

HOUSE BILL NO. 41

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

EIGHTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVES PHILLIPS, Hudson, Porter

Introduced: 1/11/93

Referred: Labor & Commerce, Judiciary, Finance

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

1 "An Act relating to civil liability for skiing accidents, operation of ski areas, and
2 duties of ski area operators and skiers; and providing for an effective date."

3 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 * Section 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND PURPOSE. (a) The legislature finds that

5 (1) the sport of skiing is practiced by a large number of citizens of the state
6 and also attracts a large number of nonresidents, providing significant contributions to the
7 economy of the state through construction and operation of skiing facilities, and through the
8 money spent by citizens of the state and nonresidents;

9 (2) the sport of skiing serves important public social and policy goals in the
10 state given the dominance of the winter season; skiing contributes to the health and well-being
11 of Alaskans, including the physically and mentally challenged; it is highly desirable and
12 necessary that Alaskans have convenient and inexpensive access to the sport of skiing;

13 (3) skiing is an active sport conducted in the outdoor alpine environment; this
14 environment consists of several elements, including terrain, weather, snow conditions, and

1 amenities created and maintained by the ski area operator;

2 (4) the terrain necessary for downhill skiing is characterized by large amounts
3 of land, that vary tremendously in steepness and feature bumps, hillocks, drops, cliffs, gullies,
4 ridges, and knobs of infinite variety; the surface and subsurface include trees, bushes,
5 undergrowth, rocks, stumps, branches, roots, and other debris;

6 (5) weather that produces the snow necessary for skiing also produces factors
7 that complicate the sport; weather varies from sunny and warm to bitterly cold and windy,
8 with various forms of precipitation, including sleet, hail, snow of infinite variety, fog, mist,
9 drizzle, rain, and showers; weather complicates the snow surface by constantly altering the
10 snow consistency and snow level, covering, uncovering, and sculpting the terrain features
11 described above;

12 (6) snow is a generic term covering an infinite range of solid precipitation and
13 the frozen state of water as it exists and evolves on the ground; there are many different kinds
14 of snow precipitation; in addition, snow on the ground is constantly changing until it either
15 melts or sublimates; this metamorphism depends on many variable factors and produces snow
16 of substantially different texture and consistency, often in short periods of time; on any given
17 day, the snow conditions vary substantially from location to location and from time to time
18 during the day;

19 (7) in order to facilitate the sport, ski area operators construct facilities,
20 including ski runs, trails, roads, aerial tramways, snowmaking equipment, buildings, and signs;
21 while these facilities may alter the natural conditions, the participants could not ski without
22 them, and the facilities are obvious and necessary to the sport;

23 (8) because of the size, power, and variation of the winter alpine environment,
24 ski area operators are financially and physically incapable of controlling the conditions under
25 which skiing takes place;

26 (9) ski area operators have a very limited ability to alter terrain features; it is
27 not reasonable to expect operators to turn wild, natural, alpine terrain into croquet lawns; there
28 will always be rocks, trees, stumps, tree roots, bushes, branches, undergrowth, and other
29 natural alpine features within a property operated by a ski area;

30 (10) ski area operators do not have control over natural weather conditions;

31 (11) under the proper weather conditions, ski area operators can and do make

1 a form of snow and can spread the snow on the surface of the terrain; however, it is not
2 possible nor is it desirable to groom every inch of snow to a smooth, even finish;

3 (12) there will, therefore, always be natural and artificial hazards in the sport
4 of skiing; it is impractical to expect the operator to eliminate or mitigate these hazards, and
5 skiers must accept these hazards as part of the risks of the sport;

6 (13) skiing is an exhilarating sport, the enjoyment of which includes several
7 components: exercise, enjoyment of the outdoor environment, physical and mental challenge
8 of a sporting activity, companionship of family and friends, and the excitement of taking
9 physical risks;

10 (14) falling is an ordinary, obvious, and necessary component of the sport; all
11 skiers, even expert skiers, fall on all kinds of terrain; a particular fall is no indication of the
12 risks of a particular slope or set of conditions; the same factors that offer the excitement of
13 skiing contribute to its inherent risks; skiers may slide when they fall, and they may encounter
14 obstacles or other skiers; skiers can be injured while skiing due to the intrinsic risks of the
15 sport, whether natural or man-made; most injuries are minor, but some injuries impair lifestyle
16 and a very few are fatal; these injuries are ordinary, though unfortunate, consequences of the
17 skier's choice to take part in the sport.

