



Annual Report 2025-2026



Skyway Station Grand Opening Party
April 11, 2026

Mission Statement

Grand Mesa Nordic Council is a community-supported, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting fun and safe cross country skiing experiences on Grand Mesa for skiers of all ages and abilities. GMNC relies entirely on voluntary contributions and grants to fund trail grooming and maintenance operations.



Non-Discrimination Policy

Grand Mesa Nordic Council does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. These activities include, but are not limited to, hiring and firing of staff, selection of volunteers and vendors, and provision of services. We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for our staff, members/clients, volunteers, subcontractors, and vendors. Minors may be excluded from membership or participation at the discretion of Grand Mesa Nordic Council leadership.

Executive Director Report

Our community accomplished big things this season! Despite a severe snow drought and mid-season heat waves, we started grooming on November 16 and groomed through closing day, April 15. During the early season, teams from around the region flocked here to train, and throughout the year, skiers came from around the US to enjoy our snow.

Our grooming crew worked relentlessly to make this possible, with shoveling help from volunteers and the Mesa County trail crew. We're planning ahead for future years with snow management techniques that ensure we can provide enjoyable skiing even when the snowpack is slim.

But the biggest news is that Skyway Station is officially ready! Thanks to 335+ individuals, families, businesses and foundations who contributed, we met our fundraising goal of \$1.6 million and were able to complete all but a few landscaping details on the project before the end of the season. This was a community effort that begins a new era for GMNC. (More details on page 15.)



More great things are coming! We've submitted the paperwork for Phase 1 of our new trails project, and the Forest Service should have a decision by July. We're grateful for the Forest Service's partnership on this project and for the grants we have received from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to fund the planning work. If all goes as hoped, we'll begin trail work this fall. (See page 14.)

We finished this challenging year in the black and remain in excellent financial standing. We couldn't have done this without your ongoing support, in monetary donations and volunteer time. Special thanks to members who give more than the minimum. These extra gifts keep us on budget. Thanks for your support!

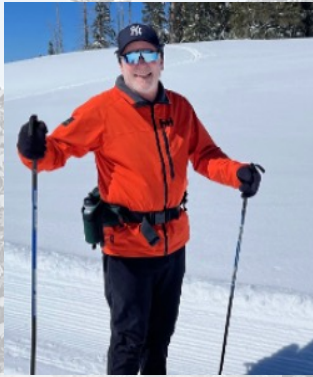
Christie Aschwanden
Executive Director

Leadership 2025-2026

GMNC is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors from our local communities.



Abram Herman
Co-Chair



John Traylor
Co-Chair



Christine Noel
Treasurer



Marguerite Tuthill
Secretary



Susie Attaway



Tom Ela



Nike VanArsdale



Ben Graves



Marilyn Kastens

Letter from the Co-Chairs



Abe Herman



John Traylor

The GMNC community came together in a big way this year, on several fronts. You turned what could have been a tough year due to lack of snow into another strong and sustainable season for the organization, and we're grateful.

Generous donors from all walks of life brought together over \$1.6 million to get us across the fundraising finish line and make the local nordic community's first-ever gathering space a reality. Skyway Station will also protect our grooming and maintenance equipment, extending its life and protecting the investment our members have made. Dan Tille has been the driving force behind this project—serving as project manager, fully on a volunteer basis and saving the organization tens of thousands of dollars. We're thankful for his countless volunteer hours.

While ski areas elsewhere were struggling to stay open, Tigran and his crew worked hard to keep things skiable—which involved a lot of back-breaking shoveling. We're thankful to them and the volunteers who pitched in. More skiers coming here looking for snow kept memberships and donations steady. Looking ahead, we have new trail proposals under Forest Service review.

This letter also marks a board transition. John completed his term as co-chair this spring after years of service to GMNC and is stepping off the board, along with Nike VanArsdale—thank you for your service, Nike! We're welcoming Marguerite Tuthill as incoming co-chair and Marilyn Kastens as Secretary for the year ahead. Dan Tille and Tom Scilacci are joining the board as Members at Large. We're grateful for continued steady leadership through a period of significant growth and change.

Grand Mesa Nordic Council is in an incredibly strong financial position with significant assets, a balanced and well-managed budget, a capable and forward-thinking board, and dedicated staff led by Executive Director Christie Aschwanden—and most importantly, all of you, the snow lovers who make this a real community. Thank you for your support!

