2020-21 Ski Season Report

Photo by Raena Rowland: FXC Masters class out on a long-distance Sunday ski.

HIGHLIGHTS

• OVERALL: The NSCF operated and expanded nearly every program through the pandemic without a single known case of COVID transmission due to our activities.
• TRAILS: Well over 700 groomers hours; record-breaking early April snowfall
• MEMBERSHIP: Slightly more than 1,000 current members (464 new members)
• JUNIOR NORDICS: Just under 300 students, 45 coaches
• FXC: Two new programs despite the pandemic
• FXC Masters: Grew substantially despite the pandemic
• ADULT LESSONS: 6 coaches, many students: 76 (session I), 61 (sess. II), 49 (sess. III)
• COMPETITION: Many virtual races, but a few in-person
• BIATHLON: Youth sessions, 20-30 participants; masters sessions steadily growing
• SPONSORSHIP: Lots of support despite the pandemic
• SONOT KKAAZOOT: Held as a “virtual” event; nearly 90 participated
• TOURS AND EVENTS:
  o A few in-person tours; Rat Ponds Tour went virtual
  o Ski Your Age (53 skiers, 1,975 kilometers)
  o Backcountry Film Festival (virtual)
  o Goldstream Sports New Trail Donor Challenge
Greetings NSCF members!

The best news to report this year is that, despite the pandemic, the club was able to operate all our programs without a single known case of COVID transmission due to our activities and remain financially sound. That skiing offered a relatively safe (outdoors and mostly self socially-distancing) outlet for physical activity was a blessing. Membership grew slightly and participation increased or remained steady for most of our programs and activities. The Competition program suffered some cancellations and virtual or interval start formats for many of the remaining events out of concern for the health of the participants; fortunately, nearly all of our sponsors hung in there.

Sincerely,
Chris Puchner, NSCF President
Report from the Board of Directors

Each year the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks normally holds a general membership meeting at the conclusion of the Sonot Kkaazoot. This meeting is used to update club members on significant happenings over the past year, and/or plans for the year to come. In addition, this meeting is used to elect new board members. Concerns about the spread of COVID-19 led to the cancellation of this event for the second year in a row, as we deemed it unsafe to hold the type of large, indoor, and in-person meeting we’ve come to expect. NSCF bylaws allow the Board to add new directors throughout the year, to be approved by a vote of membership at the next general meeting. We will continue to add new directors this way until such time as we are able to hold another general membership meeting.

The current board of directors is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFICERS</th>
<th>MEMBERS AT LARGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Puchner -- President</td>
<td>Dan Darrow*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia Karns* -- Secretary</td>
<td>Pam Laker*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Jamieson* -- Treasurer</td>
<td>Davya Flaharty*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Delamere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eric Buetow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* sitting by appointment of the board

If you have any interest in serving on the Board of Directors, or in becoming involved in the club in any other volunteer capacity, please reach out to Chris at president@nscfairbanks.org.

The Board of Directors would like to thank our volunteer Covid Committee Members, the Program Directors and staff for helping NSCF continue to offer a wide range of opportunities to ski, to improve skills and to simply get outdoors during a difficult 2020-2021 ski season. The Board would also like to report the infusion of funds through government PPP grants, the adherence to our NSCF Covid policy, the continued support from our sponsors, and hours of hard work from our staff allowed NSCF to remain in a positive financial position during the past year. Income and Expense graphs for the last fiscal year (ended Sept. 30, 2020) that would have been presented at the Annual Meeting follow; the small deficit reported has been erased by strong financial performance in the current fiscal year:
Income of $483,531 Allocated by Percentages per Category, Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30, 2020

- Registration Fees - Tuition: 37.28%
- Grant Revenue: 18.2%
- Capitalized Equipment: 11.47%
- Event Sponsors: 7.3%
- Membership Dues: 6.11%
- Donations: 4.36%
- Other: 4.15%
- Unrealized Gains/Losses: 3.53%
- Program Sponsors: 2.41%
- Service Sales and Rentals: 2.2%
- Program Sponsors: 2.1%
- Other: 1.8%

Expense of $495,840 Allocated by Percentages per Category, Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30, 2020

