing across the US was potentially greater in California due to that state's enormous outdoor winter resources. As an example of this, California's ski industry held a successful Winter Olympics when Colorado failed to do so. California's distinct ethnic and political history suggests that a discussion

[3] Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
[4] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010).
[5] Michael Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas)
Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas)

of winter recreation dynamics in the Sierra Nevada mountains is essential to interpreting the 1970s winter ski industry as a whole.

Feeding off booming postwar populations in the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, Reno, and even Los Angeles, a ski boom in California's Sierra Nevada mountains transformed previously remote mountain areas into a forum for discussing an array of national topics relevant to the 1970s including urban development, technological innovation, environmental protection, and social diversity. The Lake Tahoe region of the Sierra Nevada is particularly relevant as it contains the vast majority of Sierra Nevada winter recreation: approximately two dozen ski resorts developed mostly within the 1960s and 1970s in a distinct locality. Californian and national newspapers took note of the west coast's growing winter tourist industry. Research is further strengthened by 1970s ski promotional videos and Hollywood films that incorporate winter recreation into their plots. These sources together argue that the California ski boom of the long 1970s decade was a revolutionary and essential part of the 1970s as a whole.

Heading for the Hills

Analyzing the long-1970s skiing boom in California cannot be done without first discussing the explosion of population, prosperity, and indulgence beginning in the late 1940s. The stage for the long 1970s skiing boom was set by the postwar population, leisure, and vacation boom starting in the late 1940s and continuing through following decades. The end of World War Two saw an unprecedented West Coast population influx. Thriving Californian metropolitan centers in the Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay, and Sacramento areas, in addition to the Reno, Nevada area profited from a booming postwar economy, high employment, and growing immigration. California's job market expanded dramatically in the thirty years before 1970 in both military and civilian sectors. America's war effort after 1941 placed enormous demand for Californian manufacturing, shipbuilding, and aircraft construction among other wartime production. After the war's end, the state population continued growing both through a baby boom and increased migration from every major region in the country. Los Angeles County alone almost doubled from 4 million to 7 million people between 1950 and 1970.[6] The San Francisco Bay Area saw an increase from 2.7 million to 4.6 million by 1970, and the Sacramento area absorbed surrounding communities to

[6] "Historical General Population City and County of Los Angeles, 1850-2010," Los Angeles Almanac.

grow from 125,000 to 250,000 in the same time period.[7] Only a two-hour drive from Sacramento and five from San Francisco, neighboring Reno's steady influx of new casinos amid a tourist gambling industry and affordable land allowed that city's population to grow from 50,000 to over 70,000 by 1970.[8] Additionally, these cities received more visitors as San Francisco and Los Angeles airports opened several new terminals in the postwar years and Sacramento and Reno both opened their first terminals in the 1960s. Notably, the first direct flight from Los Angeles to Reno in 1969 made it easier than ever for Southern Californians to visit the northern Sierra Nevada.

Despite the booming war economy, rural mountain communities scattered throughout the Sierra Nevada continued to exist as rural communities with natural resource economies; tourism from urban areas played only a minor role. Lake Tahoe, nestled between growing Sacramento and Reno, was an ideal recreation spot for the Los Angeles and Bay Areas. On the lake's north shore, unincorporated Tahoe City sustained a small population of several hundred people living among a post office, several restaurants, and the lake's only dam. A dozen miles north of Lake Tahoe, the 1,300 person town of Truckee was historically known for logging, the transcontinental railroad, and the infamous Donner Party.[9] Both towns saw limited development between their foundation during the Gold Rush era and the postwar years. This profile changed dramatically as a new industry emerged to harness snowfall's economic viability much as gold had been a century before.

Exploding metropolitan populations throughout California and Nevada set the stage for pools of visitors to California's Sierra Nevada mountains. More than one mountain businessman predicted that the war's end would supply an unprecedented number of metropolitan residents looking for adventure in their natural surroundings, and this proved to be correct. Nationally, a rise in affluence, consumption, and leisure created a vacation boom where domestic and international tourism flourished. Middle class upward mobility was seen as good, and conspicuous consumption was a way of strengthening the economy. Domestic travel prospered as a huge number of people began looking to western states for rural recreation, where visits to national forests nearly tripled from 7.5 million to over 21 million between 1944 and 1947.[10] By 1956 Yosemite National Park had seen the last Indian Housing Village

[7] "Bay Area Population, 1950-1960," Bay Area Census.
[8] "Historic Population of Reno City for period 1860-2014" Population.us.
[9] "Population of Truckee, CA" Population.us.
[10] Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg*, 38

removed, a new Yosemite Lodge constructed, and tourist numbers reached an unprecedented 1 million annually.[11] More Americans than ever before rode postwar affluence to California's mountains.

The downhill ski market experienced a rebirth under the conditions of the postwar vacation boom, fueled by increased investment and growing winter season tourism. Editors of *Ski Magazine* proclaimed that "the socioeconomic force of the leisure boom in the 1950s changed American skiing in less than a decade from a slightly eccentric preoccupation of a few thousand people to a mass participation sports with the number of participants exceeding a half million,"[12] and this is reflected in postwar Sierra Nevada ski area development. Businessmen invested heavily in the Northern California ski industry in the years immediately before and after WWII. As early as 1938, an Austrian ski instructor bought hundreds of acres outside Truckee and lobbied co-investors including Southern Pacific Railroad and Walt Disney before opening Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, complete with the first chair lift in California, in 1939.[13] After 1945, outdoor businessmen looked to Sugar Bowl's example as declining war demand allowed for a flood of more private investment into new ski resorts and industry innovation to make skiing accessible to the thousands of vacationing urbanites pouring into the area. Squaw Valley Ski Resort, located between Truckee and Tahoe City, opened in 1949 on land bought from Southern Pacific Railroad by a Reno ski racer. Along the southern shore of Lake Tahoe, Sierra Ski Ranch opened for business in 1946 along Highway 50 to Sacramento and in 1947 a small ski operation was built that would become Heavenly Ski Resort in 1955.[14] New ski areas demonstrated economic and recreational value to tourists, residents, and local governments. Increased business investments coupled with new ski lift technology opened access to skiing for throngs of customers, who no longer had to be as physically durable to reach a hilltop as before. Increased tourist traffic favored ski hills with up-to-date lift technology, and areas replaced their tow ropes with chairlifts or faced a loss in business. The doubling of Tahoe ski resorts in the 1940 and 1950s was a response to increased tourist flow from postwar population booms in cities surrounding the northern Sierra Nevada mountains. As these trends showed no signs of slowing, parties looked to develop the region further with new infrastructure and real estate.

