

10

The Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts

Spotlight: Dave Butler – A heli of a job

Working for a heli-skiing operation would be a dream-come-true for many an avid backcountry skier. But faced with the challenging job of directing a heli-ski company's sustainability program, it may not be as cushy as it sounds. Dave Butler (RPF, RPBio) has the tough job of Director of Sustainability for Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) Heli-Skiing & Summer Adventures. He started his career as a Park Warden in Banff National Park, Canada, went on to work in government, handling adventure tourism tenures, and moved to CMH in 1997.

Heli-tourism represents one of the great dilemmas and conflicts between recreational enjoyment of the wilderness and the conservation of the fragile alpine and mountain areas. The question of responsibility towards the environment is one which tourism operators have generally been reluctant to accept but CMH has taken a more proactive approach to environmental issues.



Dave Butler

The Banff-based company operates in 11 mountain areas of South Eastern British Columbia, bringing in annual revenues of around CDN\$60 million with a 70 per cent repeat-booking record. CMH holds license rights from the BC government to more than 14,000km² of remote territory in the Purcell, Cariboo, Selkirk and Monashee mountain ranges and is several times

the size of its closest competitor in heli-ski visits. Its operations include up to 30 helicopters and eight remote lodges – many accessible in winter only by helicopter. There are three main strands to its business: heli-skiing, heli-hiking, and mountaineering.

As part of the senior leadership team, Butler heads up CMH's sustainability program including governance, implementation and reporting. "The company's efforts have been recognized with a range of provincial, national and international awards," Butler says. "I coordinate cross-functional teams and the integration of fiscal, environmental and human components of the business and I ensure the company's approaches are consistent with its long-term sustainability." Focusing on government and community relations, Butler deals with all land/resource tenures and regulatory issues. "And I supervise, and am accountable for, work of the Run Development Coordinator and Manager of Remote Fuel Operations – both seasonal positions," he adds.

As the grand-daddy of heli-skiing since its launch in 1965, CMH has demonstrated a commitment to the environment. "We look at environmental stewardship as one component, albeit a critical one, of our journey toward sustainability," Butler explains. The other vital ingredients are fiscal responsibility and social/cultural stewardship. "Our founder, Hans Gmoser, was committed to ensuring that we take good care of the special places that we share with our guests, and that commitment continues to today in what we do around wildlife, energy and waste management, fuel management, etc. In fact, Hans was the first in our industry to develop a specific set of wildlife procedures for guides and pilots," says Butler.

Over the years, CMH has trained its guides to keep a vigilant watch for wildlife. The guides plan their flying and skiing routes to avoid contact, and all wildlife sightings are provided annually to the BC Government for their overall management purposes. They use computer software to map wildlife sightings, and to maintain a sense, over time, about the areas where animals spend their time throughout the year. CMH also looks to external biologists to give them advice on how best to behave in these habitats.

One of the company goals is to increase energy efficiency in all aspects of the business. This helps alleviate costs as well as reduce CMH's overall footprint. "So, rather than paying money for off-sets, we use every dollar available to continue to look for ways to be more efficient in our energy use," Butler explains. "Examples include the way we light and heat the lodges, the ways in which we use helicopters, and the way we move our guests to/from our lodges."

Environmentalists typically raise concerns about the negative environmental impacts of heli-tourism on fish and wildlife, about waste and fuel storage areas, and about noise pollution. Vegetation, too, can be a contentious environmental issue. In the summer, existing hardy trails are used where possible, and use is dispersed throughout each operating area so that impacts on fragile alpine environments are minimized. CMH claims that the potential impact on the land in the winter is negligible because visitors leave only tracks in the snow. CMH guides are trained in the latest low-impact travel techniques for alpine areas, and they share these approaches with the visitors. CMH also works with local forestry companies coordinating efforts to harvest in ways that work best for skiers while reducing the visual impact of harvesting. Landing and pick-up locations are also placed in areas of minimum impact on the forest.