John Traylor & Abe Herman
Co-Chairs, Grand Mesa Nordic Council



Christine Noel
GMNC Treasurer

Treasurer's Report

Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 2026

Great News: Operating Revenues

We had a challenging year, with low snow, and the loss of \$17,500 from Mesa County. Despite these challenges, our revenues were very strong, coming in at more than \$300,000. We finished the year in the black, and we also completed our \$1.6 million capital fundraising campaign for Skyway Station.

Daily trail users were wonderfully generous this year, increasing this figure by 51.6% over last year's total.

Even Better News: Operating Expenses

Operating expenses **decreased** 11.1% in comparison to last year, with lower costs in every category except for depreciation expense, which is outside the executive director's control.

Net Income, well in the black, represents a 603.4% increase from last year's near-break-even figure.

Fiscally Strong and Here for the Next 35 Years

The GMNC is a very healthy organization with assets and equity of \$2.082 million and **no debt**. The growth in total assets from last year is 25.8%.

The Capital Equipment Replacement Fund (CERF) donations will move into the CERF Fund for a new total of \$29,852. The board increased the Snowcat Replacement Fund by the amount of depreciation expense for this year, bringing its total to \$272,087.

Operating Revenues	2025—2026	2024—2025
Memberships	155,100	160,546
Grants	17,327	27,500
Programs	23,347	25,839
Trailboxes and Daily Use	61,564	40,619
Business Contributions	27,164	26,882
Special Fundraising Events	12,274	13,681
Capital Fund Reimbursement		12,209
Investment Revenue	7,159	10,367
Merchandise Sales	2,206	3,325
Donations to CERF	6,193	13,119
Gain/Loss on Sale of Assets		<u>3,250</u>
Total Operating Revenue	312,334	337,337

Operating Expenses	2025—2026	2024—2025
Admin. & Program Staff	119,872	136,106
Trail Grooming & Maintenance	127,882	139,960
Administrative Costs	20,172	28,496
Programs & Events	4,191	4,550
Insurance	12,345	12,967
Fundraising	640	3,039
Depreciation Expense	13,087	10,208
Total Operating Expenses	<u>298,189</u>	<u>335,326</u>
Net Income	14,145	2,011

Key Staff



Christie Aschwanden
Executive Director



Tigran Bailey
Operations/Lead Groomer



Beth Klein
Bookkeeper



Lily Wade
Events/Volunteer Coordinator



Valerie Eipper
Ski School Director

Operations Report

I'm so thankful to be a part of such an incredible and inspiring group. After a very trying winter, I thank you all for your support. A shovel in hand or a kind word on the trail go a long way, and of course everyone's continued contributions to our growing operations mean a lot.

It's very exciting to see the GMNC mission move forward into a new epoch. The Skyway Station affords an incredible opportunity to meet our mission in ways never before imagined. Our snowcat and equipment will be protected and we'll have indoor storage and workspace.

A very big thank you to my colleague Jared Sears. Without his fantastic attitude and "get the job done" mentality, it would not have been possible to pull off such a successful season under the conditions we faced this year.

I also want to thank the board and the community. Christie, thank you for the shared inspiration, wonder and dedication. Looking forward to next season! I'm right behind you.

Best regards,
Tigran Bailey "Catmadness"
Operations Manager/ Lead Groomer



Ski School Report

Despite limited snow, the GMNC ski school had an amazing season, thanks to our wonderful grooming staff. Our instructors began with a training course led by PSIA-certified trainer Emily Lovett from Steamboat Springs. Emily helped us create a comprehensive teaching protocol for our instructor staff. Ben Graves led an on-snow first aid review for instructors and staff.

The GMNC ski school is funded through grants and registration fees, and it once again operated in the black. Things began with a very well attended series of masters clinics at the Grand Mesa Nordic Festival over Thanksgiving weekend. Thanks to our amazing grooming, we had record attendance with limited snow.

The Masters program was once again well attended with rotating instructors. Our Wednesday Women's Clinics continued and were well attended throughout the season, and we had several new clinics.