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[11] "1950s Yosemite," National Park Service.

[12] Coleman, *Ski Style*, 125.

[13] Morden Lund, "The Short, Sweet Ski Life of Hannes Schroll in America," *Skiing Heritage Journal*, December 2009.

[14] "Award of Winter Olympics Hailed Boon to Area's Recreation," *Mountain Democrat*, June 23, 1955.

The 1960 Olympic Onslaught

To capitalize on the booming nearby metropolitan populations and newfound interest in outdoor recreation, investors envisioned high profits from new infrastructure and real estate both at ski hills and in previously remote mountain towns. Infrastructure growth in the 1960s and 1970s in the Lake Tahoe area began with the Olympics at Squaw Valley and was then sustained for decades through the opening of new ski hills and highways to access them. Squaw Valley's transformation from a humble startup into a national winter sports icon provides a good analogy for the northern Sierra Nevada region as a whole. Reno local ski racer Wayne Poulsen bought 640 acres in Squaw Valley from Southern Pacific Railroad in 1943 envisioning it as a future ski area. He began inviting experienced skiers as advisors to develop the best ski runs for the mountain and teamed with investor Alex Cushing in the spring of 1948 to form the Squaw Valley Development Corporation. Poulsen sold access to the valley's real estate lots for $750 each while Cushing tackled developing a ski area. A wealthy Harvard Law graduate, Cushing donated $125,000 personally while convincing wealthy friends including Lawrence Rockefeller to reach a $400,000 total before opening in 1949 with a tow rope, the world's first double chairlift, and a small day lodge.[15]

In 1954, Cushing submitted a bid to the US Olympic Headquarters for the 1960 Winter Olympics. He read in a newspaper article that Reno entered a bid for the Olympics and decided to get free advertising by doing the same.[16] He sought to gain financial support and the Olympic Committee's endorsement. He travelled to New York and exaggerated Squaw Valley's facilities to score an underdog selection that shocked other bidders including Lake Placid, Sun Valley, and Aspen. After securing a Cinderella-story Winter Olympics selection, Cushing lobbied California politicians to pay for the facilities at Squaw Valley needed for such an event. His team gained the support of California governor Goodwin Knight, and an old bill promising money for the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles was revived to guarantee financial appropriations of $1 million. Money appropriated from state and federal governments allowed dramatic transformation in the remote valley with new buildings including two spectating centers, four 75-room athlete dormitories, a 400-

[15] Alex Cushing, interview by Robert Frohlich, *Mountain Dreamers*, 1997.
[16] "Reno Prepares Campaign to Get Winter Olympics," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 24, 1954.

meter ice skating rink, the 8,500-seat indoor Blyth Memorial Arena, a sheriff's office, and systems for electricity, water, heating, and sewage. More than 100,000 spectators were bussed into the valley, Southern Pacific Railroad operated six Olympic trains from Sacramento and San Francisco, and United Airlines added 13 Olympic round trip flights from the Bay Area, in addition to the regularly scheduled 25 daily flights to Reno.[17] In the end, Cushing's 1960 Olympic Games generated 250,000 visitors and 2.5 million dollars in revenue at Squaw Valley. Investors could not ignore this success and many soon began seeking similar ventures to harness skiing's local profitability.

New Resorts, Roads, and Real Estate

The conclusion of the Olympics at Squaw Valley saw the dust settle on a previously modest ski scene which was now jumpstarted into a business of a whole new scale. Investors saw further ski development as an economically viable industry and new ski hills opened all over the Lake Tahoe region. Peter Klaussen saw a vision for a grand ski area on the slopes adjacent to Squaw Valley, which would become the Alpine Meadows ski area. He obtained a permit from the US Forest Service and formed a corporation offering $10 shares and a $5,000 package option including a third of an acre lot and two season lift tickets. When he could only reach $500,000 of the needed $750,000 he sold his idea to the Bear Creek Association formed by Bay Area investors. Plans for the ski area continued, and Klaussen was placed in charge of a construction team which began work on three chair lifts, a 500-car parking lot, and a lodge.[18] Alpine Meadows opened in December 1961, nine months after the Olympics concluded only a few miles away. Homewood Mountain quickly followed suit, opening 12 miles south of Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley the same year. Heavenly Mountain's ski hill was already profitable by the time of the 1960 Olympics; it opened in 1955 and made good business by harnessing stunning views of remote southern Lake Tahoe Nevada casinos across the street-boundary Stateline. Heavenly provides an excellent example of 1960s and 1970s growth; emboldened by the success at Squaw and elsewhere in the region, Heavenly installed North America's largest aerial tram for sightseeing in 1962. This generated increased tourism that sustained growing popularity.[19] Four

[17] Rubin, Robert, "VIII Olympic Winter Games 1960, Final Report," California Olympic Commission, 1960.
[18] Peter Klaussen, interview by Robert Frolich, *Mountain Dreamers*, 1997.
[19] Chris Kuraisa, interview by Robert Frolich, *Mountain Dreamers*, 1997.

more resorts were built before 1968, and the momentum continued into the 1970s. Bud Klein recruited Stockton businessmen and formed the Kirkwood Meadows Corporation for a ski area thirty miles south of Heavenly. Klein and associates posted a $700,000 bond to fund an all-weather road and opened a $55 million-dollar ski facility boasting four chairlifts, housing, sewage and power plants, and a 15,000-square-foot lodge in 1972 that collectively could sustain over two thousand skiers daily.[20] Northstar-at-Tahoe's ski operation opened the same year, built on the lake's north side adjacent Truckee and Squaw Valley.

