

The National Ski Patrol. Member Driven?

Commentary by Mike Lord

Having read the commentary by Chris Ross, I would first like to say thank you to him for the most comprehensive and articulate discussion supporting the National BOD position, of the history of the current unrest to this date. It was an interesting read from the start, with many facts and a time line of decisions not before presented to most of our members, and I for one appreciate the time Chris took in preparing these facts for the members of the NSP.

I would like to present my commentary, from the opposing viewpoint, for consideration by our members. I do so in the hopes, that in the tradition of our society's founders, both sides may be considered by our members when making their decisions on what they feel our organization should be doing for them.

Some History

Since joining the NSP, in Europe in 1989, I have always heard comments from members of how they felt the National BOD of directors was out of touch with member's wants and needs. Many times in the past I have had reason to ponder why members feel this way. Over the past sixteen years I have seen first hand, and been part of, the efforts that our Leadership, at all levels, has made to improve the quality of our programs, the delivery of these programs to our members, and the subsequent respect that our educational material has earned from the outdoor community. I am proud to say that being involved with these programs is a major reason I get so much personal satisfaction from being a member of NSP and I believe I am not unique in gaining so much from this association. Why then do I hear regularly from members that our leadership is out of touch with what I want as a member of NSP?

Communication

As the National BOD in all it's configurations has moved in the direction of fulfilling it's mission statement, I have asked many times, of many patrollers "*Why do we want to be recognized as this educational program delivery source? What value is our BOD trying to bring to our organization by heading in this direction?*".

Let us remember that our MEMBERS, to make us better prepared to serve the outdoor community, developed our flagship program, Outdoor Emergency Care along with most other NSP programs. Developing OEC gave us the best tools to do the job we all choose first to do, and continue to do. Regardless of the other NSP duties we chose to take on, we serve a public need! If other elements of the outdoor community see the value in what our organization has developed and produced then I'm proud that we have done such a good job. I don't, however, see why my BOD should make this the driving force for the NSP. Our main focus should always be serving the people who come to the outdoors to work and play. That is what I want to be respected most for.

I have to ask, *is that still the direction our BOD is taking, and is it what the members of the NSP want?* It seems that member satisfaction with our leadership has been spiraling downward with ever increasing speed as our National BOD has pursued with ever-increasing fervor the plan to be "the premier provider of outstanding education programs and services benefiting the global outdoor recreation community". Where

in our history has the membership said to our board that, "this is what you need to make NSP known for?" *Is this the wish of our members or the personal wish of our BOD?*

Communication Breakdown

For what ever the reasons that members of NSP were polarized to embark on our current path of actions, the inability of the leadership to clearly communicate between either side has lead us to where we are right now. The inability of past and present boards to articulate to the members it's reasoning for moving in new directions, has left the membership wondering how does this help me be a better patroller. The lack of a unified voice from the membership failed to give the proper weight to the concerns the members had with the direction the NSP was heading. Now after so many years of frustration, reorganizing and soul searching we have reached a point were many members feel distrust of our BOD and that BOD shows little respect for the concerns voiced by members. If both sides of a discussion can not trust each other then something must be done to save the situation and restore meaningful communication for NSP to again move forward.

What Direction to Take

The intent of the member's petition has *never* been to force the will of the minority on the majority. Our National BOD has repeatedly said that the members are happy with the things that are being done to move the NSP where the BOD feels it should go. At the grass roots level, where the members serve the public, this contentment with BOD decisions and directions is not evident to all. When leaders within the membership brought these misgivings to the board, these same leaders were treated with distrust. In some cases reprimanded, but in no positive way thanked for bringing the concerns of the members to the BOD attention.

What then were the members to think? What then could the members do if their chosen leaders were ignored? The intent of the member's petition is to once and for all obtain a definitive answer from the membership, "*Are the majority of our members happy with where we are going*". To do this **we must count every members voice in the discussion.**

Our history and laws have again and again asserted that **each person has the right to stand up and be counted.** Our current system does **not** allow this to happen. Our BOD could have chosen to respect this request from the time of its presentation but did not. Now for better or worse the issues have forced both sides to entrench and distrust the other, instead of meeting with mutual respect to discuss openly where to go.

If the majority of our members support the actions of our board, then the vote will once and for all legitimize the path the National BOD is taking in their efforts to move the NSP forward. In the latest re-organization attempts to ensure member participation in this process were denied. Denied on the grounds that our BOD needed to be lean in order to move forward smoothly.

If, on the other hand, the members vote to change the articles, effectively ending this boards reign, the members will have given a mandate for change. A process by which each members voice will be heard in a democratic way will be in place. New candidates for the National BOD should then know what members want and should honestly take into consideration what the membership is asking for, guiding their

actions and the direction of the NSP accordingly. Never again should we as members have to ask, *"is this where I want to be going"*?

To this date our current BOD has shown that they are not overly concerned with the members wishes. Many comments have been attributed to board members that may lead us as members to question if our BOD respects us, not only as patrollers, but as a knowledge base to be used in guiding our organization. Very little attempt was made before hand to collect member's opinions. The actions our board has taken in many ways seems to be designed to put off the membership in a hope that we will lose interest and leave the BOD to chose their own path. Much of the information coming from the BOD is being spun to maintain the BOD position. Many decisions have been made to ensure the status quo.

Does our BOD want both sides and all opinions to be heard?

Many believe it is time to change these situations. Dramatic change is never easy. It is not always evil or good. It may not even be necessary. The only way the NSP will know for certain what the majority of its members wish, is to ensure that every member is asked, their answer is heard, and then an appropriate path is taken.

In the end the most beneficial outcome, from all this angst, may well be, that no BOD in the future will assume, that election by the members to guide our organization has given them the right to ignore or disrespect the wishes of those same members. As true elected leaders they will ignore their members if they wish to serve them for only a brief time.

If we as members institute these changes, contrary to what some of our leaders wish us to think, the NSP will not spiral down into oblivion. Instead, I believe that, the cream of our members will come forward to lead, with a mandate from the members, the NSP into new opportunities just waiting for us to explore. At the same time we will be able to embrace our history and show the public why the National Ski Patrol and its members do what they do with so much personal pleasure and commitment.

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