- Payroll Services: 47.12%
- Equipment: 22.09%
- Supplies: 18.2%
- Insurance: 11.47%
- Contractual Svcs: 7.3%
- Professional Fees: 6.11%
- Bank Charges: 3.53%
- Utilities: 2.41%
- Other: 2.2%
- Program Sponsors: 1.8
TRAILS

Our trail groomers (Tom Helmers, Ken Coe, Bill Husby, and Travis Kulp) put in lots of hours and grooming kilometers to keep all our wonderful trails in great shape for skiing at the Birch Hill Recreation Area and adjoining Fort Wainwright. In a normal winter, “Bad Bob” Baker would have taken the lead in putting many hours to prepare the Chena River for the Sonot Kkaazoot, but the pandemic and work on the Wendell Street Bridge made the Sonot an entirely Birch Hill affair this year. So, our grooming crew, with some help from Bob, kept the trails at Birch Hill in wonderful shape and many people appreciated the great grooming.

Here are some numbers as of March 1, from Head Groomer Tom Helmers:

- 548 hours of grooming.
- 130 hours for equipment repairs and maintenance.
- Used 400 gallons of gasoline
- Used 300 gallons of diesel
- Average age of our equipment is 9.5 years.

According to Tom, “60 percent of the grooming this year has been using snowmachines for a number of reasons, but mostly due to the lack of meaningful fresh snow for most of December through February.”

Late-season note: After this report, Fairbanks received more snow, including record-breaking snowfall in early April. Our groomers kept up the wonderful grooming, burning another 400 gallons of diesel (used by the PistenBully). After the virtual Sonot, which ran from March 13 to 28, the groomers put in another 100 to 140 hours.

Some other interesting numbers: The last day of grooming from the last few seasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>April 29</td>
<td>April 8</td>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>April 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top photo: The Three Musketeers of Birch Hill: Ken, Bill, and Tom. (Travis must be D’Artagnan.)
MEMBERSHIP

By Rebecca Heaton, Membership Coordinator

As of early March, we had 1,026 current members in the NSCF. Despite the challenges the Fairbanks community faces, support for the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks remains strong. We had 464 new members this season (including families and children). Those numbers are up from the previous season when we had just under 1,000 members and 211 new members.

JUNIOR NORDICS

By Susan Kramer, Junior Nordics Coordinator

Just under 300 kids and 45 volunteer coaches participated in Jr. Nordics this season. I took over the program in mid-September, so we had a late start for registration, which opened on October 3. We were full within a week. I learned very quickly that parents are not used to Jr. Nordics filling up. With so many on the waitlist, I was scrambling to find enough volunteer coaches to accommodate everyone.

Fast forward to November. Lessons were supposed to begin November 12. Due to the governor’s emergency declaration, we postponed the start date to December 1. Meanwhile, I had the overwhelming task of creating a whole new Jr. Nordics lesson format to account for pandemic restrictions.

Things went surprisingly smooth due to the flexibility of volunteer coaches and families. We offered two sessions on Tuesday/Thursday and Sunday, which decreased the number of skiers at Birch Hill Recreation Area at any one time.

With COVID-19 protocols in place, skiers were also required to "mask up" during lessons and we kept track of everyone who attended Jr. Nordics each day. I am happy to report, there were no known COVID-19 cases attributable to Jr. Nordics participation.

Without being able to use the Birch Hill Cross Country Ski Center, we had to change the temperature cut off to 0 degrees Fahrenheit this year and require parents to stay in their cars, if they weren’t out skiing. I have heard from past coordinators how much fun it is to visit with parents, make hot chocolate, and hand out snacks after lessons. HOPEFULLY NEXT YEAR!!!

FXC

By Åsne Honerød Hoveid, FXC Head Coach

Despite the pandemic, this has been quite the year for FXC. We started two new programs: FXC Intro, geared to homeschooled kids, and the FXC High School Program, designed to bridge the six-week gap in high school between the end of cross-country running and the start of ski season. The FXC Intro program met twice a week through the winter with seven participants, all new to FXC. The High School program had 18 participants; a couple were familiar with FXC but most were new to the program.

