

# Championships smash attendance estimates

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Thanks in part to a host of events at different locations — this is an Apres Avon event — at the 2015 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, attendance figures for the championships far exceeded original estimates.

By the numbers

800 million: Estimated TV viewers.

220,000: Current estimate of total attendance at all championship events.

66 percent: Percentage of event visitors from Colorado.

80,000: Approximate number of Facebook followers.

Source: Vail Valley Foundation

VAIL — It's going to take some time to really understand all the facts and figures generated by the 2015 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, but one thing is pretty certain: Attendance shattered initial estimates.

When the Vail Valley Foundation — the local event organizing committee — was presenting the valley's bid for the 2015 Championships, initial attendance estimates were in the range of 130,000 people. At the moment, it looks like 220,000 people or more turned out for the events.

John Dakin, vice president of communications for the Vail Valley Foundation, said the initial estimates were based in part on attendance at the 1999 Championships in Vail. Total attendance that year was about 125,000 people for the two weeks of events.

People-Counter Formula

Now, 220,000 people didn't actually come to the valley in the first half of February — that number is closer to a still-impressive 70,000. In this case, event attendance is measured much the same way skier days are measured. Under that formula, a family of four skiing for five days represents 20 skier days.

In the case of the Championships, if one person on one day attended the races at Beaver Creek, then the afternoon Apres Avon events, then the medals ceremony or a concert at night, that counts, in essence, as three clicks on the people-counter.

"We had crowds that blew us away every day," Dakin said. The race venue at Beaver Creek filled early every day, and other events also drew large crowds, he added.

Mike Imhof, vice president of communications for the Vail Valley Foundation, said that crowds tended to migrate between events. Often, there were different people at those events, too, adding that crowds often shifted even between the medals ceremonies and concerts at Solaris plaza in Vail.

Tricky Proposition

Tracking people can be a tricky proposition. Sybil Navas, the special events coordinator for the town of Vail, said Vail's Commission on Special Events has long tried to get accurate estimates at events there.

"It's very hard to do," Navas said. In Vail, the town has hired RRC Associates for a year-long look at attendance at roughly 40 events. One company will be able to provide a more consistent look at how many people turn out for events ranging from the summer farmer's market to bluegrass concerts in Lionshead.

In the case of the Championships, Dakin said the attendance numbers are pretty solid right now. So are the numbers for TV viewership — worldwide, about 800 million people tuned in. Other data is still being evaluated.

At a March 31 community meeting in Vail, Imhof told the crowd that when the event was presented to FIS officials, the estimated economic impact was \$100 million. Like the attendance estimates, that, too, could be on the low side.

"It could be months before we have that information," Dakin said.

Long-Term Economic Impacts

Due to the way taxes are paid and reported, information about sales tax revenue from February will be available in May or so. But long-term economic impacts could take years to develop, and may or may not be directly attributable to the championships.

The 1989 and 1999 Championships were widely credited with providing a boost to valley visitation and real estate sales during the next few years. How much of the valley's growth then was due to the championships isn't entirely clear, but the effects were felt.

"We probably won't see (the full effects) for a couple of years," Navas. In the near term, Navas said her best guess is that spending in Vail will show up primarily in the lodging and restaurant sectors.

However the long-term effects pan out, Dakin said the events, both live and on TV, couldn't have gone much better.

"We couldn't have asked for better weather or crowds, and U.S. Ski Team performed well," Dakin said. "It really was a mini-Olympics."

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