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No snow brings cheers from some, worries others

By The Associated Press and the Press-Gazette

Wisconsin residents who don't like winter have something to cheer about: an unseasonable shortage of snow. But some persons whose livelihoods depend on tourists are worried about the lack of white stuff.

"What we need is a blizzard," Donald Woodruff, state Divison of Tourism administrator, said Monday.

Cash registers at ski slopes, along snowmobile trails, in upstate service stations and at resorts would be ringing louder if the state were to get more snow, he said.

"If the weather doesn't get 'better,' we will have our fourth consecutive 'bad' winter," he remarked to an interviewer.

In the Green Bay area, three of four ski hills are open. Recorded announcements at Hidden Valley Ski Area, Route 2, Denmark, and Navarino Ski Hill reported this morning snow was being made on limited runs.

Hazel Demske of Hilly Haven Ski 'N' Golf, Route 2, De Pere, which has five downhill runs and a new cross-country ski trail, said only its opening weekend has been lost because of conditions.

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— Tourism official

Mary Cain of Snowburst, located south of De Pere, reports that all its runs are open and most of them have a one-foot base. Snowburst started making snow the first week in December and Cain says conditions are "real good."

"We're making snow and we had a fairly good weekend," Cain said.

Spokesmen at four local sports shops said new equipment sales, particularly cross-country ski equipment, have slowed since pre-Christmas when skiers were buying in anticipation of snow.

Avid downhill skiers who usually ski in northern Wisconsin, Upper Michigan or western resorts which have snow, however, still are customers. Others, noted one manager, "have to see snow on the ground to get excited about it."

Snow depths reached 20 inches in Ashland County and 24 inches in Douglas County Dec. 28 when a snowstorm swept northernmost Wisconsin's Lake Superior neighborhood.

But little appreciable snow has fallen downstate. The National Weather Service's outlook for the coming weekend in southern counties includes rainfall and temperatures in the 40s.

Woodruff said the season is still young, so affairs for the tourist industry are not yet as severe as they were in the winter of 1980. That year then-Gov. Lee S. Dreyfus declared a state of emergency to allow businesses to apply for low-interest survival loans.

Woodruff said he has no immediate calculations on how much money the tourist trade is off this season.

But he said a dearth of snow is uncomfortably similar to that of the 1980 winter.

"There is some snow up north for downhill skiing, and the resorts are making some (artifically)," he said. "But that's about it."

"This means people are not in the mood for winter activities and not traveling to places where there is snow," he said. "Good snow cover across the state will trigger the impulse."

The state Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection's weekly crop report says the Lake Superior area has snow accumulations of up to 22 inches in Polk County, but none at all in some other portions of the usually snowy area.

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