

Chugiak★Eagle River STAR (/)

Beer and wine will continue to flow at Arctic Valley

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The taps can keep flowing at Arctic Valley.

On Tuesday, the Alaska Alcoholic Beverage Control Board voted 4-1 to renew the ski area's beer and wine license during the board's meeting in Denali Park.

"We got exactly what we hoped for," Arctic Valley general manager John Robinson-Wilson said Wednesday.

The decision went against a recommendation made by Alaska Alcohol & Marijuana Control Office staff to not renew the license based on her determination Arctic Valley didn't fit the criteria for a "recreational permit."

In a letter to the board, AAMCO director Erika McConnell argued Arctic Valley didn't meet the requirements of a recreational site license, which include that license holders "may sell beer and wine at a recreational site during and one hour before and after a recreational event..."

McConnell said two Legislative audits "called out, among other things, bowling alleys and pool halls as ineligible businesses." She argued Arctic Valley fell into the same category as such businesses, and therefore should not be renewed.

But lawmakers themselves disagreed.

In one of numerous letters sent by legislators, Sen. Dan Saddler (R-Eagle River) argued the ski area is an important part of the local economy.

"I must emphasize how important a resource the Arctic Valley ski area and it's [sic] continued financial success is to the town of Eagle River," Saddler wrote.



The license renewal had the support of the entire Chugiak-Eagle River legislative delegation, as well as the Anchorage Assembly and several Southcentral Alaska legislators. Support for the renewal was widespread and bipartisan, with the likes of conservative Eagle River assemblywoman Amy Demboski and liberal Anchorage assemblyman Chris Constant finding common ground.

"It was hard to find anyone who didn't think we qualified as a recreational license," Robinson-Wilson said.

The renewal ends months of worry on the steep slopes overlooking both the Anchorage Bowl and the Eagle River Valley. The issue was supposed to be settled in June (<http://www.alaskastar.com/2018-06-11/ski-area-hopes-abc-board-doesnt-shred-liquor-license>), but was postponed until Tuesday's meeting (<http://www.alaskastar.com/2018-08-02/arctic-valley-liquor-license-still-air#.W3R7Ds5KiUk>) due to a high number of items on the board's agenda. Robinson-Wilson said losing the license — which Arctic Valley has held since 2010 — would have dealt a severe blow to the small, nonprofit-run ski area's business, and he's happy to be moving forward with business as usual.

"We're doing maintenance projects and getting ready for winter," he said.

The ski area and tube park typically opens in late December or early January, depending on snow conditions. In the summer, Arctic Valley hosts weddings and is a popular alpine hiking destination. The area's main draw this time of year, Robinson-Wilson said, are blueberries.

The berries are a bit late this year, he said, but he expects prime picking over the next couple weeks.

"They're slowly ripening up," he said.

Email Star editor Matt Tunseth at editor@alaskastar.com (<mailto:editor@alaskastar.com>)

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