

2026 MSAA Summer Meeting & Tradeshow

Breakout Sessions & Workshops by Track

Updated: July 14, 2026

Breakout sessions are 75 minutes. Workshops are 2 hours 15 minutes. Keynotes are 60 minutes.

KEYNOTES

Opening Keynote: Mark Ostach

KEYNOTE | Monday 8:30 am - 9:30 am

Speaker: *Mark Ostach*

Get ready to be inspired at the 2026 MSAA Summer Meeting & Tradeshow in Boyne, MI, where globally recognized speaker and leadership coach Mark Ostach takes the stage with his keynote, *Fostering Connection & Wellness*. A two-time TED speaker and author frequently featured in *USA Today*, Mark blends heartfelt storytelling, neuroscience, and simple leadership strategies to help us rediscover the most powerful connection we have—human connection. This highly interactive session is packed with inspiring stories that will help you better connect with your co-workers, your community, and yourself. So check your phones one last time, and come find the courage to connect.

Small Hills, Big Impact: An MSAA Fireside Chat on the Industry and the Midwest

KEYNOTE | Tuesday 8:15 am - 9:15 am

Speakers: *Michael Reitzell, NSAA; Stephen Kircher, Boyne Resorts; Rick Schmitz, Schmitz Brothers Resorts*

Join NSAA President Michael Reitzell, NSAA Board Chair and Boyne Resorts' Stephen Kircher, and MSAA Board Chair and NSAA Executive Board member Rick Schmitz of Schmitz Brothers Resorts for a candid conversation on the state of the industry and the Midwest's place in it. Mike will open with an update on the industry at large, including NSAA initiatives and programs.

The discussion then turns to the outsized role Midwest areas play and how the region will help grow participation and shape the industry for years to come. With strong Midwest representation on the NSAA board, through the MSAA & state associations, one thing is clear: the region has a seat at the national table and a big part to play in what's next.

GENERAL SESSION

MSAA Leadership Roundtable

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 9:45 am - 11:00 am

Speakers: *Bo Bigelow, Midwest Ski Areas Association; Rick Schmitz, Schmitz Brothers Resorts*

Join MSAA Executive Director Bo Bigelow and MSAA Chair Rick Schmitz for the annual MSAA General Managers Roundtable, a collaborative breakout session designed for all current and emerging ski area leaders. This highly interactive forum will feature an open discussion where attendees can share innovative ideas and tackle the most pressing issues currently impacting ski area operations and leadership. Come prepared to connect with industry peers and exchange valuable insights to help guide your mountain's future success.

Building the Future Ski Industry Workforce: How The Pipeline Project is Connecting Career & Technical Education to Resort Careers

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 11:15 am - 12:30 pm

Speaker: *Tiffany Whitcomb, The Pipeline Project*

The ski industry has a workforce challenge—but it also has an opportunity. This presentation explores how The Pipeline Project is connecting Career & Technical Education (CTE) students with meaningful careers in the ski industry through year-round workforce development. Learn why today's CTE students represent an untapped talent pipeline, the barriers that currently exist between schools and resorts, and how The Pipeline Project is helping bridge that gap through partnerships, career exploration, and hands-on workforce initiatives.

NSAA Small Ski Areas Committee Meeting

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 2:15 pm - 3:30 pm

Speakers: *Rick Schmitz, Schmitz Brothers Resorts; Earl Saline, NSAA*

The NSAA Small Ski Areas Committee meeting, continuing the important discussions initiated during the May gathering. Attendees will hear the latest progress updates from sub-committees and committee leadership regarding initiatives that directly impact small ski area operations. While this is an in-person meeting designed for collaborative networking, a virtual attendance option will also be available for those unable to join on-site.

LEADERSHIP

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Building The Safety Culture

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 2:15 pm - 3:30 pm

Speaker: *Chauncy Johnson, Snow Angels Foundation*

PEOPLE & CULTURE

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DOL Audits & Compliance: Focusing on current “hot buttons,” risk reduction strategies, and how to handle an audit.

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 9:30 am - 10:45am

Speaker: *Kelly Brooks, Snow Operating*

Difficult Conversations: Tips and techniques to make difficult conversations easier, including practical application.

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 11:00 am - 12:15 pm

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LIFT MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

Chairlift Grips Workshop

WORKSHOP | Monday 9:45 am - 12:30 pm

Speaker: *James Griffith, Doppelmayr*

Join Doppelmayr's James Griffith for an engaging, hands-on workshop dedicated to the mechanics and maintenance of fixed chairlift grips. This session will provide ski area personnel with a practical review of exactly what to focus on when inspecting and servicing these critical components. By working directly with the hardware, attendees will gain the hands-on experience needed to ensure the safety, compliance, and longevity of their lift systems.