All three of our free learn-to-ski clinics sold out in a very short period of time. We were able to offer these clinics at no cost to attendees thanks to grants from **Monument Health** and **The Dave and Mary Wood Fund at the Western Colorado Community Foundation**. We also partnered with **The Nature Connection** to offer low cost or complimentary ski rentals to clinic attendees. These clinics are geared to first time classic skiers and they translated into many new members and ski enthusiasts.

Thank you to all the instructors who made this season one of our best. Their patience and professionalism helped us provide a quality product to our participants. We received very positive feedback on our instructors. We are looking forward to adding more skate-specific clinics and new programs next season!

-Valerie Eipper
Ski School Director





Volunteer & Events Report

As a student at Colorado Mesa University, I was hired as the Volunteer and Events Coordinator to fulfill my internship requirement. I graduate May 2026 with a Bachelor's degree in Outdoor Recreation Industry Studies. To begin my internship with the Grand Mesa Nordic Council, I learned what it takes to be a Trail Ambassador and then facilitated three Ambassador Training sessions. A group of 30 Trail Ambassadors volunteered a total of 315 hours of their time to educate fellow recreationists this season.



Additionally, I managed the Nordic Council's Facebook and Instagram accounts where I posted GMNC events, other local events, and business member and volunteer spotlights. I also quickly got started on hosting 13 membership tables at the County Line and Skyway Trailheads. Along with our many wonderful volunteers, I baked treats, informed trail users of proper etiquette, and sold swag and memberships.

Despite the low snow season, membership sales are at a similar amount as last season. Each volunteer brought dedication and high spirits to the events and trails regardless of snow and weather conditions.

It was my pleasure to work for GMNC this year.

-Lily Wade
Volunteer & Events Coordinator
CMU Intern



GMNC Depends on Volunteers!

Our volunteers form the backbone of GMNC. So many of our events and operations depend on our wonderful cadre of volunteers — from trail work days in fall to races, membership tables, kids days and other events, we depend on volunteers to get the job done. Our volunteer Trail Ambassadors provide a friendly face of GMNC, sharing information and etiquette tips to trail users. Ambassadors also collect user feedback and provide GMNC staff with detailed reports of happenings and usage. Board member Tom Ela has been serving as volunteer race director for our race series for 36 years!



