

Chugiak★Eagle River STAR (/)

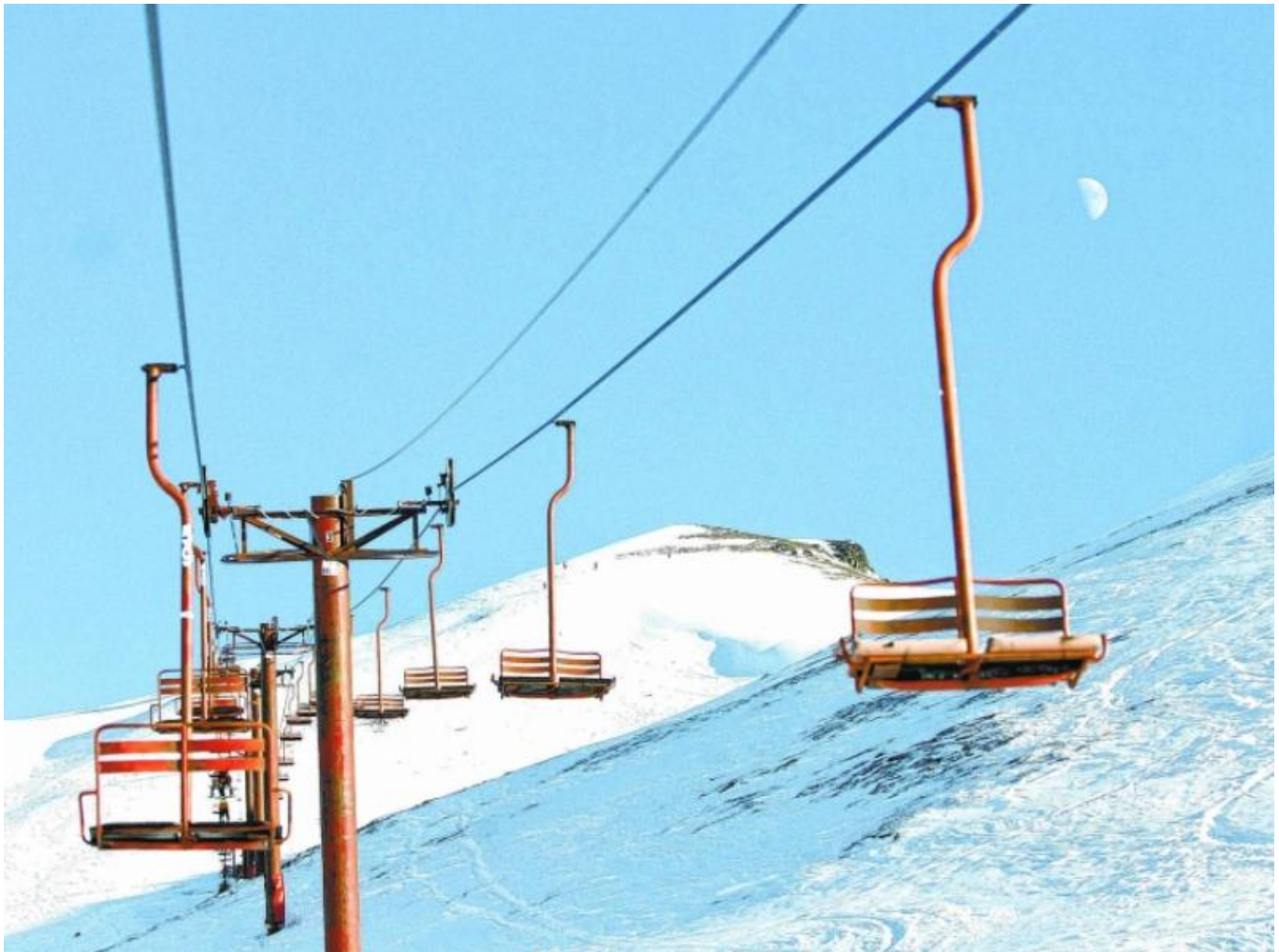
Ski area hopes ABC board doesn't shred liquor license

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Arctic Valley's Chair 2, which takes riders to around 4,000 feet in elevation. (Star photo by Matt Tunseth)

After a day's skiing on the steep slopes of Arctic Valley, it's not uncommon for skiers and snowboarders to gather in the slopeside Alpenglow Lodge to swap tales of fresh powder over a glass of wine or beer. It's a tradition that links the small nonprofit ski area with lodges from Alaska to the Alps.

"Après ski is something that's a part of ski culture all over the world," said Arctic Valley general manager John Robinson-Wilson last week.

Those post-piste gatherings may become a little less spirited if the Alaska Alcohol Beverage Control Board goes along with a recommendation by the state's Alcohol & Marijuana Control Office (AMCO) to deny the ski area's permit for a recreational liquor license.

"We're certainly concerned and we're taking it seriously," Robinson-Wilson said.

In a letter to the board

(<https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/Portals/9/pub/ABC/Minutes/2018/06.12/Tab57.pdf>) in advance of its June 12 meeting, AMCO director Ericka McConnell wrote Arctic Valley does not satisfy the requirements of a recreational site license, which defines "recreational site" as "a location where baseball games, car races, hockey games, dog sled racing events, or curling matches are regularly held during a season."

"There do not appear to be 'events' regularly held at a ski area," McConnell wrote in her recommendation. "While ski race events may be held at a ski area, there is no indication that Arctic Valley holds and is limited to such competitive events, which is a common thread of the examples provided in the statute."

Arctic Valley is run by the nonprofit Anchorage Ski Club and includes a T-bar, two chair lifts and a tube park. The sleepy ski area nestled high in the Chugach Mountains (the base is at about 2,500 feet) was originally established by the U.S. Army, and today known for providing skiers and riders a lift-accessible backcountry ski experience within a short drive of Anchorage or Eagle River.

Robinson-Wilson said he thinks the ski area fits the definition of a recreational site, and said the license has been renewed three times since it was originally obtained in 2010 — despite legislative audits in 2014 and 2018 that found other locations such as pool halls or bowling alleys to be noncompliant with the regulations.

"Our license was renewed in 2016 after that audit came out," he said.

In addition to bowling alleys and pool halls, the 2014 and 2018 audits of the law specifically singled out a sports center/pub, a gym, a gift shop, theaters, tour companies, an art council and a spa.

"These business types did not meet the definition of a recreational site nor were operations limited to a season," reads the 2014 audit.

Arctic Valley was never singled out as an example of a noncompliant location.

"Our license was not mentioned in either audit," Robinson-Wilson said.

Though the nonprofit can forge ahead without the liquor license, he said he's hopeful the board sides with Arctic Valley and renews the license.

"We think we have a pretty good case," he said.

However, if the board decides not to renew the license, he said it could mean the end of apres ski at Arctic Valley.

"It would certainly hurt the atmosphere up here," he said.

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