Surface Conveyor Workshop

WORKSHOP | Monday 2:15 pm - 4:15 pm

Speakers: *Conor Rowan, Star Lifts USA; Dustin Flath, Star Lifts USA*

Join industry experts for an engaging, hands-on workshop dedicated to the safe operation and upkeep of ski area surface conveyors. This interactive class will guide participants through the latest industry best practices for daily operations, routine maintenance, and critical safety inspections. By working directly with the equipment, attendees will leave with the practical skills and knowledge necessary to keep their surface lifts running reliably all season long.

ANSI B77.1-2022 and looking to 2027

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 9:30 am - 10:45am

Speaker: *Mike Lane, NSAA*

This session is a quick overview of what has changed in B77.1-2022. Then we look forward to 2027 and potential changes coming and why. Participants will learn what ASC B77 Standards Committee is working on and gain a better understanding of what may be coming in the future B77.1 standard. There are currently ~100 proposed changes in the process, some of these will be in the 2027 standard.

Brakes and Braking 101 ½

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 11:00 am - 12:15 pm

Speaker: *Mike Lane, NSAA*

This updated class will look at the different types of brakes, their physical characteristics, and what the B77.1 standard requires and why. The session then applies the different brake types used on ropeways and gives an overview to help you understand their operation and potential problems. The later portion of the class discusses rotation inertia (energy), and what can be learned from brake curves.

Ski Area Chairlift NDT Testing

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm

Speaker: *Logan Still, Rocky Mountain NDT*

Join industry expert Logan Still for an in-depth session exploring the critical need for Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) on ski area chairlifts. This presentation will break down the specific NDT requirements outlined in the ANSI B77 standard, ensuring your mountain's lift maintenance program remains fully compliant and safe. Attendees will learn exactly what ski areas need to be aware of when planning and executing NDT inspections, while also gaining valuable insights into current industry best practices to maximize lift reliability and passenger safety.

Michigan Ski Area Safety Act & Rules

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 3:30 pm - 4:45 pm

Speaker: *Greg Ohlemacher, Michigan Department of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs*

Join representatives from the Michigan Department of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs for an essential deep dive into the Michigan Ski Area Safety Act & Rules. This breakout session will cover current regulations, compliance standards, and critical safety protocols to ensure your mountain operates smoothly and safely. While this is an absolute must-attend for all Michigan-based ski areas, operators throughout the entire Midwest will find immense value in the safety insights, operational benchmarks, and regulatory best practices shared during this presentation.

NSAA Incidents & Component Failure Database

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 3:30 pm - 4:45 pm

Speaker: *Mike Lane, NSAA*

NSAA has created a lift related incident and critical component failure database. The database and submittals to it will help in notifying the ropeway maintenance crews of trends, and expand educational opportunities to address potential issues. Mike will discuss the process of submitting the form electronically, and further discuss what should and shouldn't be submitted.

Takeaways:

- Understanding of the purpose of the database, the data's security, and personal protected information.
- Understanding of the submittal process.
- Understanding of what and what should not be reported.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk - Playing Efficient Offense: Build and Update Your Risk Systems and Programs

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 9:45 am - 11:00 am

Speakers: *Zander Kestly, Camber Risk and Safety; Mark Petrozzi, AlpenRisk Safety Advisors*

Understand and explore the thought process behind designing commonsense risk practices tailored to ski areas. This breakout will guide you through developing practical systems and documentation that align with industry practices, from risk assessment to preventive controls. Attendees will leave with a clear blueprint for implementing and sustaining effective pre-loss processes that inform guests, equip staff, and protect assets while supporting mission-critical operations.

Improving Your Post-Incident Playbook: Tactics that foster organizational improvement and protection

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 11:15 am - 12:30 pm

Speakers: *Zander Kestly, Camber Risk and Safety; Mark Petrozzi, AlpenRisk Safety Advisors*

This breakout picks up where risk mitigation left off, focusing on post-incident actions that safeguard guests, staff, and operations. Attendees will explore incident investigation procedures, essential records and documentation, and the implications of the Miller decision, with practical checklists to implement and sustain in your ski area. Join us to translate lessons learned into a rigorous, industry-aligned post-loss program.

