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Pere Marquette Ski Area Is Not Ready This Season

Ski enthusiasts will have to wait another season before the Pere Marquette Ski Area at Pere Marquette State Park near Grafton, Ill., is in full swing. Snow-making equipment is still not ready to turn the frozen gray Illinois hillside into a glistening white winter fun spot.

However, manager Donald Caplan offers some solace to the hard-core skier: The 2245-foot, double-chair lift and the four rope tows will operate when Mother Nature co-operates with even a thin blanket of snow.

In fact, the beginners' slope was open for two days last week after Tuesday's two-inch snowfall. Caplan said about 250 skiers capitalized on the weather the first day with about half as many on Thursday.

The main slope, one-half mile long with a 380 ft. drop, will not be opened when there is less than six inches of snow, Caplan said.

The snow-making equipment is not in this year, he said, primarily because difficulties in reaching the water supply, the Illinois River, with a .7 mile underground pipeline.

Still, Caplan looks forward to next year. Based on a 15-year weather survey, he anticipates being open between 55 and 90 days with artificial snow.

Natural snow will be in short supply, he predicted, and 20 days of operation would be a banner year.

When the snow does fall, skiers will find the area equipped with 150 sets of rental equipment, a cafeteria and warming hut, and an art gallery. Next year, a cocktail lounge will be added.

Another "next year" proposition is lights. Caplan said the entire area would be lighted for nighttime sking. The beginners' slope might be lighted this year with the addition of several dusk-to-dawn lights.

Lift charges for this season will be $3.50 for the rope tows and $5.00 for all lifts on weekdays, and $4.50 and $7 for weekends.

The chair operates as a scenic lift during the summer.

Denis Zavadil, president of the Hidden Valley Ski Corp., said that so far this season there there had been no skiing on the Hidden Valley ski area on Highway F, five miles south of Pacific, Mo., because snow accumulation had not been enough. He said the two-inch snow that fell last week was not enough for skiing. It takes about 3 to 4 inches of snow to ski, he said.

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