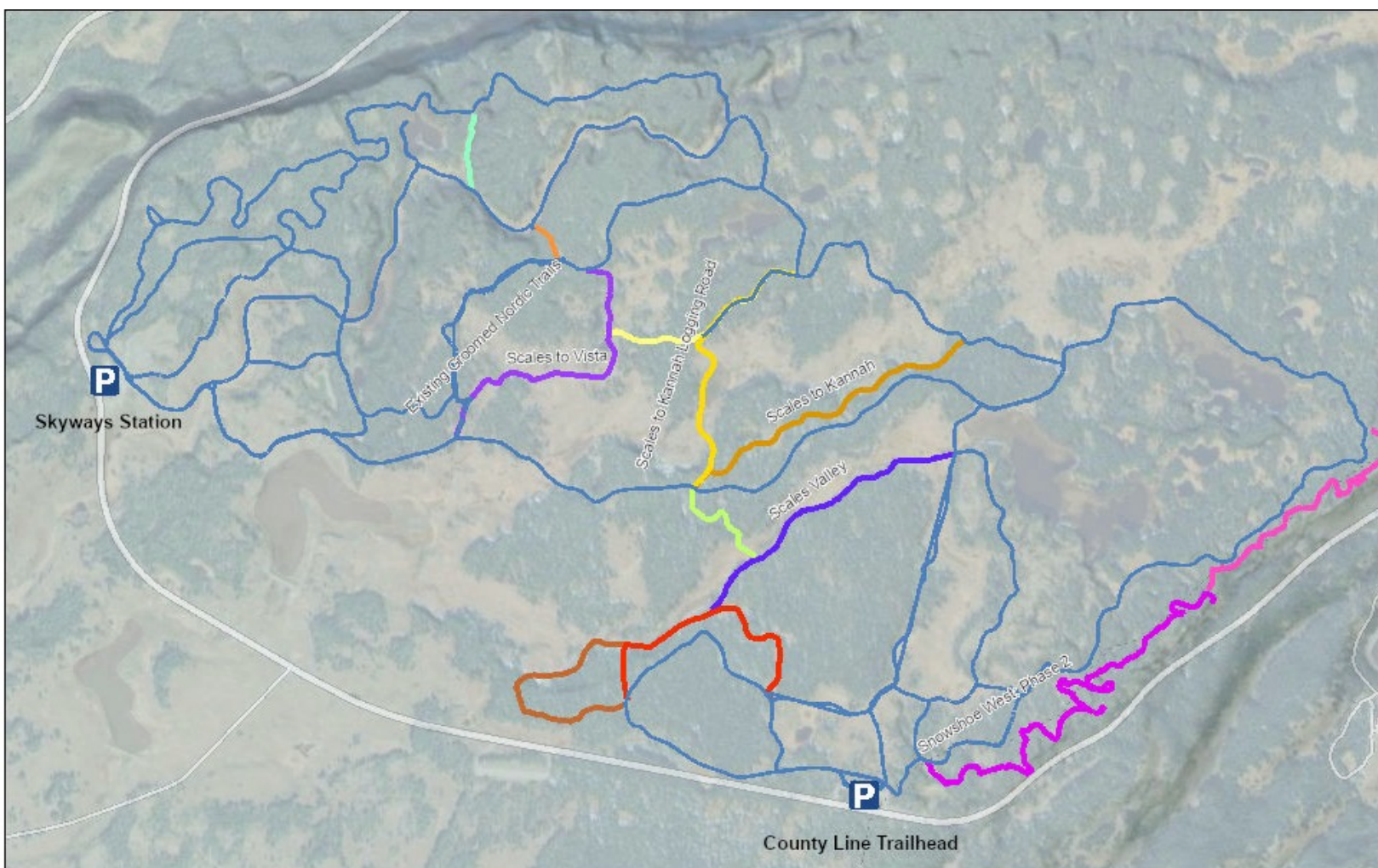
Community Partners

- Alpine Bank
- ANB Bank
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- Dave and Mary Wood Fund
- Delta County
- Delta-Montrose Electric Assoc.
- El Pomar Foundation
- Friends of Youth and Nature
- Fruita Thrift Shop
- Gates Family Foundation
- Goodwin Foundation
- Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Coalition
- Jean Thomas Lambert Foundation
- Lions Club of Grand Junction
- Mesa County Trails Crew
- The Town of Cedaredge
- The Rotary Club of Delta Colorado
- The Nature Connection
- Riverside Educational Center
- Surface Creek Community Fund
- U.S. Forest Service
- Western Colorado Community Foundation
- West Slope Outdoors Alliance

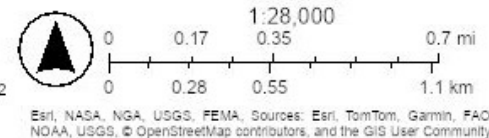
Business Supporters

- Big John's Lumber
- Board and Buckle
- Cedaredge Lodge
- Chill Switch Wines
- Delta County Tourism
- Dufford, Waldeck, Milburn & Krohn, LLP
- Ela Family Farms
- Empowered Energy Systems
- Fidel's Cocina
- Fortunate Fruit LLC
- Gear Junction
- Geo Quest
- Grand Mesa Lodge
- Traversatile Properties
- Loki Gear & Outdoor Shop
- Maison de Terre B&B
- Mike Tofel, Christi Reece Group
- Monumental Health
- Mountain Top Resort
- North Fork Karate
- Odiin Gear Depot
- Primary Care Partners
- Palisade Pizza and Pourhouse
- Rocky Mountain Orthopedics
- Sauvage Spectrum Winery
- Thunders Mountain Lodge
- Western Slope Whiskey Club
- Mariko Wilcox, Northwestern Mutual

Trail Expansion Project Update



6/1/2026



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community.

Last season, we received a \$23,088 planning grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to support our proposed trail expansion at County Line and Skyway. The grant was intended to fund the necessary mapping and environmental assessments required to submit the proposed trails to the U.S. Forest Service for approval. After we received the grant, we learned that the USFS is requiring more extensive assessments than previously expressed and this change would significantly increase the cost of the project. Undeterred, we split the project into two parts — Phase 1 and Phase 2 — and applied for and received a second CPW grant to fund the extra cost.

