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Blue Mountain Goes Green to Go White

Ski Areas need a lot of energy to make snow. Rising energy costs, combined with global warming, present a dilemma for the successful operation of a ski area. Blue Mountain Ski Area in Palmerton, PA has been fighting back with a program to make more efficient snow that will save over 2 million kilowatt-hours of electricity this year.

Blue Mountain Ski Area engaged Bethlehem, PA based EMS Environmental, Inc. to conduct an energy audit of the resort to identify the most effective places to make energy saving investments. The audit calculated energy efficiency improvements and associated savings that would be realized with snowmaking upgrades on two critical trails. According to Jim Dailey, General Manager at Blue Mountain, "we needed the audit to make sure we invested our money where it made the most sense from both a business and an environmental perspective."

The audit and efficiency calculations for the equipment upgrades also enabled Blue Mountain to qualify for custom energy saving incentives from PPL. The Public Utility Commission (PUC) under Pennsylvania Act 129 requires Utilities to improve energy efficiency in their service area. "Blue Mountain was amongst the first group of business customers to take advantage of PPL Electric Utilities' E-power Custom Incentive Program" said John Bulger, Key Account Manager with PPL. "Working with Blue Mountain on this innovative energy savings project has been both productive and rewarding. We at PPL are vigorously promoting a full range of rebates and incentives under our E-power programs and we are confident that both business and residential customers will continue to implement energy saving measures which will qualify them for available rebates and incentives."

"This was a very complex energy audit" said Phil Jones, VP Green Business Solutions for EMS Environmental. "There are so many weather and operating variables to consider when comparing snowmaking technologies. We calculated that Blue Mountain Ski Area will save 15% of its electric use, or on average over 2 million kilowatt-hours of electricity each year." This electric savings will result in greenhouse gas reductions of 2,625,000 lbs of carbon dioxide each year. In addition, the ski area will be able to open more quickly after the weather turns cold due to the increase in snowmaking efficiency from the new equipment.

Timely efforts from all parties have enabled the upgrades to be fully in place for this year's ski season. The new equipment, a combination of fully automated snow guns and automated snow fans from Johnson Controls and Areco, respectively, started up with the rest of the snow making equipment this past week without a hitch. These new systems automatically start when the weather is right, adjust to changes in temperature and humidity and stop if the weather changes out of the range for making good snow. With a cooperative weather forecast, the ski area plans to open December 10, 2010.

"I am very excited," said Barbara Green, President of Blue Mountain Ski Area. "By reducing our energy use, we are able to keep ticket prices down and help the environment. And with the rebates from PPL, we will be able to keep investing in more energy saving improvements throughout the resort."

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