

NEWS

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Ski Resort Swaps Fiberglass for Sustainable Wood

BY MARTINIQUE DAVIS

TELLURIDE— There are over 350 trail signs affixed to posts and nailed to trees across the Telluride Ski Resort.

The harsh high-alpine climate on Telluride's slopes is no match for the signs' fiberglass construction, and every five or so years, the classic rectangular blue signs need to be replaced.

And so, every five or so years, Telluride Ski Patrolter Jim Greene would remove hundreds of worn-out, plastic-based signs from around the mountain. Since the signs cannot be refurbished, they all were destined for the landfill.

"We'd fill a dumpster with these six-foot by one-foot fiberglass signs, and I thought, there's got to be a better way," says Greene.

Those dumpsters brimming with glass-reinforced plastic provided the impetus behind Greene's new business, Greenworx Signs. Greene's "better way" is manifest in handsome, ecologically friendly wooden trail signs that will eventually replace all 350 fiberglass signs at the Telluride Ski Area.

Made of cedar, Greenworx signs look like they're hand-carved out of a single piece of wood (it's actually several pieces, stacked together). Each sign boasts white lettering projecting off a natural brown

background, and is emblazoned with the red Telluride Ski Resort logo. Reminiscent of the wooden ski area signs popular in the 1970s, Greene's signs represent a simple and natural yet uniquely refined take on the traditional trail sign.

Not only are the cedar Greenworx signs more attractive than their electric-blue fiberglass counterparts, they can be refurbished, as well, so that they won't wind up in the dumpster when they start to show signs of aging. Greene has guaranteed his signs for five years, but said he expects them to last even longer.

Thanks to the wood construction, his signs are far less toxic than fiberglass signs, manufactured out of a plastic-based slurry infused with fine fibers of glass. The National Toxicology Program classifies inhalable glass wool fibers like those found in fiberglass products as "[r]easonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen," and despite strict manufacturing guidelines there is a higher incidence of lung cancer among fiberglass factory workers.

The Telluride Ski Resort has replaced 35 fiberglass signs so far, all in Prospect Basin, and anticipates a full replacement of all plastic-based signs on the area within three to five years.

Greene, who describes himself as more a tinkerer than a carpenter,



learned his woodworking basics in his father's wood shop in Washington State, and refined his tinkering skills working year-round for the Telluride Ski Resort for the last 15 years, as a ski patrolter in the winter and on the mountain's summer crew.

"For years I was wracking my brain about what I could do in my line of work, something that could be my own business and also my own bit of environmental initiative, however small it may be," Greene explains of the evolution of Greenworx Signs.

Not only has the creation of his new business helped this father and longtime local realize his personal goal of making a difference; it has also provided the Telluride Ski Resort with an opportunity to put some of its environmental initiatives into action.



SUSTAINABLE SIGNAGE— Telluride Ski Patrolter Jim Greene installed a new wood sign near Lift 5 last week (above); at left, a dumpster full of discarded trail signs that are thrown out every five years or so. (Photo by Brett Schreckengost)

"This is a great example of an idea which is good for the environment, the company, and the individual," says Dave Riley, Telluride Ski and Golf's CEO, of Greene's eco-sign project.

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According to Telluride Ski and Golf's Manager of Eco Adventures and Environmental Programs Katie Geissler, one of the resort's goals is to "practice responsible environmental stewardship." Additionally, the Telluride Ski Resort is one of only eight resorts in North America that participated in the inaugural year of the Climate Challenge this year. The Climate Challenge is a voluntary program, administered through the

National Ski Area Association, that recognizes ski areas that are committed to developing greenhouse gas inventories and setting goals for carbon reduction. Telluride Ski and Golf recently set a goal to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 5 percent in the next five years, Geissler reports.

"Jim's trail sign project aligns quite well with the Climate Challenge initiative, as one of the categories we will continue to measure, and ultimately reduce, is solid waste," Geissler says.

So while Telluride is one of only a few ski areas involved in the Climate Challenge, now it is also one of the only ski areas to be reducing its carbon footprint and waste output with a change that's both ecologically friendly and visually pleasing.

"We are so excited to be able to benefit from Jim's creativity and craftsmanship," says Telluride's Vice President of Resort Operations Elizabeth Howe. "Not only are the signs made locally and from cedar, rather than fiberglass, but they are beautiful

and contribute to Telluride's goal of being 'Unmatched.'"

Greene hopes that the eco-friendly trail sign project he's undertaken at his home mountain is just the beginning of Greenworx Signs' reign, and that other ski resorts will take notice of Telluride's eye-catching and waste-reducing trail signs and jump on board.

"Everybody's using the fiberglass signs, because that's what's available from the main ski area suppliers. Some of these larger ski ar-

reas must have thousands of signs... and they must be filling up so many dumpsters" with worn-out signs, he says.

"The Telluride Ski Area is constantly talking about sustainability, and also supporting local business. They really came through on this one, and hopefully other resorts will too. Hopefully this will become the new ski area standard for trail signs."

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