Building The Safety Culture

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 2:15 pm - 3:30 pm

Speaker: *Chauncy Johnson, Snow Angels Foundation*

Active Shooter: What To Think About & How to Develop a Plan

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 2:15 pm - 3:30 pm

Speaker: *Rob Rozhon, Gregory & Appel*

Strong incident investigation strategies and follow-up help your ski area improve operational performance. Following the Miller Decision in Colorado we will explore documentation and checklist updates that create clear paths for your teams to respond to critical incidents. Attendees will leave with new insight how post incident systems help your ski areas have more confidence in some of the most stressful moments.

Fall Educational Seminar Session 1

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 9:30 am - 10:45am

Speakers: *Dave Byrd, NSAA; Ryan Lavoie, MountainGuard; Amanda M. Cialkowski, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Kelly P. Magnus, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Jack Deegan, Plunkett Cooney*

NSAA's Fall Education Series (FES) is returning to the MSAA conference with another packed agenda of current trends in risk management, legal updates, operational best practices, and helpful technologies emerging across the ski industry. Sponsored by MountainGuard for 33 straight years since its inception in 1993, MountainGuard's Ryan Lavoie and NSAA's Dave Byrd will again helm the FES—along with assistance from our amazing local ASDA counsel in the Midwest. This year, the FES will be taking place in four distinct sessions on Tuesday, August 18. The series will take a fresh look at where the industry is on operational challenges involving terrain parks,

including new ideas on guest education, park layout, investigations, and events in the park. In addition, there are a lot of recent industry updates, including upcoming changes to ANSI B77, ASTM and padding, night lighting and surveillance—with a special focus on NSAA's new Lift Safety Toolkit for the industry. As we discussed a lot recently, OSHA is aggressively scrutinizing the ski industry, with an unprecedented number of ski area unannounced inspections—as a result, we will be highlighting the best ways to prioritize overall employee safety and accountability.

Of course, we always incorporate a round-up of legal claims, court rulings, and current litigation updates, including some important wins on releases of liability, legislation, and ski statutes—still, there is a critical need to address some of the industry's challenges with our internal written policies and manuals that often complicates claims. Indeed, the overall litigation landscape still remains problematic with increasingly high demands and especially aggressive tactics from plaintiffs' counsel. The fall education seminars are a big success because of the incredible collaboration and sharing within our industry, and the sharing of best practices.

Fall Educational Seminar Session 2

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 11:00 am - 12:15 pm

Speakers: *Dave Byrd, NSAA; Ryan Lavoie, MountainGuard; Amanda M. Cialkowski, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Kelly P. Magnus, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Jack Deegan, Plunkett Cooney*

Terrain Park Jump Measurement Class

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm

Speakers: *Jeremy Cooper, Boyne Resorts; Adam Mahler, Trollhaugen Ski Area; Kyle Wilson, Nordic Mountain*

This session focuses on best practices for pre- and post-incident procedures in terrain park operations, with a primary emphasis on hands-on jump measurement training. Working in groups, participants will walk through the full measurement process — taking accurate jump measurements, documenting them properly, managing the scene, and applying a consistent investigative approach.

The session will also include a discussion of feature testing, risk assessment, and ongoing monitoring to ensure consistency, safety, and compliance with industry standards — but the core of the session is practical, in-the-field measurement work that participants can put to use right away.

Best of all, this training is easily replicable at your own area, making it a practical resource for both fall preparation and in-season training.

Fall Educational Seminar Session 3

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm

Speakers: *Dave Byrd, NSAA; Ryan Lavoie, MountainGuard; Amanda M. Cialkowski, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Kelly P. Magnus, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Jack Deegan, Plunkett Cooney*

Fall Educational Seminar Session 4

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 3:30 pm - 4:45 pm

Speakers: *Dave Byrd, NSAA; Ryan Lavoie, MountainGuard; Amanda M. Cialkowski, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Kelly P. Magnus, Nilan Johnson Lewis; Jack Deegan, Plunkett Cooney*

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Crisis Comms: 4 Things to Know When Responding to a Crisis

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 9:45 am - 11:00 am

Speakers: *Tonya Riley, NSAA; Dave Byrd, NSAA*

Critical incidents can happen at any ski area, and how they're handled matters. Poor communication can increase legal exposure, erode public trust, and lead to greater insurance and regulatory scrutiny. This session will share practical tips for responding to incidents and communicating effectively when they occur.

