## Ski for Light 2020

Casper, Wyoming

*Survey designed and summarized by Amy White. Email* *mountainsky11@gmail.com* *with any questions.*

### Results

#### Respondents

We received responses from 150 participants. The demographic and prior experience breakdown of respondents was

* 76 MIPS/VIPS, 66 guides, and 8 others
* 4% were under 35 years old, 18% were ages 35-54, 78% were ages 55+
* 55% female / 45% male
* This was the first SFL event for 17% of respondents; 35% had attended 1-5 times, 18% had attended 6-10 times, and 30% had attended over 10 times.
* 13 respondents were brand new to cross country skiing, 15 had skied for 1 to 5 years, 23 had skied for 6-10 years, and 98 (65%) had skied for over 10 years

#### Open Ended Questions

**What was a highlight from your week?**

* 58 respondents mentioned connecting with and making new friends, the welcoming community, or their relationship with their skier or guide was the highlight of the week. (38% of attendees overall; 44% of new attendees, 36% of one to five time attendees, and 38% of 6+ time attendees; 36% of guides, 39% of skiers, 50% of others)
* 49 respondents said the skiing or improving their skiing skills was the highlight with some comments about the fluffy snow and the great staff at Casper Mountain Resort. Some also enjoyed getting to ski in a new place. (32% of attendees overall; 44% of new attendees, 32% of one to five time attendees, and 29% of 6+ time attendees; 30% of guides, 37% of skiers, 12% of others. This was down from 2019 where 38% of attendees overall said skiing was the highlight of their week.)
* 12 respondents mentioned the race / rally as a highlight of the week. (12% of attendees overall; 16% of new attendees, 9% of one to five time SFL attendees, and 4% of 6+ time attendees; 7% of guides, 9% of skiers, 0% of others).
* 45 respondents mentioned the organized excursions, evening activities, or being in a new place and exploring Wyoming were the highlights. (30% of attendees overall; 12% of new attendees, 32% of one to five time SFL attendees, and 35% of 6+ time attendees; 32% of guides, 30% of skiers, 12% of others.) Many people complemented the swift and seamless way in which the event organizers were able to find and arrange alternatives when skiing wasn’t an option and appreciated the flexibility and “yes we can” attitude of the organizers and participants. The Capser museum was very popular (14 people) as was the cowboy poet and singer (6 people) and the talent show (7 people). Many people also mentioned playing or listening to music (3 people - I’m not sure if this should be included as part of the talent show or cowboy poet counts). Some folks also mentioned getting to explore downtown Casper, see Wyoming for the first time, and ski in a new place (6 people).

**Would you recommend that SFL return to Casper, Wyoming again?**

7% of people said yes, 42% said yes but with changes, and 51% of people said no. (In comparison, last year when asked if SFL should return to Snow Mountain Ranch again, 76% said yes and 21% said yes but with changes; 3% said no.) The most common reasons for not wanting to return or for requested changes were:

* Poor onsite facilities, tent and porta-potty, no properly heated space to rest (lots of people mentioned this)
* Expensive travel
* Long and inconvenient bus ride
* Too windy
* Not clear why the main ski area and lodge wasn’t available for SFL’s use
* Poor food (too much meat and potatoes, poor vegetarian options, limited breakfast items)
* Ski at the Nordic Center instead of on the Biathlon Club trails (lots of people mentioned this)
* Overpriced ski rentals
* Don’t double up skiers with a guide. Do more local recruiting / advertising for local guides and/or offer discounts to guides to increase attendance
* Lots of positive comments about the town of Casper being very welcoming and the staff at the ski resort being very helpful
* Few beginner or intermediate trails and poorly groomed or not groomed at all
* Ski area was not accessible
* Contract with the school district to run the buses next time (lots of people mentioned this)
* No support at airport
* More variety in evening activities

**Are there any additional resources or information that would have been useful to have prior to the event or at the event to improve your experience?**

Suggestions for additional information that would have been useful in advance:

* Packing list, suggestions for how to dress in extreme weather.
* Understanding of the ski area, layout, trails, etc
* Communication plan for emergencies, provide a phone number to call or text, keep messages consistent and up to date.
* Advance notice of transportation to ski area, tent, and porta potty set up (lots of people mentioned this)
* Not clear who on SFL to go to with questions or problems. Published list of staff with contact information and responsibilities
* Heads up that you were short on guides and that skiers would be doubled up (lots of people mentioned this). Give people who registered late the opportunity to withdraw their application if there are insufficient guides. Poor for SFL reputation to say you will get your own guide and then not do so.
* More information about the weather and altitude in advance
* Information about alternative activities to skiing
* Information about special interest sessions and schedule so could plan out week in advance
* Matching guides and skiers before the event so they could communicate in advance
* Information about what is within walking distance of the hotel
* Make it clear on the application form that a true vegetarian option is available rather than just pescatarian.