Work on Phase 1 was completed this spring, and the USFS should have a final decision on this phase of the project by the end of June. If things go as planned, we intend to start doing trail work this fall, aiming to open some of the new trails this winter.

Phase 2 work will happen this summer, and we'll submit that proposal next spring, and hopefully proceed with those trails the following fall. We will be seeking additional funding (and donations!) for the trail work on the ground.



Skyway Station Is Ready!

What a journey it's been. GMNC has been dreaming of a permanent structure for more than a decade, and the plans went through countless iterations from initial concept to completion. The remote location plus requirements imposed by multiple entities added extra challenges, but we got the job done thanks to an outpouring of community support. More than 335 individuals, families, businesses, and organizations donated to make this project happen.

I'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who had to listen to me talk about this project for the past five years. I appreciated all the community input. So many people helped — more than I can list here. But I want to call out a few: former GMNC President and board member Joe Ramey helped me get the ball rolling; former groomer Eric Jensen offered design details and ideas on how the building might function, John Traylor and Christie Aschwanden listened and gave input, and our board of directors put their faith in me to see this project through.

The completion of Skyway Station heralds a new era for GMNC. We now have a community gathering place, an operations workspace and safe and secure storage for our snowcat and other equipment. This project is a long-term investment in our community.

Skyway Station is closed for the summer, and security cameras and alarm systems are operational. We'll re-open the building at the start of the season. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone come and enjoy it. Catmadness is already excited about having a comfortable space for off-season maintenance.

Thank you for your support. We couldn't have done it without you. Find more information or make a donation here: <https://gmnc.org/join/future/>

Dan Tille
Skyway Station Project Manager



The following donors gave \$2,000 or more to the Skyway Station capital campaign.

Alpine Bank
Susie Attaway
John Batug
Tom & Sue Beachman
Steve Bennett
Big John Lumber
Walter Carter Bland
The Cairns Fund
Bryan Cashion
Arnie Clarke
Colorado Concrete
Irene & Jim Compton
Cristee-Meade Building Company
Delta-Montrose Electric Association
Jan Dudley
El Pomar Foundation
Tom Ela
Fidelity Charitable
Dee and Ruth Friesen
Fruita Thrift Store
In memory of Jerry Fuxa, Outdoor Enthusiast
Gates Family Foundation
The James Gates Family
The Goodwin Foundation
Steven & Robin Heil
Pauline Heuscher
Enno Heuscher
John and Dorothy

The Judkins Family
Victoria & David Klinger
Bob Major
Ariel and Beth Martinez
Laura McAlevy and Val Szwarc
Heather McKernan
Marilyn Mudge
Andrea Nederveld
Joe D. Ramey & Ellen Heffernan
John and Barbara Rankin Revocable Trust
Red Rock Excavating
Christi Reece Group
James Riddell
Jennifer Riefenberg
Illene Roggensack
The Luke and Jude Schmieder Charitable Fund
Dan & Lynea Schultz-Ela
Dr. Roger & Mrs. Rita Shenkel
Shepherd Charitable
Dan and Kate Tille
John Traylor
Art Trevena & Joyce Tanihara
Shannon Tupa and Peter Marshall
Peter Valenti
Bill and Laurae Welch
Dave and Mary Wood Fund / Western Colorado Community Foundation
Multiple anonymous donors

THE 2025-2026 SEASON BY THE NUMBERS

More than **30** volunteers came to our **5** volunteer trail work days in the fall.

Our **30** Trail Ambassadors worked more than **315 hours** helping people feel welcome and sharing information about GMNC and good trail etiquette.

Our clinics and lessons had **227** attendees. **77** people signed up for our free learn-to-ski clinics.

We hosted **13** membership tables to welcome trail users into the GMNC community.

1,276 individuals, families and organizations made financial contributions. **58** sustaining members contributed through monthly giving.

We held **5** races, with **265** participants and more than **12** volunteers.



Thanks to our community we keep skiing thanks fellas!