18 (b) The purpose of this Act is to repeal and revise state law relating to skiing enacted
19 by ch. 80, SLA 1980, as interpreted by the Alaska Supreme Court in *Hiibschman v. City of*
20 *Valdez*, 821 P.2d 1354, (Alaska 1991). It is also the purpose of this Act to

21 (1) define the responsibilities of ski area operators and their agents and
22 employees;

23 (2) define the responsibilities of skiers using ski areas;

24 (3) define those areas of responsibility and affirmative acts for which ski area
25 operators may be liable for loss, damage, injury, or death, and to define those risks that the
26 skier expressly assumes and for which there can be no recovery;

27 (4) exclude a comparative negligence or comparative fault analysis from the
28 ski context where an injury is the result of an inherent risk of skiing; and

29 (5) create the necessary conditions to permit ski area operators to continue to
30 offer facilities to Alaskans and nonresidents for the sport of skiing.

31 * Sec. 2. AS 05 is amended by adding a new chapter to read:

1 **CHAPTER 45. SKI LIABILITY, SAFETY, AND RESPONSIBILITY.**

2 **Sec. 05.45.010. LIMITATION ON ACTIONS ARISING FROM SKIING.**

3 Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a person may not bring an action against
4 a ski area operator for an injury resulting from an inherent danger and risk of skiing.

5 **Sec. 05.45.020. VIOLATIONS THAT CONSTITUTE NEGLIGENCE. (a)**

6 A person who violates a requirement of this chapter is negligent and civilly liable to
7 the extent the violation causes injury to a person or damage to property.

8 (b) A ski area operator who violates a requirement of this chapter or a
9 regulation adopted by the Department of Labor under AS 05.20.070 is negligent and
10 civilly liable to the extent the violation causes injury to a person or damage to
11 property.

12 **Sec. 05.45.030. DUTIES OF PASSENGERS. (a)** A passenger may not board
13 a tramway if the passenger does not have sufficient physical dexterity, ability, and
14 knowledge to negotiate or use the facility safely or until the passenger has asked for
15 and received information sufficient to enable the passenger to use the equipment
16 safely.

17 (b) A passenger may not

18 (1) embark upon or disembark from a tramway except at a designated
19 area unless reasonably necessary to prevent injury to the passenger or others; this
20 paragraph does not apply if the tramway stops and the operator assists the passengers
21 to disembark from the tramway;

22 (2) throw or expel an object from a tramway while riding on the
23 tramway, except as permitted by the operator;

24 (3) act while riding on a tramway in a manner that may interfere with
25 proper or safe operation of the tramway;

26 (4) engage in conduct that may contribute to or cause injury to a
27 person;

28 (5) place in an uphill track of a J-bar, T-bar, platter pull, rope tow, or
29 another surface lift an object that could cause another skier to fall;

30 (6) embark upon a tramway marked as closed;

31 (7) disobey instructions posted in accordance with this chapter or oral

1 instructions by the ski area operator regarding the proper or safe use of a tramway
2 unless the oral instructions are contrary to this chapter or contrary to posted
3 instructions.

4 Sec. 05.45.040. REQUIRED PLAN AND PATROL BY SKI AREA
5 OPERATORS. (a) A ski area operator shall prepare a plan of operation for each ski
6 season. Before the operation of the ski area for that season, the plan shall be reviewed
7 and approved by the

8 (1) commissioner of public safety; or

9 (2) agency of the United States that manages land on which the ski area
10 operates.

11 (b) A ski area operator shall provide a ski patrol with qualifications meeting
12 or exceeding the standards of the National Ski Patrol System, Inc.

13 Sec. 05.45.050. REQUIRED SIGNS FOR TRAMWAYS; DUTIES OF
14 OPERATORS. (a) A ski area operator who operates a tramway shall maintain a sign
15 system with concise, simple, and pertinent information for the protection and
16 instruction of passengers. Signs shall be prominently placed on each tramway,
17 readable in conditions of ordinary visibility, and where applicable adequately lighted
18 for nighttime passengers. Signs shall be posted

19 (1) at or near the loading point of each tramway, regardless of the type,
20 advising that a person not familiar with the operation of the device must ask the
21 operator of the device for assistance and instruction;

22 (2) in the interior of each two-car and multicar tramway showing

23 (A) the maximum capacity in pounds of the car and the
24 maximum number of passengers allowed;

25 (B) instructions for procedures in emergencies;

26 (3) in a conspicuous place at each loading area of two-car and multicar
27 tramways stating the maximum capacity in pounds of the car and the maximum
28 number of passengers allowed;