**If you were a first time skiing participant, (visually or mobility impaired person), was there anything that could have been done better to improve your first SFL experience?**

* No sharing of guides (mentioned a lot)
* Would be nice to have the person who called me in advance actually meet me the first evening to help me get oriented and meet other people as it was my first time.
* When voicing concerns they were not listened to or were minimized. People don’t have to agree but should respect differences of opinion and experience. Dismissive attitude from organizers about severity of situation on the mountain. (A few people mentioned this.)
* Hard to tell who was in charge.
* Expected the people in the store and resources area to have all of the answers but they did not.
* Skier / guide contact before the event
* Announcer

**If you were a first time guide, was there anything that could have been done better to improve your first SFL experience? Any additional topics that would have been useful to cover in guide training related to guiding, the events of the week, working with VIPs and MIPs, or anything else?**

* Better communication with local guides not staying at the hotel
* Poor course orientation - be prepared with maps and stake each kilometer for pacing reference. Have trails marked out prior to the event.
* A bit more guide training and understanding of the ski program/events would have been useful. I didn't understand what the final ski day was all about until I arrived and still didn't really understand that it was a race until mid-week.

**If you have attended before, why do you keep coming back?**

66 guide, 8 other and 76 skiiers

25 new, 53 1-5, 72 6+

* 75 respondents said reconnecting with old friends, meeting new people from around the world, and the supportive community as reasons they keep returning. (50% of attendees overall; 55% of one to five time SFL attendees, and 64% of 6+ time attendees; 47% of guides, 50% of skiers, 75% of others)
* 60 people listed a love for cross country skiing or wanting to improve their skills as the reason they keep coming back. (40% of attendees overall; 40% of one to five time SFL attendees, and 54% of 6+ time attendees; 36% of guides, 47% of skiers, 0% of others)
* 13 guides (20%) said they keep returning because it’s a rewarding experience to be able to help a VIP or MIP learn to ski or improve their skills.
* 12 people said because they believe in the mission of SFL and think it’s a great organization that runs well organized events.
* 9 people listed the opportunity to visit new places.
* 5 people said being outside and in the mountains.
* 4 people said they keep returning because of the variety of fun activities.
* 2 people mentioned the healthy lifestyle and physical challenge.

**What does SFL mean to you?**

Some notable quotables.

* A big family reunion where we all go skiing.
* A chance to give back to the sport that has given me great joy by facilitating the opportunity for others to experience that too.
* A chance to meet new friends and people who have different experiences and ways of perceiving the world.
* A huge cadre of wonderful people for whom "blindness" is a characteristic, not a disability. A place where I can feel totally free to ski when I want, as fast or as slow as I want; a place where we can touch and listen to nature -- including deer tracks in the snow.
* After Casper, it means staying flexible! Seriously though, it means, as a guide, being with others as they push themselves through trying something new or uncertain and witnessing the joy of success. It means stepping beyond my own needs and helping others obtain their goals. It means making connections with others that carries me through the year.
* All people are equal, focus on the abilities of others, not the disabilities.
* An opportunity to understand what it is like to navigate the world as a blind person and to understand better the obstacles that we all have to overcome to live fulfilled lives.
* I wrote a song about my regional SFL experience back in 2011. The chorus applies to either event. I think the words highlight the nature of what is happening both on the trails and at the hotel: Quote on. Ski For Light, Ski For Light. You ski, you walk, you laugh, and talk It's good fun for your life. Quote off. My point is that we are doing activities \*with\* each other; not \*for.\*
* SFL is the most meaningful and rewarding experience of my adult life.
* SFL is the most rewarding week of the year for me. No other organization or activity has given me so many life long friends.
* An egalitarian society where everyone is treated as a long-time friend and anyone can accomplish anything they put their mind to - and someone will be there to help if needed.
* An opportunity to engage in winter sports, travel to different parts of the U S, and meet others with similar challenges.
* For me, I like the fact that I can let my guard down and not worry about how my disability is going to be perceived. We're all in the same boat. Guides, even the new ones, are not judgmental. What I like is that every year I learn something new. Every year I get more comfortable doing something that is not an everyday thing. And the fact that I get to see old friends and meet new ones is simply a bonus.
* The well organized event, sensitivity to VIP needs, additional, enriching info sessions, opportunities for socializing and fun, encouragement for skiers of all abilities and ambitions, and so much more. It’s just an amazing group of people and I appreciate all the hard work that has gone into giving me this opportunity. I wish I’d known about it many years ago.
* It is an opportunity to spend a week in Blind Community, to feel normal rather than disabled.
* It means everything to me: Friendship, exercise, travel, improving my skills, learning new things, building confidence, growing as an individual, love!
* It means experiencing something for the first time and accomplishing something from my bucket list
* It means pushing my own limits, connecting with like-minded people, being fully accepted just as I am, and looking forward to each, upcoming event, as it is often the highlight of my year.
* it means the chance to get outdoors in the snow-capped mountains, to learn, to challenge myself, and to push my limits.
* SFL is life changing. The organization affords us the opportunity to do something we never thought we could do. Well organized activities and clear direction are provided and are key to success.

