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Vail resorts to limit ticket sales at ski resorts including Wildcat

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Skiers are seen at Wildcat in 2020. (MARTY BASCH PHOTO)

By PAULA TRACY, InDepthNH.org

NEWBURY — Vail Resorts has announced that this coming winter it will limit ticket sales at its 40 ski resorts across North America, including Mount Sunapee and Wildcat Mountain.

After a winter of complaints from day trippers all the way up to the governor that Vail had oversold its leased product here, the company met with state Department of Natural and Cultural Resource officials.

Changes are on the way not only here in New Hampshire, where they own Attitash in Bartlett, Wildcat in Pinkham Notch, and Crotched Mountain in Bennington but at other resorts that also faced overcrowding this past winter.

In an email sent out to last year's season pass holders, it wrote, "Please be aware that Vail Resorts will be limiting lift tickets throughout the 2022-23 season to prioritize your on-mountain experience. You are strongly encouraged to purchase your lift access in advance — whether it's a lift ticket, Epic Day Pass, or season pass."

It comes a few days before the company plans to increase rates for the multi-mountain Epic pass.

Last winter, a petition [change.org/p/state-intervention-urgently-needed-against-vail-resorts-mt-sunapee-to-preserve-our-nh-resources](https://www.change.org/p/state-intervention-urgently-needed-against-vail-resorts-mt-sunapee-to-preserve-our-nh-resources) circulated and more than 2,000 signed it claiming Vail had failed in its stewardship of the state-owned mountain.

The state inked a 20-year agreement in 2018 after the Mueller family of Vermont stepped away from the lease operations.

On Feb. 15, Executive Councilor Cinde Warmington, a Concord Democrat, asked state Parks Director Phil Bryce if the state's contractor had oversold its product.

Gov. Chris Sununu, whose family owns the Waterville Valley ski area and has had administrative experience, said Vail's customer service "stinks" noting 2-mile-long backups on Route 103 during the busy holiday periods.

Adam White, regional spokesman for Vail Resorts said Tuesday there are a number of measures that are new this winter to address concerns raised from the 2021-22 ski season, and this limiting of daily lift tickets is new.

He noted that also new is the \$20 an hour starting wage with benefits as is "pulse parking" to address peak times when people are trying to get to the area.

But he noted the company does not plan to limit Epic Pass sales and in fact is looking to grow that base of user.

“There is a difference between capacity and crowding,” he said, noting peak times and choke points are being addressed.

He said he could not give a comfortable carrying capacity for Sunapee, a number at which point the ticket sales would cease, but he noted each resort has a limit based on various things including parking, lifts operating, trails open.

Peter Disch, general manager of Mount Sunapee, was not immediately available for comment Tuesday.

Sarah Stewart, the commissioner of the state Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, said the company was working with the state to fix problems but Bryce noted the contract it signed did not limit the number of passes sold.

On its Facebook page were a number of comments urging the company to deal with the situation.

In a post, Bob White wrote “PLEASE make the Sunapee experience great again! ... I went once last year and that was enough for me...very sad.”

The email sent to customers went out with a notice that pass prices will be going up after Labor Day.

“Lift tickets will be limited every day, across every resort, during the 2022/23 season. If tickets are sold out online, guests will not be able to purchase them at ticket windows. Passes and Pass Holder benefit tickets will not be impacted, and there is no impact to guests who enroll in ski and ride school lessons that include lift access.”

The Bloomfield, Colorado-based company pays the state a fee to operate Sunapee with the proceeds going to improve state-owned and operated Cannon Mountain in Franconia Notch.

It is working to recruit more staff, an issue identified as problematic last winter by state Rep. Dan Wolf, R-Newbury.

They are offering a \$20 an hour starting wage with “best in class benefits.”