29 (4) at all chair lifts stating the following:

30 (A) "Prepare to Unload," which shall be located not less than
31 50 feet ahead of the unloading area;

1 (B) "Keep Ski Tips Up," which shall be located ahead of any
2 point where the skis may come in contact with a platform or the snow surface;

3 (C) "Unload Here," which shall be located at the point
4 designated for unloading;

5 (D) "Safety Gate," which shall be located where applicable;

6 (E) "Remove Pole Straps from Wrists," which shall be located
7 prominently at each loading area;

8 (F) "Check for Loose Clothing and Equipment," which shall be
9 located before the "Prepare to Unload" sign;

10 (5) at all J-bars, T-bars, platter pulls, rope tows, and any other surface
11 lift, stating the following:

12 (A) "Remove Pole Straps from Wrists," which shall be placed
13 at or near the loading area;

14 (B) "Stay in Tracks," "Unload Here," and "Safety Gate," which
15 shall be located where applicable;

16 (C) "Prepare to Unload," which shall be located not less than
17 50 feet ahead of each unloading area;

18 (6) near the boarding area of all J-bars, T-bars, platter pulls, rope tows,
19 and any other surface lift, advising passengers to check to be certain that clothing,
20 scarves, and hair will not become entangled with the lift;

21 (7) at or near the boarding area of all lifts, stating the skier's duty set
22 out in AS 05.45.100(c)(2).

23 (b) Signs not specified by (a) of this section may be posted at the discretion
24 of the ski area operator.

25 (c) A ski area operator, before opening the tramway to the public each day,
26 shall inspect the tramway for the presence and visibility of the signs required by (a)
27 of this section.

28 (d) A ski area operator shall post and maintain signs that are required by (a)
29 of this section in a manner that they may be viewed during conditions of ordinary
30 visibility.

31 Sec. 05.45.060. REQUIRED SIGNS FOR TRAILS AND SLOPES; DUTIES

1 OF OPERATORS. (a) A ski area operator shall maintain a sign and marking system
2 as required in this section in addition to that required by AS 05.45.050. All signs
3 required by this section shall be maintained so as to be readable and recognizable
4 under conditions of ordinary visibility.

5 (b) A ski area operator shall post a sign recognizable to skiers proceeding to
6 the uphill loading point of each base area lift that depicts and explains signs and
7 symbols that the skier may encounter at the ski area. The sign must include the
8 following:

9 (1) the least difficult trails and slopes, designated by a green circle and
10 the word "easiest";

11 (2) the most difficult trails and slopes, designated by a black diamond
12 and the words "most difficult";

13 (3) the trails and slopes that have a degree of difficulty that falls
14 between the green circle and the black diamond designation, designated by a blue
15 square and the words "more difficult";

16 (4) danger areas designated by a red exclamation point inside a yellow
17 triangle with a red band around the triangle and the word "danger" printed beneath the
18 emblem;

19 (5) closed trails or slopes designated by an octagonal shaped sign with
20 a red border around a white interior containing a black figure in the shape of a skier
21 with a black band running diagonally across the sign from the upper right-hand side
22 to the lower left-hand side and with the word "Closed" printed beneath the emblem.

23 (c) If applicable, a sign shall be placed at or near the loading point of each
24 tramway as follows:

25 WARNING: This lift services (most difficult)

26 or (most difficult and more difficult) or

27 (more difficult) slopes only.

28 (d) If a particular trail or slope or portion of a trail or slope is closed to the
29 public by a ski area operator, the operator shall place a sign notifying the public of
30 that fact at each identified entrance of each portion of the trail or slope involved. This
31 subsection does not apply if the trail or slope is closed with ropes or fences.