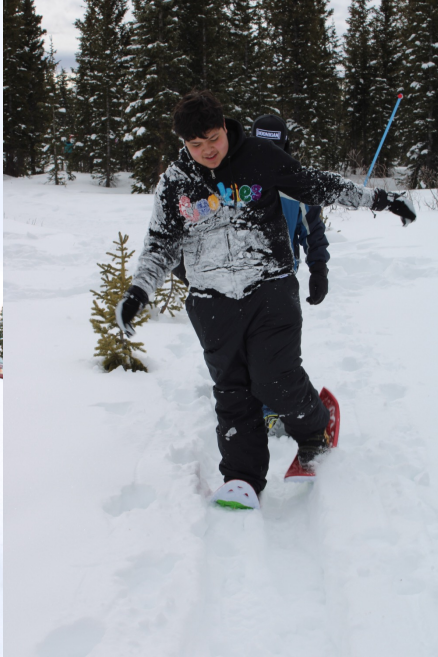




Partner Programs Get Kids Skiing!

The Nature Connection helps kids and families go skiing! **400** people took advantage of their low-cost ski lending at Community Ski Days, and they also provided ski lending at one of our free ski clinics. A total of **247 kids** took part in Skis for Kids at County Line, and for most of them it was their first-ever ski outing.





**Friends of Youth and Nature's
Together for Resilient Youth**
event brought 80 kids to the Mesa
for winter fun. They also funded a
field trip for 37 local fifth graders
to come ski on our trails.





Riverside Educational Center works with Title I schools, (indicating elevated levels of poverty) and brought **107** students skiing on our trails this winter — **53** elementary students, **37** middle school students, and **17** high school students.



GMNC Turned 35 in 2025!

We celebrated with an anniversary bash (and fundraiser) at CMU. Watch "35 Years of GMNC," a video history here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5UJ-o9r0rs>



Seven founding members attended our anniversary party on 1/17/26: (from left to right) Tom Ela, Cheryl Bodie, Winslow Robertson, Suzie Evans, Anita Evans, Richard Hypio, and Chuck Bodie.

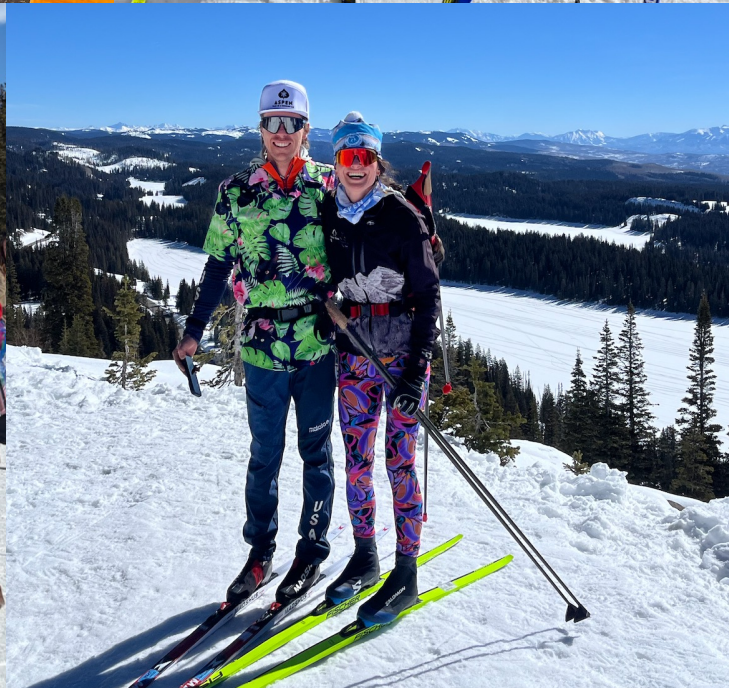


Show & tell table at the party.



Fashion show highlight: Tom Ela's striptease with every GMNC race t-shirt.

Memories from 2025 – 2026



Profile: Catmadness

GMNC's Lead Groomer

By Laura McCrackin

(first published in A View of the Mesa Magazine)

What began as a childhood fascination became a lifelong calling for Tigran Bailey, aka Catmadness, The lead groomer for the Grand Mesa Nordic Council. Tigran said "I grew up watching snowcats crawl across Crystal Mountain, Michigan and lying beneath the hum of snowmaking guns. As a teenager, I skied both downhill and cross country at Crystal where \$15 lift tickets made the sport accessible to local kids." He began learning the mechanics behind the scene, waxing skis, helping run an aging snowcat, and observing the quiet methodical work that transforms winter landscapes into something skiable. An early encounter with Olympic Cross country skier, Bill Koch, further deepened his connection to the sport.