Growth of tourism in the Sierra Nevada justified improved roads. The 1960 Olympics and subsequent growth of ski areas in Tahoe coincided with the Interstate Highway System's crusade to connect the country, and traffic from the Olympics exposed the need for road expansion and repairing for safer travelling to both north and southern Lake Tahoe in the 1960s and 1970s. Old Highway 40 wound from Sacramento to Reno but was frequently plagued by ice, snowstorms, and car accidents along the infamous Donner Pass near Truckee in the winter making it impassable much of the time.[21] In 1964, however, a massive new Highway 80 alleviated many of these problems and allowed greater flow of safe traffic directly through Truckee than ever before. Highway 80 opened up the way to Truckee, Tahoe City, Sugar Bowl, Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, Homewood, and soon-to-be ski areas like Northstar. Like trains nearly a century before, new roads brought with them a bonanza of tourist money and skiers that further bolstered ski areas on the north side of Lake Tahoe. Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s southern Lake Tahoe grew rapidly as a result of improved roads. US Route 50, running from Sacramento to the Nevada state line at the southern tip of the lake before continuing across Nevada, underwent extensive widening, weatherproofing, and other upgrades that allowed it to safely handle more people during winter than ever before.[22] It was not until the paving of these roads that travel through the often-hazardous winter northern Sierra Nevada was made a reliable possibility for tourists. Road construction emboldened a growing recreational empire and opened the Sierra Nevada to completely unprecedented development. Now with transportation a much less daunting undertaking, ski areas and the towns around them were anchored with visitors and a new South Lake Tahoe would soon grow.

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[20] Bud Klein, interview by Robert Frolich, *Mountain Dreamers*, 1997.
[21] Kenneth Adams, "California Highways and Public Works," *California Division of Public Works, Division of Highways*, 1956.
[22] "US 50 Freeway Between Capital and Lake Tahoe is Stretching," *Mountain Democrat*, September 5, 1963.

An explosion in real estate accompanied the new ski areas and highways. Real estate transformed the Tahoe community remarkably in Truckee, the ski resorts themselves, and a developing new town of South Lake Tahoe. In 1970 the small town of Truckee held just over 1,300 people, and charmed visitors with several restaurants and shops along its historic main street. The town underwent extensive growth as its close proximity to ski areas like Sugar Bowl, Squaw Valley, and Northstar, allowing its population to double by 1980 and swell to over 8,000 by 1990. Traditionally dependent on lumber industry and the Southern Pacific Railroad, Truckee's economy grew to include services for tourists and outdoor recreation. Skiing and Truckee's nostalgic appeal brought more visitors than ever before into the town, and its increasing reputation as a ski mecca allowed the population to grow at a rate 6.5 times greater than the overall rate for California. In 1972 a new housing community named Tahoe Donner broke ground on 6,000 new lots complemented by a golf course and even a modest ski hill. By 1979, the upscale Mardis Valley housing community projected to add 41,000 new seasonal residents to the town, and Traverso realtors advertised 1,500 new home listings. Developers constructed 55 new homes on 8 acres adjacent to nearby Donner Lake. This dramatic new real estate explosion brought improvements for Truckee like more services for the elderly, but magnified problems with parking and mixed feelings among longtime residents.[23] Real estate growth happened at ski areas themselves as well. Wayne Poulsen used the 2,000 acres he owned to develop Squaw Valley into a community with roads, restaurants, bars, hotels, and homesites. The investors who bought Alpine Meadows stock laced with acreage from Peter Klaussen's corporation built second homes on their land, and listings for homes at Tahoe resorts were very common in Bay Area, Southern California, and Reno newspaper listings.[24] Seventy eight condos were built on Tahoe's north shore under the shadow of ski areas at Northstar to compliment the restaurants, shops, new recreation centers, and lounges recently built there and at several other nearby ski areas.[25]

Possibly the most dramatic example of rural area transformation related to skiing is the case study of Lake Tahoe's southern shore. Stradling the Stateline, Nevada casinos complemented Californian skiing

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[23] Chaco Mohler, "A Community in Search of Itself," *Sierra Sun*, 1979.

[24] "Real Estate: Condo and Housing Advertisements," *Nevada State Journal*, July 20, 1975.
"Real Estate: Condo and Housing Advertisements," *Independent Journal*, March 2, 1968.

[25] Lou Desser, "Time-Sharing Ownership Widens Allure of Resort Condominiums… New Program at Lake Tahoe," *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1973.
Joan Sweeny, "The White Elephant May be Getting a Lift," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1974.

across the street at Heavenly. Harvey's Casino was constructed in 1944 and followed by Harrah's Casino in 1955, creating a mountain entertainment oasis on the shores of a beautiful alpine lake which fostered ten years of runaway commercialism.[26] The area remained unincorporated and was governed by a County Board of Supervisors 60 miles away in Placerville until being incorporated as a city in November 1965. By 1968, South Lake Tahoe was a town of 14,500 permanent residents who lived among several hundred motels, real estate offices, and restaurants. They were protected by new fire and police departments with chiefs recruited from Palo Alta and the Los Angeles Police Department. The city spent $90,000 a year on local business promotion to increase tourism, and a new public swimming pool, ice skating rink, convention center, and auditorium were planned by 1975 to complement improvements on Highway 50. Criticized initially as "a slice of suburbia horribly misplaced in a forest," the city council went about checking development to ensure the mountains and lake would not be further degraded. Local government passed a plan for all 15 billboards in town to be removed by 1975. Telephone poles and electrical power lines were removed or buried underground. A permit was needed to cut down any tree, with a $60 fee attached.[27] The two decades from 1955 to 1975 showed enormous growth of development and real estate in South Lake Tahoe paired with progressive steps to protect the natural attractions nearby. Similar growth in nearby ski resorts and Truckee collectively were a case of sensational development that transformed that region of the Sierra Nevada into a winter recreation empire.