AI for Senior Leaders: Save Time, Reduce Risk, Make Better Decisions

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 11:15 am - 12:30 pm

Speaker: *Mike Lannen, Eternity Marketing*

Executives and resort leaders are inundated with emails, board reports, contracts, regulatory updates, sustainability data, and industry analysis. The question isn't whether AI is coming. It's whether you'll use it strategically.

Time is your scarcest resource. AI can function as a strategic assistant — synthesizing information so you can focus on leadership, advocacy, and long-term industry growth.

In this executive-focused breakout, Mike Lannen, Founder of Eternity, will demonstrate how ski industry leaders can use AI to reclaim hours each week while improving decision quality and reducing risk.

This is not a technical session. It's a leadership playbook.

Key Takeaways:

- Rapidly triage, summarize and respond to high-volume email threads
- Turn long reports, audits, and industry research into decision-ready executive briefs
- Generate board-ready summaries in minutes
- Craft stunning slide decks from raw data

Stoke Economics: The Financial Impact of Belonging

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 2:15 pm - 3:30 pm

Speaker: *Kyle Wilson, Nordic Mountain*

This session will explore the historic tension between ski school and terrain parks as an analogy for the broader snow sports industry. We will discuss actionable strategies for developing a unified culture and breaking down organizational silos. By analyzing these two distinct ecosystems, we will discuss how resorts can widen the path for first-time guests to become core customers. Come ready to share your firsthand testimonials and leave with a blueprint for a unified frontline.

Events 101

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 9:30 am - 10:45am

Speaker: *Marsha Hovey, Trollhaugen Ski Area*

In this breakout, participants explore what defines event success for your resort—whether measured by revenue, visitation, community impact, media reach, or personal satisfaction. Attendees are divided into groups,

assigned a budget, and tasked with crafting a compelling, practical event concept, then reconvening to share insights and feedback. Guided by experts, the session emphasizes real-world challenges like attendance, ROI, and cross-department collaboration, turning obstacles into opportunities for learning. The result is actionable ideas, peer-tested strategies, and a clear path to maximize impact at your resort.

Midwest Marketing Thunderclap!

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 11:00 am - 12:15 pm

Speakers: *Marsha Hovey, Trollhaugen Ski Area; Kari Roder, Boyne Mountain Resort; Nate Wolleson, Snow Trails*

Join us for the Midwest Marketers Thunderclap, where our panelists share a win or a loss that reshaped how they market ski areas and optimize offerings. Each story highlights the real-world impact on strategy, messaging, and guest experience, with practical takeaways you can apply to your own resort. Expect candid lessons on resilience, adaptation, and the power of data-driven decision making in a fast-moving market. This session turns setbacks into insights and wins into scalable marketing momentum.

Solving the "Lesson Conversion Crisis" via Marketing Funnels

WORKSHOP | Tuesday 2:00 pm - 4:15 pm

Speaker: *Sam Rufo, nxtConcepts*

The 10% year-over-year drop in lesson visits flagged by Mike Reitzell, at NSAA, isn't an operations problem. It's a marketing funnel problem. This highly tactical "revenue recovery" workshop reframes lesson and rental bookings as a funnel you can fix, stage by stage, using marketing tools you already have plus the newer ones reshaping how guests find and book you.

We'll work top to bottom through the funnel.

Get found (awareness). How guests now discover ski areas through AI search and answer engines (AEO/GEO), and what it takes to be the answer when a first-timer asks ChatGPT or Google "where can I learn to ski near me." Remove the friction (booking). A live audit of the first-timer mobile booking experience and landing page, finding the clicks and confusion that quietly kill sales.

Nurture and convert (re-engagement). Building automated, non-salesy lifecycle email sequences that move lift-ticket buyers toward lessons and rentals, plus custom audiences and ad retargeting to bring back the guests who didn't book the first time.

Target precisely (the thread throughout). Moving beyond the "blast email" by segmenting local vs. destination and skier vs. rider, so every message fits the guest.

Throughout the session, you'll see how to build these pieces faster using the AI already inside the software you use. We'll compare Gemini, ChatGPT, and Claude.

What you'll walk away with: a concrete, dated digital playbook for this coming winter.

This is a working session, not a lecture. Bring a phone or laptop.

GROWTH & RETENTION

From Turns to Returns

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 9:45 am - 11:00 am

Speaker: *Erika Meier, PSIA/ASSI - Central*

How video creates better skiers, loyal guest and new revenue for resorts.