At eighteen, on Christmas Day, Tigran arrived in Aspen Colorado. It marked the beginning of a formative period working under mentors Jeff Isaacson, John Wilcox and Doug Bitterman at the Ashcroft Nordic Center. He would go on to spend more than two decades with the Aspen Ski Company, grooming Aspen Mountain and Aspen Highlands and developing deep expertise in snowmaking.

Tigran explains "While the tools have evolved from manually mixing air and water to today's automated computer controlled systems, the essence of snowmaking has remained the same." Tigran's mastery of the craft earn him recognition as Snowmaker of the Year from Colorado Ski Country USA in 2016.

Today, Tigran serves as Operations Manager and Lead Groomer for the Grand Mesa Nordic Council, where he has worked for the past three seasons. The move was shaped in part by the realities of mountain town living, such as more affordable housing, and a strong sense of community in Colorado's North Fork Valley. He says "I desire to be a part of a place where people can contribute to something larger than themselves."

His time working at a Waldorf School in biodynamic gardening reinforced that perspective. It taught him, he says, "to work outside of myself to participate in a system where collective energy



builds overtime." On the Grand Mesa he sees that principal at work. The Nordic Community, he describes "grows like a snowball, each person adding momentum to the organization."

A typical day of grooming begins long before most skiers arrive. Depending on conditions, preparation may start in the late afternoon, but much of the work unfolds overnight. It often begins around nine PM and continues into the morning hours. Tigran clarifies "the goal is simple but demanding, maintain the trails and be off them before the first skiers set out."

Early in the season, grooming is foundational. Snow must be packed over rocks and uneven ground to establish a stable base. Tigran says "I compare it to community theater with weeks of rehearsal before the real performance begins. Once the base is set, the work becomes more refined, shaping the surface into something consistent fast and durable."

Storms can quickly reset the process. A 25 inch snowfall may take two days to fully work through. The equipment varies. There is the PistonBully snowcat and snowmobiles with rollers and specialized implements. Regardless of the equipment, the goal remains the same; to integrate each new layer into the existing base. Tigran explains "with each pass, the structure of the snow itself changes, the long fragile crystals of fresh snow are broken down and reorganized into small, rounded, consistent particles eventually like ball bearings, these rise to the surface and create a skiable track even in lean snow years."

The work is physically demanding and often unpredictable. A recent windstorm brought down multiple trees across the trails requiring Tigran and fellow groomer, Jarred Sears, to clear them with chainsaws. Tigran notes "I could not do this without Jared and the Nordic Council volunteers." He explains "Wind itself is one of the greatest challenges as it redistributes snow, accelerates snow melt, and sometimes undoes hours of work overnight."

(continues next page)



In low snow years, like the current season, more work must be done with snowmobiles rather than the larger snowcat. While this reduces fuel consumption it significantly increases time and effort.

Operating the snow cat requires skill, such as managing the front blade with one hand and the rear implements with the other, constantly adjusting to maintain a level, consistent track. Much of this labor goes unseen. Skiers arrive to a finished product, often unaware of the variability beneath their skis, the differences in snow depth, temperature, and structure.

Tigran reveals “the reward is not just in the finished trail, but in the experience it creates.” He finds satisfaction watching people discover the Grand Mesa, seeing them move across the surface he helped shape. He enjoys skiing alongside them, teaching technique and helping others appreciate both the beauty and the challenge of variable conditions.

That appreciation is personal. Years ago an injury forced him to reconnect with his body, and cross country skiing became a way back. It was a way to rebuild strength, awareness and presence. Today, he embraces all forms of Nordic skiing; Classic, Skate and Backcountry, each offering a different relationship to the landscape.

There is solitude in the work. Long hours alone on the Mesa, the sound of the machine softened by the snow, the movement of the trees, and the wind. All of these are a part of what sustain him. Tigran notes “The quiet is a part of the gift.”

In the end, grooming is both a craft and a contribution. It is the unseen work that allows a community to gather, move, and connect in winter. And on the Grand Mesa that work is carried forward each night, layer by layer, pass by pass, by someone who still carries the same sense of wonder he found as a 13-year-old lying beneath the snow guns.



"The reward is not just in the finished trail, but in the experience it creates."