Industry Innovations: Trams, Fake Snow, Grooming, Improved Equipment and Ski Patrol

The growth of infrastructure and real estate which increased the Tahoe area's carrying capacity for more tourists and an increasing number of locals coincided with growth of new resort technology that made skiing an increasingly welcoming and safer experience. New lift technology in the 1960s and 1970s was brought about by evolution in, snowmaking, trail design improvements, better personal equipment, and increased safety by ski patrols.

Since the early postwar years, improved chair lift technology enabled skiing to be a hobby for people without excessive athleticism and

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[26] "Building Permits Reflect Growth," *Nevada State Journal*, January 15, 1960.

[27] Daryl E. Lembke, "South Lake Tahoe Proves Beauty can Exist with Tourism" *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1968.

in rugged mountain terrain. Prior to Sugar Bowl's inaugural chair lift, skiers' limited options to reach hilltops included hiking or "rope tow" pulley systems. However, postwar investment in new technologies like chair lifts and "T" or "J-bars" allowed skiers to sit on their ride up a hill. In contrast to hiking several hundred yards up a mountain for hours over the course of a day, lifts lessened the requirement for toughness and made skiing much more relaxing.[28] By the 1960s and 1970s, ski hills nationwide limited to older lift systems like rope tows began disappearing from state listings at the expense of hills with newer technology like chairlifts, and this technology remained state of the art well into the 1970s. By 1971 Squaw Valley boasted 26 lifts, Alpine Meadows used 12 lifts to transport 9000 skiers an hour, and Heavenly used 22 lifts to get travelers over its 3600-foot-high vertical into peaks that spread over both sides of the CA and NV Stateline. Kirkwood added a remarkable new 1500-foot-long double chairlift, and Homewood and Northstar both had new lifts in the works by February of 1978. A remarkable new innovation in lift technology emerged in the 1970s: gondolas. These new insulated cabins, fitting anywhere from four to two dozen passengers, kept skiers warm and out of the wind and snow as they soared through the air. These gondolas minimized a skier's interaction with a mountain's unpleasant features and were often perceived as bringing a new level of luxury to resorts like Squaw Valley and Heavenly.[29]

One massive innovation in the ski industry came about ironically out of perceived misfortune; a series of years with sub-standard snow conditions in the early 1970s made mountain managers increasingly willing to experiment with new artificial-snowmaking technology. Although invented in the 1950s, creating artificial snow by cooling pumped water to the freezing point and ejecting its flakes over a mountainside was an unpopular and inefficiently expensive practice until several 1970s droughts across the American west made ski resorts increasingly interested in the option. Squaw Valley received just 15 inches of snow cover in January 1977, on ground that normally enjoyed 145 inches by that time of the year. Sierra Nevada resorts attempted to literally end a drought by investing heavily in snow-making machinery. In the drought years, Heavenly Valley spent $750,000 on snow-making gear spread over 70 acres. Boreal Ridge ski area adjacent to Sugar Bowl tripled its snow-making machinery in 1977, and Alpine Meadows added

[28] Coleman, *Ski Style*, 122, 126.
[29] Ron Fett, "Ski America First: A Lift for Stateside Slopes. *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 7, 1971.

30 acres of new equipment the following year. When natural snow levels picked back up in 1978, it fell on ski areas that provided for customers even amid unpredictable weather patterns.[30]

The mountains' face literally changed in response to increased skiers. New masses of people experienced Sierra Nevada skiing by turning down a slope and scraping away snow with the edge of their skis. Grooming machines became increasingly mainstream throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Machines used blades to move, flatten, and compact recent snowfall and popular overly-skied runs to keep them appearing fresh. Grooming enabled slope designers to design ski runs especially for beginners, then distinct runs for intermediate skiers, and finally slopes for the most experienced. As snow-grooming created accessible and appealing terrain for new skiers, contrastingly challenging terrain developed to ensure no skier complained of boredom. Ski slopes became a collective canvas for thousands of individual carving strokes, and the grooves skiers scraped into a run while executing turns formed waist-high, hard-packed mounds of snow. These mounds were named moguls, and they began to increasingly dot ski runs in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Frightening to beginners and respected as challenging to maneuver at high speeds for experienced skiers, mogul skiing continued to evolve over the next two decades before becoming a distinct Winter Olympic event in the 1990s.[31] Innovation in snow grooming and ski terrain make mountain managers consider the best ways to preserve a distinctly wild and natural environment amid planned ski routes. Keeping a ski area seemingly pristine was important to managers because it satisfied customers' expectations and the Forest Service. The Forest Service became a partner in helping to design runs where skiers could "have a feeling of isolation and freedom of congestion."[32]

Skiers in the 1970s had access to thoughtfully designed equipment that made participating in winter recreation accessible and comfortable. Improved personal skis and ski boot equipment was designed in the postwar years; Plastic boots and metal-edged skis changed improved a skier's experience by making their equipment lighter and giving more control over ones' skis. the 1950s and 1960s, ski design was evolving away from wood and toward metal and fiberglass. Howard Head introduced skis with metal edges for ordinary, non-racer skiers which exploded in popularity because they empowered a skier with more