Building an Adaptive Program

BREAKOUT SESSION | Monday 11:15 am - 12:30 pm

Speaker: *Ann Papenfuss, PSIA/ASSI - Central*

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Designing the Future of the Guest Experience

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 9:30 am - 10:45am

Speaker: *Kristen Carey, SE Group*

Guest expectations are evolving quickly, shaped by advances in technology, changing travel patterns, and new approaches to ski area planning best practices. This session explores the future of the guest experience through a holistic perspective that considers place, technology, and transportation together. It will look at how design, digital tools, and mobility solutions are shaping how guests arrive, move through, and experience an area.

We will also examine how thoughtful planning can reduce friction, improve access, and create more seamless experiences across the entire guest journey—from parking and arrival to lifts, base areas, and on-mountain services. Whether planning new infrastructure, upgrading base areas, or improving guest flow, this session is designed to provide insights to support forward-looking decisions.

Key Takeaways:

- Understand how planning decisions related to place, technology, and transportation influence the guest experience
- Learn how ski areas can use design and technology to reduce friction across the guest journey
- Identify planning and operational strategies that support more seamless and enjoyable guest experiences

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Terrain Park Builds & Layout

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 3:30 pm - 4:45 pm

Speakers: *Jeremy Cooper, Boyne Resorts; Adam Mahler, Trollhaugen Ski Area; Kyle Wilson, Nordic Mountain*

Ready to design the park of your dreams? This hands-on session puts you in the driver's seat of park layout and build. Working in teams with a scale diagram, you'll strategically place features and builds to create a park that flows — weighing real-world considerations like groomer access, user ability, and ongoing maintenance every step of the way.

But a great park is more than just features. Each team will define their target park user and map out the signage and fencing needed to bring it all together safely and intentionally.

The best part? Teams go head-to-head, and instructors will crown the winning design with a prize. Bring your creativity, think like a builder, and come ready to compete!

RENTAL & RETAIL

Buying and Profiting with Winter Accessories

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 9:30 am - 10:45am

Speaker: *Lou Fliszar, Winters Edge Accessories*

The Guest Experience in the AI Age

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm

Speakers: *Dave Scott, Michigan Digital; Anthony Talarico, ShredderPOS*

All new e-commerce and point of sale systems are changing the way skiers shop. The next wave of technology replaces the shopping cart with an agentic workflow. These new tools have to look good, be easy to understand, and provide a quick path to the slopes. We'll talk about all the new stuff and how to use it to strengthen your connection with skiers. Please join us with your questions and ideas. No passwords required.

SARA BP Program Roundtable

BREAKOUT SESSION | Tuesday 3:30 pm - 4:45 pm

Speaker: *Joe Yasis, SARA BP / Midwest Ski Areas Association*

Join Joe Yasis for a discussion on the Ski Areas Rental & Accessories Buying Program (SARA BP). He'll walk through what's new in the program, feature insights from manufacturer partners, and share best practices for selecting gear and accessories that boost guest satisfaction and operational efficiency. This session is a practical, partner-informed guide to making the most of SARA BP for your ski area.

MOUNTAIN OPERATIONS

Park Feature Fabrication & Welding Workshop

WORKSHOP | Monday 9:45 am - 12:30 pm

Speakers: *Jeremy Cooper, Boyne Resorts; Adam Mahler, Trollhaugen Ski Area*

This hands-on workshop trains mountain ops teams, terrain park crews, and ski & ride schools in the essentials of park feature fabrication. You'll gain practical takeaways on design considerations, materials, safety, and build processes, including a welding component suitable for all levels. Please come prepared to work in a maintenance space—wear appropriate clothing and footwear, and expect a collaborative, hands-on learning environment that you can bring straight back to your ski area.

SMI Equipment Servicing Training

WORKSHOP | Monday 9:45 am - 12:30 pm

Join us for the SMI Equipment Servicing Training, a workshop focused on maintaining and troubleshooting SMI snowmaking equipment and systems. This is a fully hands-on session where participants will work directly with the machinery to practice real-world servicing techniques. Please come prepared to get dirty and be sure to wear proper work clothing and sturdy, closed-toe footwear for your safety.

PistenBully Service Workshop

WORKSHOP | Monday 9:45 am - 12:30 pm

HKD Service Workshop

WORKSHOP | Monday 9:45 am - 12:30 pm

Speaker: *Justin Sikkenga, HKD Snowmakers*

Prinoth Service Workshop

WORKSHOP | Monday 2:15 pm - 4:15 pm

TechnoAlpin Service Workshop

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