

Mountain Rider's Alliance

A New Business Model for the Ski Industry

by Melissa Siig | photographs by Tom Winter

A 10,000-acre swath of steep and deep Alaska backcountry terrain—the likes of which has long been the exclusive domain of heli-skiing operations—may soon be available for the price of a season pass.

The Mountain Rider's Alliance (MRA) is the driving force behind the proposed ski area, part of which sits on the same land as the defunct Manitoba Mountain Ski Area (90 minutes from Anchorage). Jamie Schectman is the guy behind the MRA. A 42-year-old devoted skier based in Squaw Valley, California, he started the company in 2010 with a plan to buy existing ski resorts and build new ones, then sell memberships to each ski area. Schectman calls it a "poor man's Yellowstone Club," referring to the private ski community in Montana. The more shares members buy, the more benefits they receive, such as discounts on lift tickets, retail, and parties. Non-members can ski on off-peak days.

Phase one of Manitoba Mountain Ski Area—it could open as early as the 2012–13 season—includes a Nordic trail system and a beginner ski area. The wild backcountry terrain above 500 feet would open at a later date. Eventually, Manitoba would include three surface lifts and access to big lines. If it flies, up to 70 much-needed jobs could get created.

National Ski Areas Association President Michael Berry says the MRA plan could work. "The industry was founded on that model and there is no reason to believe it can't be replicated," he said.



Opposite page: MRA Board Member Joe Turner tests the business model on Manitoba Mountain, AK. **Inset:** The MRA's Joe Turner (foreground), Philip Sarnoff, Dave Scanlan, and an unidentified local AK skier.