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[30] Ben Irwin, "See and Ski at Reno and Tahoe," *Los Angeles Times,* February 12, 1978.
[31] Ken Ringle, "Skiing: Banishing Fear of the Moguls," *The Washington Post*, February 21, 1976.
[32] U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Ski Area Association, *Planning Considerations for Winter Sports Resort Development* (1973), 15.

control over their turning. His ski also was coated in a synthetic plastic on which a skier could apply wax in order to increase speed. Ski design continued to evolve superior fiberglass-covered skis which became mainstream by the 1980s. Lange Boots introduced plastic boots in 1965, which eliminated old and cumbersome leather boots that were less stiff and insulated. Now a skier could explore slopes longer while receiving less foot pain and weathering. Lange's design took over the ski boot industry and became the standard for racers and vacationers throughout the 1970s.[33] [34]

Despite the evolutions in lift technology, snowmaking, trail design, and personal gear, skiing remained an inherently dangerous undertaking and a "standard fatalism that skiers had about ski accidents" remained. Ski patrol teams were an acknowledged necessity on the slopes. Ski patrol teams were active by the 1940s, but the 1960s and 1970s presented them new challenges distinct to those decades. Working class stress was a problem nationally in those decades, and skier Minot Dole contextualized skier risk-taking by concluding "the mushrooming of the sport of skiing owes a lot to the lack of adventure in the life of today's everyman." Skiers sometimes arrived to fill an adventure-void at mountains, where there was limited supervision keeping them on trails. As an outdoor and potentially adrenaline-packed recreation choice, skiers often attempted to outperform one another, and ski increasingly dangerous terrain. Ski businesses also possessed limited control over a skier's choice to leave a ski area's boundaries and explore nearby unregulated and hazardous terrain. This situation resulted in skiers routinely suffering injuries ranging from mundane strained muscles and broken bones to fatal avalanches. Venturing in unsafe terrain was a safety obstacle that affected working class adventure-seekers all the way to the nation's top skiers; in 1964 America's ski racing star, Olympic medalist, and alpine racing Hall of Fame member Bud Werner lost a race with a Swiss avalanche.[35] These factors saw ski patrols at mountains around the country improve their fight against avalanches, frequently using dynamite and artillery pieces to blast loose snow pack off steep mountain peaks to create controlled avalanches before skiers arrived for the day.

In the long-1970s decade ski patrols also adjusted to an era where new ski area technology was implemented very quickly, and unexpected

[33] Ron Felt, "Fiberglass Skis, Plastic Boots are Evaluated," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, January 29, 1970.

[34] Robert Kelleter, "Solid Equipment," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 19, 1972.

[35] "Bud Werner Killed in Swiss Avalanche" *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, April 13, 1964.

technical issues were inevitable. Accidents involving new tram technology became an unfortunate occurrence with sometimes fatal results, and this type of tragedy soon manifested itself in the Sierra Nevada as the Squaw Valley tram tragedy of 1978 became the worst ski tram accident in history to that point. Wind caused a tram car to derail and fall 100 feet, killing four and injuring dozens.[36] Ski patrols' responses to accidents stemming from avalanches and fast-paced technical growth, as well as everyday skier injuries like broken bones and muscle sprains, have enabled ski areas to provide greater safety since the long-1970s decade.

The Conservation Crusade

Rapid growth of infrastructure, real estate, and resort technology coincided with a growing national attention toward preserving natural spaces, and together these trends served as a catalyst for growing environmental concerns by people around ski resorts, which changed from a mutually beneficial relationship to a major policy battle in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, small ski hill operations were perceived as a positive way of recruiting people to appreciate their surrounding mountains. Conservationists enjoyed the growth in people seeing themselves "as intimately connected to the mountain and snow" around them, and understanding "the landscapes as pristine, wild, empty, and natural."[37] During the initial postwar boom, people who cared about the mountain environment found comfort knowing the Forest Service played a role in facilitating healthy ski area growth. The US forest Service held responsibility for issuing permits for any new ski resort growth in the four national forests surrounding the Lake Tahoe area, where almost all resorts were positioned either partially on or adjacent to USFS public land. Much more than simply a regulator, the USFS also created committees that compiled lists of potential sites for financially rewarding and ecologically considerate ski development. Going further, the agency helped to expand winter recreation areas in order to get more people outdoors in the winter. In 1963, Tahoe National Forest employees conducted searches for possible ski areas by helicopter and ground study.[38] The result was that conservation and ski area development were not mutually exclusive, and winter recreation enjoyed approval from both the public and the Forest Service.

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[36] Jerry Cohen, "The Squaw Valley Tram Tragedy," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1978.
[37] Coleman, *Ski Style*, 117.
[38] Frolich, Robert, *Mountain Dreamers* (Truckee, CA: Coldstream Press, 1997), 74.

Questioning commercial development on public wilderness lands, however, was a Californian tradition in the postwar years. As early as 1908, the City of San Francisco's plan to dam Hetch Hetchy Valley as a water reserve was met with vehement opposition from conservationists that formed the Sierra Club. California mountaineers created a legacy of appreciation for public wilderness land and skepticism towards developing the Sierra Nevada mountains. This sentiment was re-stoked beginning in the 1960s and gained strength through the 1970s by the recent explosion in people and development beleaguering the Sierras. Conservationist groups and some locals regarded the area's recent development as the negative transformation of a natural space into an overexploited playground for non-locals. Increasingly developed communities like Truckee, Tahoe City, and South Lake Tahoe embodied this trend as they experienced rising costs and increased vehicle traffic. When Kirkwood Meadows Corporation earned a USFS permit to break ground on chairlifts, it was unable to do so before winning a lawsuit against the Sierra Club.[39] Conservationists also clamored about the negative effects development posed to wildlife, as the region's growing prominence contributed to increased fishing, hunting, and deforestation. A 1966 *Los Angeles Times* article labelled "Trouble at Tahoe" slandered development planning failures for polluting Lake Tahoe's iconic clear waters.[40] They also did not fail to note that carving new trails and roads for new skiing terrain demanded altering a mountainside dramatically.[41]

