

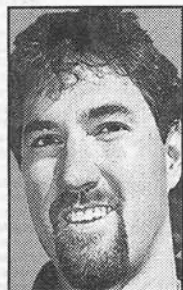
Winds of change blow in Taos

TAOS SKI VALLEY, N.M. — With the crowds at Taos Ski Valley waning as quickly as New Mexico snow in late March, the ban against snowboarders in the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains finally may come to an end.

No, the late Ernie Blake's precious skiers-only area isn't lifting its long-standing ban against sidewinder riders. But if local land owner Roger Pattison and project partner Christof Brownell have their way, Blake's Taos Ski Valley

Resort soon may see some competition in the form of a new snowboard-friendly area just off its northwest flank — the same site where Blake originally hoped to build his dream.

"It's going to happen, regardless. Even if it's just a private tow service," said Brownell, whose parents own and operate the Thunderbird Lodge in Taos Ski Valley.



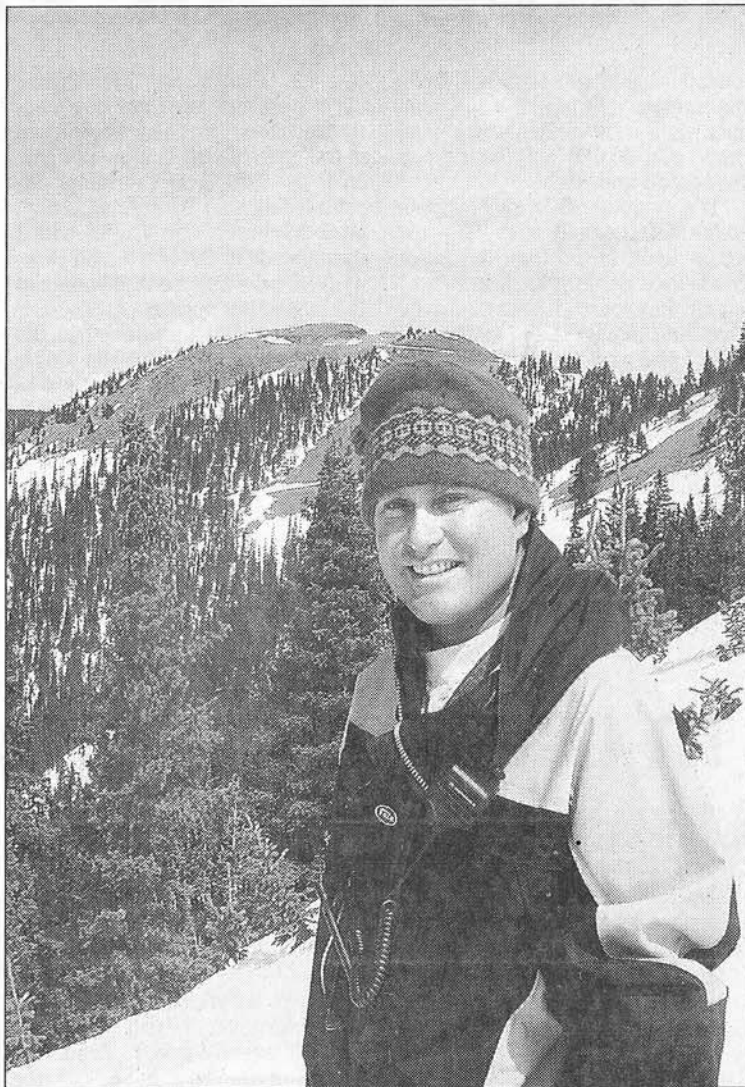
Scott Willoughby
Winter extremes

Exactly when depends on our investors."

With Pattison overseeing a family land trust that includes a huge swath of land in the ski valley, the first hurdle already is cleared. Charged with making profitable use of the land, Pattison intends to dedicate 600 acres of primarily north-facing terrain in Hondo Canyon overlooking Taos Ski Valley to what he describes as a year-round playground, taking it a step further by attempting to bridge the ideological gap in the valley that pits skiers against snowboarders.

"I want it known up front that what I am interested in is a community-based endeavor that benefits everyone," Pattison told the Taos News in February. "This is not about flying in the face of Taos Ski Valley, and it's not about 'Free Taos.' My family and I want to see a recreation facility developed for the benefit and enjoyment of families."

That's music to the ears of people like the Brownells, who say they've seen a noticeable decline in business through the years as families with snowboarding chil-



Special to The Denver Post / Scott Willoughby
Christof Brownell, one of the men involved in developing a snowboard-friendly ski area at Taos, stands in the Hondo Canyon area, where they are proposing to put in a chairlift.

dren (or even adults) have opted to take their business elsewhere. Friday, hundreds of young snowboarders and their families flocked to the less desirable terrain of nearby Angel Fire Resort for the USASA Snowboarding National Championships as parking lots, slopes, lodges and restaurants in the Taos Ski Valley were nearly empty.

And for Christof Brownell, 35, who traded in his skis for a snowboard after suffering a knee injury, it means he'll no longer have to leave home and drive as many as five hours to find comparable lift-served snowboarding terrain to the slopes he grew up on.

"It's north facing, at 11,500 feet of elevation and 1,500 vertical feet of riding. Those three components alone make it worth pursuing a

lift," Brownell said. "Rather than banging our heads against the wall to convince TSV to acknowledge snowboarding as a form of skiing, we're trying to make something positive of our own."

That the battle between snowboarders and the Taos Ski Valley would escalate to the point of a private land owner building a new resort right next door in order to accommodate families might cause TSV officials to reconsider their policy. But it hasn't. Taos remains one of only four ski areas in North America — and quite possibly the world — to ban snowboards, even as it encourages lift operators to move around the mountain on contraptions known as "snowbikes." And it appears unlikely to change.

"The layout of the mountain and

the narrow characteristics of much of the terrain simply aren't conducive to snowboarding," said Adriana Blake, marketing manager for TSV. "The other reason we haven't opened our mountain up to snowboarding is because we've found a niche position that allows us to compete with the super resorts like Vail. We never have been, nor will we ever be everything to everyone."

The addition of a new, albeit modest snowboarding area in the valley may in fact lend TSV some everyman appeal. Basic business sense dictates the existing area might support it for that reason.

"We don't really have a stand on it, but we're in no way opposed to it," Blake said. "I think it would be a good thing for the community."

Ironically, the terrain earmarked for Pattison's snowboard friendly resort is a mirror image of TSV. According to Pattison, Ernie Blake even leased the land in winter in the early 1950s and drew survey lines for a proposed rope tow that remain visible.

But unlike the reflection across the valley, Pattison's proposed resort won't discriminate by the type of device strapped to a customer's feet. Skiers will be welcome, and come summer, so will mountain bikers. Like boarders, mountain bikers never have been allowed to ride at Taos Ski Valley.

Initial plans call for a handful of primarily expert gladed tree runs and a terrain park that includes the standard halfpipe and rail features. Of course, along with the proposed resort venture are proposed residential and commercial ventures, and Pattison has put out the call to potential investors to help make the plan work. As many as 350 home sites are proposed around the base of the ski area.

While it may be a few years yet before any new homes are erected, Brownell believes a part of the ski-snowboard area could open as soon as next winter. He and Pattison already have thinned a few trees to make room for riders and, with a little more capital, could have a rope tow in place this summer. A chairlift is expected to take at least another year.

"All I can say is that it's a lot of fun. It's like our own private area right behind the house," Brownell said. "Roger skis and I snowboard, and it's not an issue. The only place it's an issue is on the other side of the mountain."