1 (e) A ski area operator shall
2 (1) place a sign at or near the beginning of each trail or slope, which
3 must contain the appropriate symbol of the relative degree of difficulty of that
4 particular trail or slope as described in (b) of this section; this paragraph does not
5 apply to a slope or trail designated "easiest" that to a skier is substantially visible in
6 its entirety under conditions of ordinary visibility before beginning to ski the slope or
7 trail;
8 (2) mark the ski area boundaries in a fashion readily visible to skiers
9 under conditions of ordinary visibility;
10 (3) mark that portion of the boundary with signs as required by (b)(5)
11 of this section if the owner of land adjoining a ski area closes all or part of the land
12 and advises the ski area operator of the closure; this paragraph does not apply in a
13 heavily wooded area or other nonskiable terrain;
14 (4) mark hydrants, water pipes, and all other man-made structures on
15 slopes and trails that are not readily visible to skiers under conditions of ordinary
16 visibility from a distance of at least 100 feet and adequately and appropriately cover
17 man-made structures that create obstructions with a shock absorbent material that will
18 lessen injuries; any type of marker is sufficient, including wooden poles, flags, or
19 signs, if the marker is visible from a distance of 100 feet and if the marker itself does
20 not constitute a serious hazard to skiers; in this paragraph, "man-made structures" does
21 not include variations in steepness or terrain, whether natural or as a result of slope
22 design, snow making, grooming operations, roads and catwalks, or other terrain
23 modifications;
24 (5) post and maintain signs that contain the warning notice specified
25 in (g) of this section; the notice shall be placed in a clearly visible location at the ski
26 area where lift tickets and ski school lessons are sold and in a position to be
27 recognizable as a sign to skiers proceeding to the uphill loading point of each base
28 area lift; the signs may not be smaller than three feet by three feet and must be white
29 with black and red letters as specified in this paragraph; the word "WARNING" must
30 appear on the sign in red letters; the warning notice specified in this paragraph must
31 appear on the sign in black letters with each letter to be a minimum of one inch in

1 height.

2 (f) A ski lift ticket sold or made available for sale to skiers by a ski area
3 operator must contain in clearly readable print the warning notice specified in (g) of
4 this section.

5 (g) The signs described in (e)(5) of this section and the lift tickets described
6 in (f) of this section must contain the following warning notice:

7 **WARNING**

8 Under Alaska law, the risk of an injury to person or
9 property resulting from any of the inherent dangers
10 and risks of skiing rests only with the skier. A
11 skier may not recover from a ski area operator for an
12 injury resulting from any of the inherent dangers
13 and risks of skiing, including changing weather
14 conditions, existing and changing snow conditions,
15 bare spots, rocks, stumps, trees, collisions with
16 natural objects, man made objects, or other skiers,
17 variations in terrain, and the failure of skiers to
18 ski within their own abilities.

19 Sec. 05.45.070. OTHER DUTIES OF SKI AREA OPERATORS. (a) A ski
20 area operator shall equip a motorized snow-grooming vehicle with a light visible at any
21 time the vehicle is moving on or in the vicinity of a ski slope or trail.

22 (b) When maintenance equipment is being employed to maintain or groom a
23 ski slope or trail while the ski slope or trail is open to the public, the ski area operator
24 shall place a conspicuous notice regarding the maintenance or grooming at or near the
25 top of that ski slope or trail.

26 (c) A snowmobile operated on the ski slope or trails of a ski area shall be
27 equipped with at least

- 28 (1) one lighted head lamp;
29 (2) one lighted red tail lamp;
30 (3) a brake system maintained in operable condition; and
31 (4) a fluorescent flag at least 40 square inches mounted at least six feet

1 above the bottom of the tracks.

2 Sec. 05.45.080. **SKIERS OUTSIDE MARKED BOUNDARIES.** A ski area
3 operator does not have a duty arising out of the operator's status as a ski area operator
4 to a skier skiing beyond the area boundaries if the boundaries are marked as required
5 by AS 05.45.060(e)(2).

6 Sec. 05.45.090. **REVOCAION OF SKIING PRIVILEGES.** A ski area
7 operator, upon finding a person skiing in a careless and reckless manner, may revoke
8 that person's skiing privileges. This section may not be construed to create an
9 affirmative duty on the part of the ski area operator to protect skiers from their own
10 or from another skier's carelessness or recklessness.

11 Sec. 05.45.100. **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SKIERS.** (a) A
12 skier is responsible for knowing the range of the skier's own ability to negotiate a ski
13 slope or trail and to ski within the limits of the skier's ability. A skier is responsible
14 for an injury to a person or property resulting from an inherent danger and risk of
15 skiing, except that a skier is not precluded under this chapter from suing another skier
16 for an injury to person or property resulting from the other skier's acts or omissions.
17 Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the risk of a skier's collision with another
18 skier is not an inherent danger or risk of skiing in an action by one skier against
19 another.

20 (b) A skier has the duty to maintain control of the skier's speed and course at
21 all times when skiing and to maintain a proper lookout so as to be able to avoid other
22 skiers and objects. However, a person skiing downhill has the primary duty to avoid
23 collision with a person or object below the skier.