Simultaneously, the national government's relationship to Sierra Nevada ski areas became increasingly regulative and dictated by a national trend of increased environmental consciousness. Throughout the entire United States, the baby boomer generation settled in growing cities and suburbs and left unprecedented footprints on their natural surroundings. The 1964 Wilderness Act delegated protection of rural areas by further empowering the US Forest Service and similar agencies to address these concerns.[42] National concern over environmental preservation was continually stressed in the following years through the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969, creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. These pieces of legislation all cemented the environmental movement's

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[39] Frolich, *Mountain Dreamers*, 76.

[40] Art Seidenbaum, "Trouble at Tahoe: Pollution and Planning Failures Threaten a Beautiful Lake," *Los Angeles Times,* October 16, 1966.

[41] Joan Sweeny, "Endangered Species: The Future of Ski Resorts Feared," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1976.

[42] 88th Congress, "Wilderness Act of 1964" Public Law 88. Washington, D.C., September 3, 1964.

progress firmly within the country's political landscape and set parameters for ski resort regulation in California. Collectively, these regulations created a lengthy review process that added time and money needed for any applications to develop ski resorts on federal USFS-controlled land. As a result, the Forest Service's relationship to Lake Tahoe ski areas shifted from encouragement to increasing regulation as the government perceived threats posed to national forest lands by dramatically increased ski numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. One way the USFS sought to contain the ski resort boom was by restricting the amount of permits it granted to Sierra Nevada ski resorts. Ski businesses encountered more issues getting government permission for growth amid the cumbersome permit policy. Another form of red tape used by the USFS included the sharp rise in money resorts payed for the use of public land.[43]

Limited permits and increasing costs associated with running a ski hill conflicted with the ski industry's growing momentum and expansion goals, and this caused resort management to see government regulation as less of a cooperative partner and more of a rival by the 1970s. After 1964, California resorts increasingly rallied under the Far West Ski Association and lobbied to create new ski areas at San Gorgonio mountain in southern California and in the Mineral King Valley in the southern Sierras. The FWSA created the SkiSport Defense Fund in 1974 to financially advocate for further ski area development at several newly identified potential ski areas.[44]

Concessions made by both government and recreation leaders throughout the 1970s and 1980s reduced tension and allowed growth which made environmental and fiscal sense. The Forest Service, which had previously held authority over resort lift tickets, finally deregulated lift ticket prices in 1977, allowing resorts some fiscal breathing room amid expensive land payments and technology costs. The 1986 Ski Permit Act simplified the previous USFS two-permit system into a streamlined one permit process and allowed for greater year-round activities at resorts. Ski industry investors and managers were likewise unopposed to reasonable concessions that protected the wilderness from which they made a living, and they cheered alongside conservationists as resorts started using helicopters instead of forest-destroying bulldozers to install chairlifts at most resorts by the early 1970s.[45] Ski resorts learned to survive and even thrive by embracing environmental concerns and

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[43] Coleman, *Ski Style*, 138.
[44] "History of the Far West Ski Association," Far West Ski Association.
[45] Frolich, *Mountain Dreamers*, 80.

adopted cheap measures like recycling and turning their trails into classrooms through nature tours.[46]

A case study of the Sierra Nevada Mineral King Valley from 1965 to 1978 demonstrated that although conservationists tolerated existing ski areas that adopted environmental programs, the era of opening new resorts had reached a dramatic close. Recalling successful investments in Sugar Bowl decades before, Walt Disney received a permit from the USFS to build a Mineral King Ski Resort in Sequoia National Forest. California's legislature supported the project in order to provide greater access to mountain recreation for central and southern Californians as well as the jobs such an enterprise would create, and Governor Pat Brown actively sought funding from federal grants and loans. The Sierra Club publicly denounced Disney's plans as a case of environmentally-degrading business greed. A Sierra Club lawsuit to delay the project made it to the US Supreme Court, where the 1972 *Sierra Club vs. Morton* decision approved the USFS's permit and Mineral King's construction plans. Continued legal pestering from the Sierra Club, a required environmental assessment report, and the midterm election defeat of a supportive local congressman were some of the problems that muddied logistics and delayed the project for years further. Disney Productions abandoned the project, and in 1978 Congress made future development in Mineral King Valley impossible by annexing it to Sequoia National Park. The painstaking legal battles and public debate instigated by Disney's Mineral King Ski Resort highlighted the underlying liabilities of ski resort development on public land. With the costs seeming to outweigh the benefits, businessmen have not successfully pursued a new ski resort anywhere in the Sierra Nevada since 1978.[47] The tension and concessions between Sierra Nevada ski businesses, state and local governments, and environmental activists is a worthwhile addition to a discussion of the 1970s environmental movement and has defined ski business in California since.

Social Shifts

In addition to greater environmental consciousness, Sierra Nevada ski areas became a forum for marketing and greater social diversity. Through the image resorts created for themselves in marketing,

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[46] Janet Nelson, "Turning Trails into Classrooms," *Ski Areas Management,* November 1995, 48.

[47] Werner Weiss, "Walt Disney's Mineral King," *Yesterland*, December 11, 2016. "Mineral King Enters the Park" National Park Service, July 12, 2014.

to the perception given to them from Hollywood and private films like those of Warren Miller, ski areas enticed the American public more than ever before during the long-1970s decade. They also became a stage from which to address new levels of diversity. Lastly, an increasing perception as playgrounds for the wealthy created pushback among skiers which created snowboarding and cross-country skiing as ways of challenging the confines of a resort.