This May we had 11 seniors graduate and move on from our Comp program, but we also had nine new Comp Bridge kids step into Comp from Devo. The 27 members of our Comp group have trained more this year than most. These athletes are used to competing almost every weekend from mid-November through mid-March, but the pandemic curtailed most of the traveling and competing this season. Despite that, these athletes have continued to work hard and have really impressed me in terms of their determination and motivation.

The largest training group in FXC is our Devo program, which had 38 kids this year, including several new additions over the summer and winter.

We are thrilled to have been able to run all these programs this winter, and it’s been a pleasure to coach all these amazing athletes. None of it could have been done without our incredible assistant coaches Tjarn Bross, Tobias Albrigtsen, Jordan Laker-Morris, and Warren Rosholt.

*Photos by Tobias Albrigtsen.*
FXC MASTERS
By Christina Turman, Head Coach, FXC Masters

FXC Masters grew substantially this winter! We feel our dream of offering a full-fledged adult ski training program in Fairbanks really came to fruition this season! We were able to offer masters training 4-5 times a week all winter. By offering an array of classes, beginner and advanced skiers alike were able to find a class that fit their needs and schedule.

Thanks to our great coaches and motivated athletes we were able to accomplish our goal of creating a fun team environment for master skiers to continue to develop cross-country ski skills, improve their fitness and strength, and most importantly: build community, and work together to promote and support skiing in Fairbanks!

Coaches and athletes alike were very thankful for this team and the space it created to safely socialize and improve physical and mental health during the pandemic!

FXC Masters by the numbers:
• Number of FXC Masters Skiers: 96
• Number of skiers new to program: 57
• Number of coached sessions this season: 111
• Number of coaches: 5

Photo by Christina Turman: FXC Masters crushing their last workout.

ADULT LESSONS
By Susan Kramer, Adult Lessons Coordinator

We had 76 skiers during Session I, 61 skiers during Session II and 49 skiers during Session III. We ran a lean, mean Adults Lessons program this year with only six coaches for all three sessions. They offered high-quality instruction each lesson, and I received very positive feedback from participants. Many skiers took lessons during all three sessions, which attests to the great job our coaches did.
COMPETITION

By John Estle, Competition Events director

Having overseen the NSCF’s Competition Events program for the past 25+ years, I can say that all of my previous experience did little to prepare me for the winter of 2020-2021. It was a different sort of season.

In early November, with our first races approaching, we formed a committee to monitor the coronavirus situation and provide guidance to the NSCF Board of Directors regarding competition events. Included in the committee were three physicians, three key members of the NSCF race organization, a Nordic Ski Patrol representative, and an EMT. The committee recommended that we provide virtual events during November and December (when local and statewide caseloads were very high), then re-evaluate in December.

The first two Kinross Fort Knox Town Race Series races, the Beaver Sports Turkey Day Relays, and the first Buetow Dental Distance Series race were conducted on a virtual basis. After that November-December experience, and in light of a rapidly-decreasing caseload, the committee decided we should try some in-person events (all in interval-start format) beginning in late January, with COVID-19 mitigation protocols originally created by Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage and Cross Country Alaska.

Learning as we went, we held an in-person FXC time trial, then an in-person third Town Race Series race. In late January, we hosted the Reishus Cup (originally Besh Cup #5 and #6) FIS races. Saturday was too cold for an official FIS event, but the skiers were eager, so we held it as a club event. Sunday was warmer, so we held an FIS event. In February, we held the fourth and final Town Race Series race and the regional high school championships. Virtual formats were kept for the last Distance Series races and the Denali State Bank Sonot KKaazoot.

NSCF would like to thank all of our event sponsors who remained with us despite the challenges of the pandemic.

Looking forward, NSCF will host the 2022 ASAA Cross Country Ski Championships the last weekend of February, and the 2023 US Ski and Snowboard Junior National Championships in mid-March. Over the next few seasons, let’s celebrate the freedom to race in person! In the meantime, be careful!

Excerpted from a longer report by John. See the full report here: https://tinyurl.com/5m9kkutn

Photo By Chel Ethun: Participants line up during a Town Series race that was able to host a small field of racers by using masks and proper distancing.
BIATHLON

*By Jim Pasek, Biathlon Director*

Interest in biathlon has been outstanding this season. Biathlon has hosted summer, fall, winter, and spring sessions for youth this season. Master sessions were taught in winter and spring. Hilary Saucy taught the youth summer and fall sessions and has since moved to Anchorage. Anchorage’s gain, but our loss. Hilary was instrumental in getting the biathlon program ramped up. Everett Darrow taught the winter and spring youth and master sessions.