Additional notable quotables. These people have indicated they do not want their comments shared in published materials.

* That I am making a small contribution to someone’s sense of accomplishment and confidence and all of the kind people who participate.
* It means that I am an equal in something I love!
* SFL is a great way to get people involved in sporting activities. I love meeting all the new skiers.
* The sense of family, community, and a genuinely good and fun time every year.

**Will you be coming to Snow Mountain Ranch Colorado next year?**

* 101 people (67% of respondents) said yes.
* 36 people (24% of respondents) said maybe. Reasons given include concerns around coronavirus (5 people), uncertain health (4 people), cost (8 people), the event is one day too long (2 people), schedule conflicts (8 people), don’t like venue (1 person mentioned the altitude, 1 person mentioned staying in different locations and going outside for meals), were dissatisfied with experience this year (2 people).
* 11 people (7% of respondents) said no. Reasons given include concerns around the coronavirus (2 people), cost (4 people), schedule conflicts (5 people), don’t like the venue (2 people), wasn’t happy with their experience this year (1 person).

**Any other feedback you'd like to share?**

Attitudes of the leadership have certainly improved over the years, but I would still remind them that not everyone is an accomplished skier, and the "fun" of the event should be emphasized rather than the race/rally and need to only ski. Snowshoeing should be more acceptable if the venue allows. Everyone needs to be shown a hearty welcome and acceptance, no matter the skill or lack thereof.

As a guide that was given 2 skiers, I felt this was really unfair to my skiers. Part of this week is the bond that the guide and skiers form. The better of my 2 skiers I passed onto other guides who were available. I'm sure she felt ripped off. She was a super good sport, but still…

Better food is key especially for vegetarians.

Great job under tremendous pressure!

I do want to thank everyone involved that make Ski For Light possible. I believe everyone did their best and it truly showed. Thank you for a memorable week in Casper.

I feel that the experience of those of us who were on the bus, many of us first time skiers, was minimized by SFL officials. At the skier meeting following breakfast the next day, people who were facilitating the meeting wanted to know what songs we were singing on the bus as we were stranded For hours on the side of the road in a snow bank or if we made snow angels. This minimized the fact that we were in an accident where our bus slid backwards and sideways and finally went off the road… It was not fun, it was not a party… It was dangerous and scary. Again, no apologies were forthcoming by any of the board members who were in attendance including former president Marion Elmquist. I had hoped that my first ski experience would have made me want to return to SFL, but sadly it left me with a very low opinion of SFL.

I had my own guide, but I don't think it was acceptable to expect participants to share. I would not have been impressed if I'd had flown all the way from the UK and paid out the full amount to have to share a guide.

I have to say that I'm glad I was not a first-timer in Casper... it might have made it tough to come back, especially if I'd had guide/skier-matching issues on top of the transportation snafoos and weather-related mishaps. Much of that was completely beyond our control, though, and I'm so proud of all of us for pulling off a great week in spite of the hurdles. We ran into more than our fair share of challenges this year, and I have nothing but admiration for our dedicated planning committee and for every single one of us who kept pushing forward to make the magic happen, even when it didn't look like we'd planned. I'm in it for the long haul, and there's no group of people I'd rather be with when the chips are down! We're a great organization, whose spirit is bigger than any one of us, and each year teaches me something about myself, about life, and about leaning into the moment with love, with grit, and with hope!

I still have a full time job, and even at early 50's feel like a youngster in the group, esp. relative to other guides. it would be great for me, and for me to try to get other fellow skiers to volunteer, if the week was just a bit shorter, there seem to be travel delays that make my 8 day comittment turn into 9..... seems like to the old guard in the group that this is a long vacation for them.... yes, it is a vacation for me, but it would be a lot sweeter if we could have the rally / race day on Friday, and fly home on Sat! seems like a no-brainer in terms of getting (and keeping) younger guides, and reducing cost / fees. thanks for listening and for all the work that goes into the events

I want to say a big thank you to the SFL board and the organizing committee for the great job they did given all the challenges.

Infection control! Infection control! Infection control! Infection control MUST GET BETTER! I got the “Casper Crud” and the cough hung on and hung on! I sat with, ate with, rode buses with and skied with VIP’s and guides who developed pneumonia, influenza, bronchitis, the “Casper Crud”, etc. COVID-19 will probably still be around next January. Let’s stress hand washing and covering coughs! I only heard one announcement about that at Casper. How about hand sanitizer pumps first on the buffet tables before the food, plates and utensils. How about little hand sanitizer bottles in the welcome packets everyone receives at check in? How about N95 masks in our welcome packets?