As ski areas grew, their image began to change. Growing ski areas complemented their improved technology with an unprecedented focus on marketing. In the late 1960s it became relevant and more common for ski hill management to hire marketing directors. One California ski manager worked hard to increase his ski area's visibility and told reporters that "this business is too competitive to allow you to overlook any possibilities which might build clientele."[48] California ski areas followed a national trend toward adopting European-themed décor to suggest an authentic connection to the sport's Alp culture. Mountains built lodges intended to look like their counterparts in Norway, Switzerland, and France. Squaw Valley Inn, for example, was modeled to imitate a Swiss-chalet.[49] Likewise, Sugar Bowl's slopes all ended at a Bavarian-style base lodge adjacent to the parking lot. They also made a point of hiring ski instructors with European backgrounds to lead ski schools; racers and tourists in California could be taught by Alpine Meadow's German Werner Schuster and Austrian-educated Luggi Foeger, and Squaw Valley's Frenchman Emile Allais. This all went to paint California's Sierra Nevada as a legitimate branch-off from the European Alp ski scene, yet California resorts simultaneously created a distinct brand separate from the norms of the national and international ski industries. Sierra Nevada ski areas often fell back on their surroundings to advertise their beauty and connection to nature. They flaunted Lake Tahoe's crystal-blue water and remoteness compared to more crowded ski resorts in the Rocky Mountains. Advertisements frequently mentioned west coast sun, suggesting that a trip to the Sierra Nevada was more like a trip to the beach than the rugged wilderness. Further, instead of competing fiercely for customers Tahoe ski areas often cooperated to offer ski passes which worked interchangeably at several different mountains. For example, by 1971 Heavenly Valley, Kirkwood, Northstar, Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, and Incline Village all offered

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[48] Burt Slims, "For Summer Profits, Try a Little Imagination," *Skiing Area News 2*, April 1967, 30.

[49] George & Linda Hamilton, "Alpine Ski Runs Through Squaw Valley," *Chicago Tribune,* January 10, 1971.

a collective ski pas and shared a toll-free phone line to handle reservations.[50] One more theme distinct to west coast skiing was actually not located in California at all, but directly across the state line in Nevada—gambling. One contemporary travel advertisement titled "Tahoe—A Full House with Casinos, Slopes," elaborated "where else can you take in a top-notch nightclub, gamble at plush casinos, and have the ski slopes at your front door?"[51] Mountain managers and marketing directors took advantage of national trends and also local west coast characteristics to corral visitors from across the US.

Whatever effort ski hills invested in advertising themselves, they were helped in the 1970s and 1980s by Hollywood and private filmmakers to inspire a general interest in skiing, especially among young people. Popular teenage movies began to incorporate the hobby into American mainstream and linked skiing with action and sex, which were both increasingly visual in contemporary music and film. For example, movies like 1970's *Downhill Racer* focus on teenage boys finding excitement and attractive girls in ski resort settings, and James Bond is seen shooting guns and jumping off cliffs during ski chase scenes in three separate films from 1969 to 1981.[52] Through examples like these, Hollywood entertainment helped turn American skiing from a fringe sport into a part of American popular culture. Simultaneously, independent movie producers increasingly made films about their times skiing. Filmmaker Warren Miller helped invent the genre of ski movies, recording dozens of full-length films with titles like *Winter Fever* and *Steep and Deep* featuring young people attempting risky turns and jumps. These films created a cult of young people pursuing creativity and fun with limited rules on the slopes.[53]

Creative advertising and media coverage brought more people than ever to sample skiing, and the 1970s saw a slew of empowerment for African Americans and women on ski hills. Notably, African Americans exercised the attitude of the recent Civil Rights Movement by exploring skiing in noticeable numbers. This included affluent African Americans, curious middle-class members, and notably adolescents in antipoverty

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50 Carolyn McGuire, "SKIING '76: 23 Ski Areas in Beautiful, Challenging Lake Tahoe," *Chicago Tribune*, January 11, 1976.
51 Wendy Williams, "Tahoe-A Full House with Casinos, Slopes," *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 1977.
52 Robert Kelleter, "Potomac's Guide to Skiing Here and Yon," *The Washington Post, Times* Herald, January 24, 1971.
53 Jane Galbraith, "Thriller Ski Films Give 'Em a 'Rush'," *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1993.

programs.[54] This was especially true in the Sierra Nevada, where San Francisco local Barry Vinson worked to erase the color line as a ski instructor at Squaw Valley and a professional ski racer.[55] Along similar lines, the National Brotherhood of Skiing originated in 1973 with the goals "to identify and discuss problems and subjects which were unique to the black skiing population, ski and socialize." They also aimed to increase skiing among African American youth and produce African American Olympic skiers.[56] Women also benefited from specifically designed ski programs that spread a tougher female outdoor persona. Elissa Slanger, a ski instructor at Squaw Valley, pioneered her Women's Way ski lessons emphasizing yoga, analysis of women's movement, and female aggression in skiing. She conducted her first clinic at Squaw in 1976 and was touring the US at seminars preaching women's skiing technique by the end of the decade.[57] Throughout the long 1970s decade, women took advantage of Title IX's stance to gain respect as winter recreation athletes.