24 (c) A skier may not

25 (1) ski on a ski slope or trail that has been posted as "Closed" under
26 AS 05.45.060(b)(5) and (d);

27 (2) use a ski unless the ski is equipped with a strap or other device
28 capable of stopping the ski should the ski become unattached from the skier; this
29 subsection does not apply to cross-country skis;

30 (3) cross the uphill track of a J-bar, T-bar, platter pull, or rope tow
31 except at locations designated by the operator, or place an object in an uphill track;

1 (4) move uphill on a tramway or use a ski slope or trail while the
2 skier's ability is impaired or while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled
3 substance as defined in AS 11.71.900 or other drug;

4 (5) knowingly enter upon public or private land from an adjoining ski
5 area when the land has been closed by an owner and is posted by the owner or by the
6 ski area operator under AS 05.45.060(e)(3).

7 (d) A skier shall stay clear of snow grooming equipment, vehicles, lift towers,
8 signs, and other equipment on the ski slopes and trails.

9 (e) A skier has the duty to heed all posted information and other warnings and
10 to refrain from acting in a manner that may cause or contribute to the injury of the
11 skier or others. Evidence that the signs required by AS 05.45.050 and 05.45.060 were
12 present, visible, and readable at the beginning of a given day creates a presumption
13 that all skiers using the ski area on that day have seen and understood the signs.

14 (f) Before beginning to ski from a stationary position or before entering a ski
15 slope or trail from the side, a skier has the duty to avoid moving skiers already on the
16 ski slope or trail.

17 (g) A skier involved in a collision with another skier or person that results in
18 an injury may not leave the vicinity of the collision before giving the skier's name and
19 current address to an employee of the ski area operator or a member of the voluntary
20 ski patrol, except for the purpose of securing aid for a person injured in the collision.
21 A person who leaves the scene of a collision to obtain aid shall give the person's name
22 and current address as required by this subsection after obtaining aid.

23 (h) A person who violates a provision of (c) or (g) of this section is guilty of
24 a violation as defined in AS 11.81.900.

25 Sec. 05.45.200. DEFINITIONS. In this chapter,

26 (1) "base area lift" means a tramway that skiers ordinarily use without
27 first using some other tramway;

28 (2) "conditions of ordinary visibility" means daylight or nighttime in
29 nonprecipitating weather;

30 (3) "inherent danger and risk of skiing" means a danger or condition
31 that is an integral part of the sport of skiing, including changing weather conditions;

1 snow conditions as they exist or may change, including ice, hard pack, powder, packed
2 powder, wind pack, corn, crust, slush, cut-up snow, and machine-made snow; surface
3 or subsurface conditions including bare spots, forest growth, rocks, stumps, streambeds,
4 and trees, or other natural objects, and collisions with natural objects; impact with lift
5 towers, signs, posts, fences or enclosures, hydrants, water pipes, other man-made
6 structures, and their components; variations in steepness or terrain, whether natural or
7 as a result of slope design, snowmaking or grooming operations, including roads and
8 catwalks or other terrain modifications; collision with other skiers; and the failure of
9 skiers to ski within their own abilities; the term "inherent danger and risk of skiing"
10 does not include the negligence of a ski area operator under AS 05.45.020(b), or acts
11 or omissions of a ski area operator involving the use or operation of ski lifts;

12 (4) "injury" means property damage, personal injury, or death;

13 (5) "passenger" means a person who is lawfully using a tramway;

14 (6) "ski area" means all ski slopes or trails and other places under the
15 control of a ski area operator and administered as a single enterprise;

16 (7) "ski area operator" means a person having operational responsibility
17 for a ski area, and includes an agency of the state or a political subdivision of the
18 state;

19 (8) "skier" means an individual using a ski area for the purpose of

20 (A) skiing;

21 (B) sliding downhill on snow or ice on skis, a toboggan, a sled,
22 a tube, a ski-bob, a snowboard, or another skiing device; or

23 (C) using any of the facilities of a ski area, including ski slopes
24 and trails;

25 (9) "ski slopes or trails" means those areas designated by a ski area
26 operator to be used by a skier;

27 (10) "tramway" means a device that is a passenger tramway, aerial or
28 surface lift, ski lift, or rope tow regulated under AS 05.20.

29 Sec. 05.45.210. SHORT TITLE. This chapter may be cited as the Alaska Ski
30 Safety Act of 1993.

31 * Sec. 3. AS 09.65.135 and AS 18.60.822 are repealed.

1 * Sec. 4. This Act takes effect immediately under AS 01.10.070(c).