Each youth session lasted 6-8 weeks. Youth sessions saw 20-30 participants at each practice through the season. Sessions were broken down into beginners, intermediates, and advanced with 7-10 participants in each group. The advanced group has been the same group of participants together for two-plus seasons now.

Master sessions have been steadily growing through the season. They are held as single session two-hour clinics. There were two clinics in the winter and three in the spring. We started with three participants in the first fall session increasing to seven participants in the rest of the clinics.

*Photo by Jim Pasek: Participants at the Birch Hill biathlon range during an early season biathlon masters clinic.*

SPONSORSHIP

*By Michelle Ethun, Sponsorship Coordinator*

The Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks could not have adapted so quickly and provided such quality of programing over this past year without the incredible support of our sponsors. The business community continued their fantastic support of the club as we adapted to an everchanging dynamic to bring high quality trails, programming, and events to the Fairbanks ski community. It is a true testament to the strength of the Fairbanks community that so many business partners and individuals continued to provide financial and in-kind support to provide all Fairbanks residents a way to stay happy, healthy and continue to do what we love.

On behalf of the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks we say THANK YOU to all our generous donors, sponsors and business partners. We truly could not have achieved the success we had this year without you.
SONOT KKAAZOOT

By Eric Troyer

Due to the pandemic, the Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot could not be held in its traditional format. However, thanks to organizer Bob Baker with help from Susan Sugai and Eric Troyer, we were able to hold a “virtual” event, with people submitting times, distances, and reports.

In the end, nearly 90 people participated. Some people did multiple versions of the race. This time the event was entirely up at Birch Hill from the start. It was held over the course of about two weeks, with the final week being dubbed “Sonot Weekend.” The groomers focused extra effort on that weekend and Father Sonot, “Bad Bob” Baker, put up kilometer signs so that people would know how much pain they had left to endure. Bob created courses of 10, 30, and 50 kilometers. The latter two were a bit shy of their actual distances. That was a kindness extended by Bob, since the original Sonot course has 20k of flat skiing on the Chena River. Birch Hill is a tad bit hillier.

To see the results of the 2021 Sonot with links to individual posts as well as a spreadsheet with standings ranked by time, go to: https://tinyurl.com/wea6pw37

This year’s event had some unique accomplishments worth noting:

- A few people completed a Hat Trick (completed all three distances of the race): Bad Bob and Sharon Baker (Father and Mother Sonot), Anna Rix, Bill Husby, Dan Johnson, Susan Sugai, Byron Broda, and Eric Troyer.
- Anna Rix did all three versions of the race in one day! (That's 90K!)
- Bill Husby did the race six times! (And helped groom the course when he wasn't skiing!)
- Dan Johnson was the only skiathlon participant, doing his multi-day 50K in classic and skate styles.
- Bill Hibler got the "Most Bang for the Buck" award, spending 8 hours, 40 minutes on his multi-day 50k effort.

Graphic: Sonot poster by Mark Ross
TOURS AND EVENTS

By Eric Troyer, Tour Coordinator

We held a number of tours and events, though all were affected to some degree by the pandemic. The Rat Ponds Ski Tour was a do-it-yourself affair, though with signs and grooming. A handful of regular tours were offered, though with masking and distancing required (fairly easy for cross-country skiing).

Ski Your Age in Kilometers is mostly DIY anyway, but this year the Birch Hill Ski Center was closed, and the event took place over a week rather than on a single day. As a result, 53 skiers skied 1,975 kilometers. Of those, 45 skied their age!

The Backcountry Film Festival was virtual, but many people participated, and we earned more than $1,700!

The Candlelight Ski couldn’t be held, but sponsor Goldstream Sports stepped up with the New Trail Donor Challenge, which helped raise nearly $11,000 for Birch Hill grooming!

*Photo by Bad Bob Baker: Sharon Baker, Corrine Leistikow and Eric Troyer enjoy the Bakers’ Moose Mountain Sunrise Tour.*

That’s it! See you on the ski trails next season!