As skiing's audience grew so did its elitist aura. Tahoe-raised ski racer Spyder Sabich's murder in 1976 contributed to a growing image of ski resorts as celebrity playgrounds. Despite growing racial and gender inclusiveness, more and more patrons looked for ways to reject the white pompous stigma. Veteran skiers wanting to break this mold began "snurfing"- an abbreviation for snow surfing- and snowboarding was born.[58] Snowboarding embodied disrespect for rules, inner-city mannerisms, and became a popular alternative for those wanting a new way to experience the mountains. The old-fashioned, pre-industrial sport of cross-country skiing provided a parallel refuge for those disillusioned with growing ski areas. Silently gliding across flat ground along sparsely populated cross-country ski trails surged in popularity. Truckee's Royal Gorge resort is North America's largest cross-country ski area and began hosting nationally attended races in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[59] California's ski boom expedited social diversity for women and minorities at downhill ski areas and also promoted innovative ways to

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[54] Barbara Campbell, "Ski Resorts in U.S. Report a Growing Number of Blacks are Testing the Slopes," *New York Times,* April 11, 1971.
[55] Walter Fletcher, "People in Sports: A Pro Skier Attempts to Erase Color Line," *New York Times*, December 26, 1973.
[56] Ben Finley, "About Us," National Brotherhood of Skiers.
[57] Judith Turner, "'Woman's way': Right time," *The Washington Post,* February 18, 1979.
[58] Doug Cress, "'Surfing' the Slopes on Snowboards," *The Washington Post,* December 06, 1985.
[59] Kerry Drager, "Cross-Country Ski Fans Find Tahoe," *Los Angeles Times,* December 06, 1981.

experience winter recreation including snowboarding and cross-country skiing.

Wrapping Up

The long-1970s decade facilitated an unprecedented revolution in Californian ski area size, operations, local development, and culture which strongly tied to national trends of the decade as a whole. More people traveled nationally amid postwar indulgence, and this manifested itself in California as mountain tourism expanded the winter recreation market. New highways and a windfall of real estate growth in Northern California's previously rural areas mirrored development of roads and suburbs nationally. Similarly, contemporary technological developments making Americans' lives easier extended to winter sports where fake snow, improved chairlifts, and innovative consumer equipment made the mountains more accommodating than ever before. The dramatic tension between ski businesses and conservationists in California directly descended from shifting national government and public perception emphasis toward environmental protection. Further, innovative marketing directors who promoted the Sierra Nevada as a popular skiing and gambling haven reflected strides in marketing nationally during the decade. Lastly, social diversity exploded along unique gender and racial lines in the Sierra Nevada mountains and paralleled national movements for equality in the 1960s and 1970s. These linkages unquestionably situate the 1960s' and 1970s' California ski boom as an intriguing and relevant addition to the historiography of the long 1970s decade.

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Appendix

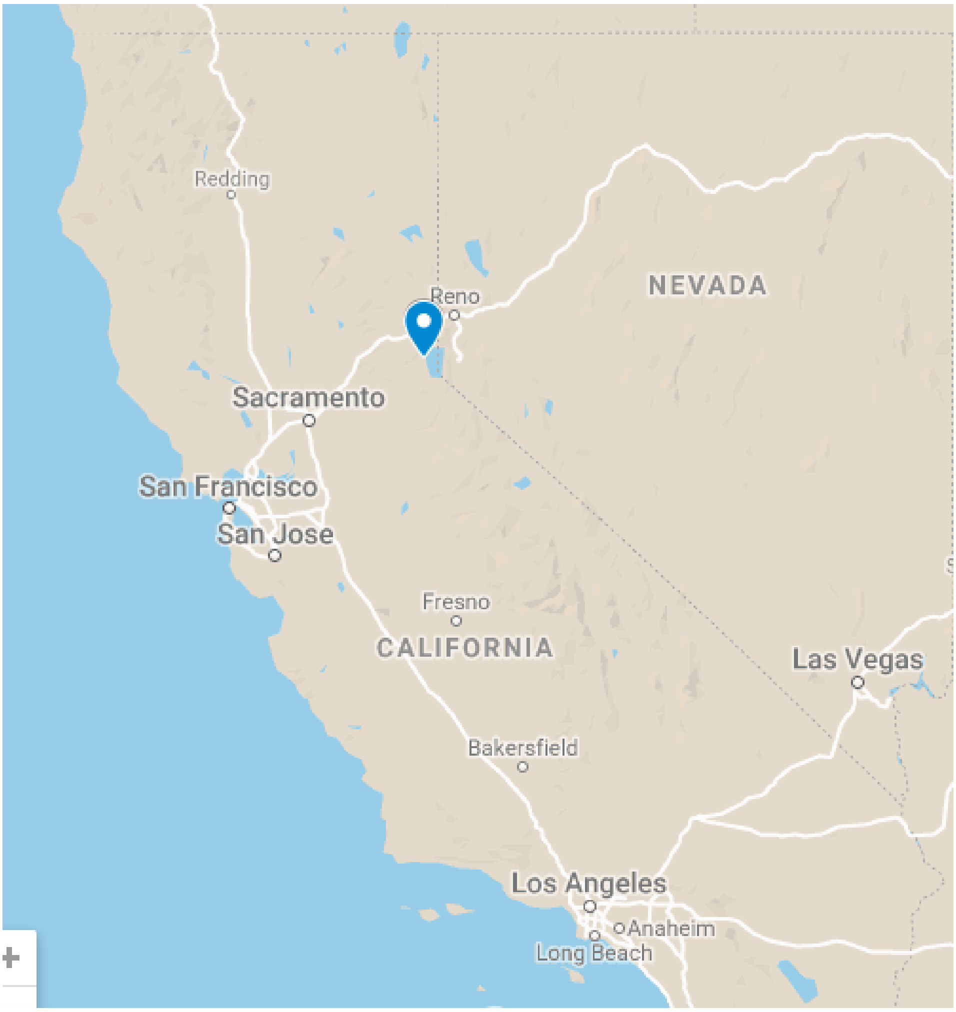

Figure 1. A map of California, with Tahoe situated between Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Reno. Ski mountains surround Lake Tahoe on all sides, with large metropolitan centers in close proximity to the east, west, and south.

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