Waste reduction is also important to CMH. For example, in the Adamant Lodge in the Selkirk Mountains, food waste (that used to be consumed by lodge pigs before hoof-and-mouth scares) is eliminated by using a prototype composting system developed by maintenance manager, Duane Dukart. In 2002, CMH established the 'President's Award for Environmental Initiative', a program which empowers all staff to take a look at what they can change in their own jobs that will help the environment. Dukart received the first President's Award for his efforts to promote environmental stewardship. The same system is now used in the Bugaboo Lodge. The company also employs the latest technology in sewage treatment and uses only environmentally-friendly soaps and paper.

Helicopter fuelling locations use leading edge technology to prevent fuel spills from reaching the ground or the water. These systems include engineered containment berms and a state-of-the-art emergency spill response system. Use of helicopters is minimized wherever possible, as this is the greatest direct cost of operations. The fuel for the helicopters is stored at the lodges, and at remote fuel caches, using leading-edge storage facilities.

In order to communicate its strong sustainability standpoint CMH produces regular reports which are posted on its website. Sustainability and environmental policies are also used in marketing messages to potential and return guests. And staff members who interact with guests or media are trained in presenting CMH's environmental approaches, giving solid examples. "This includes media interviews, and special talks and presentations at colleges and universities, to special interest groups, and at tourism conferences," Butler adds.

In 2014 CMH created a new internal Sustainability Advisory Group: "a 'think tank' responsible for ensuring we keep looking for both low-hanging fruit, and larger company-changing ideas. This has only been in place since November. A very different approach than our old Second Nature team," says Butler.

Sources: Interview with Dave Butler, December 2014; www.canadianmountainholidays.com/

Impacts of winter sport tourism

The unprecedented expansion of tourism has given rise to a number of economic, environmental and social impacts that tend to be concentrated in destination areas (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Tourism research has typically emphasized the economic impacts and yet there are increasing concerns about the effects of tourism on host societies and their environments. A number of techniques have been developed to monitor these impacts. Common analytical frameworks include an environmental audit, environmental impact analysis, carrying capacity, and community assessment techniques. It is beyond the scope of this book to cover these techniques in detail, but the tourism manager needs to have knowledge of the most current models. Managers must also have an understanding of the principles of sustainable tourism, described as "tourism which is developed and maintained in an area in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human

and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes” (Butler, 1993, p. 29). As shown in the Spotlight above, Canadian Mountain Holidays is a good example of this.

This increasing emphasis on sustainability has important implications for winter sport tourism, and this chapter focuses on the three pillars of sustainability – the economy, the environment and society. In the past, winter sport tourism was encouraged for its economic benefits with little consideration for the effects on the environment. But this is beginning to change. For tourism to be sustainable, it is vital that its impacts are understood, so that they can be incorporated into planning and management. Table 10.1 lists just some of the positive and negative impacts of winter sport tourism according to experts, many of which are covered in more detail throughout this chapter.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Employment and income benefits, both direct and indirect	Overdependence on tourism
Tax benefits to local, regional and national governments	Raises property prices beyond the reach of local young people
Attracts the higher-spending social groups	Leads to an increase in road traffic
Health benefits	Resident hostility towards tourists
Positive contribution to quality of life	Negative impact on wildlife
Catalyst for positive social change	Pollution
Increases local property values	Soil erosion
Quality of tourism increases	Displacement through land occupancy
Counteracts problems of seasonality	Heavy use of water for snow making
Improved recreation facilities for local communities	Creates pressures on land

Table 10.1: Positive and negative impacts of winter sport tourism

Economic impacts

As mentioned above, early tourism research focused mainly upon the economic aspects of the industry, with many early impact studies directed at international and national levels. However, there are an increasing number of studies that examine regional and local economic impacts, and this chapter contains several examples of these. Similarly, there are a growing number of studies that attempt to estimate the impacts of specific events. According to Wall and Mathieson (2006), four factors have contributed to both the emphasis on economic impact analysis and the quality of such studies.

Firstly, when compared with physical and social impacts, economic impacts are relatively easy to measure. There exist widely accepted methodologies for