



May 2021

To the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Cross Country Sport Committee:

To the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee:

To Tiger Shaw, CEO of U.S. Ski and Snowboard:

In this time of unparalleled social change and reflection, we request that this Committee take an important step forward for equity and inclusion by creating domestic race schedules that offer equal race distances for women and men.

At every level of NRL racing, women's race distances are significantly shorter than men's -- often half the distance. This discrepancy in race distance reinforces antiquated gender expectations about what female athletes are -- and, more importantly, are not -- capable of doing. It also creates an entirely different race experience for each gender. This discrimination is not good for the sport or for racers. The Ski Equal Team and the individuals who signed the Ski Equal Petition want a change!

Women are unquestionably capable of competing successfully at any distance. The Visma Ski Classics, the American Birkie, the Craftsbury Marathon and virtually every other domestic popular ski race already offer men and women equal race distances. Requiring women to race shorter distances sends an unmistakable message, intended or not, that women are not as capable as men. This format further reinforces the stereotype that women have lived with for generations: that the competitive accomplishments of men are valued more than the achievements of females. We have the opportunity to break this cycle and allow women to participate successfully in all distances.

The current format gives a completely different competitive experience for men and women. Using data from recent competitions, the attached figure examines two races with separate distances (top graphs) and two with equal distances (bottom graphs). The difference in time on course for men and women competing in separate distance races show a significant gap and virtually no overlap of time. By contrast, equal distance races show a significant overlap in finish times and consequently a similar race experience for the men's and women's fields. This is not an isolated example - we see similar patterns in other collegiate and junior races. There is no compelling reason to require women and men at any level to race different distances.

We recognize that domestic race schedules are driven by international standards and, at the FIS and WJC/U23 Championships level, race distances are not equal. However, race formats at this level are very diverse, ranging from sprints to 30/50k. Equalizing domestic race distances would allow us to offer all athletes a similarly broad range of race formats - not just longer races for women, but also shorter races for men. Furthermore, rethinking these formats would incentivize age appropriate distances for our athletes aligning more closely with the U.S. Ski and Snowboard's LTAD model.

Requiring women to race different distances than men causes real harm to our athletes, both women and men, girls and boys. Girls and young women are keenly aware of when they are being treated differently from boys and young men. This is true whether she is a Division I NCAA women's basketball player who is given a subpar weight room, or a 16-year-old female Nordic skier who is forced to race a shorter distance. By providing equality of opportunity in sport, the Nordic ski community will prepare women to expect equality of opportunity in areas beyond sport, such as employment and compensation.

The U.S. Ski and Snowboard Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Statement acknowledges the need for equity, regular self-evaluation, and an openness to change – we agree wholeheartedly. We firmly believe that the ski community must combat inequality in the sport we all love and provide a more fair and equitable experience for all our athletes. Young women are already inundated with societal messages telling them that they're less capable than men; these messages shouldn't be reinforced by their athletic competitions.

The U.S. Nordic racing community has the chance to lead the world on an issue that women have been fighting for in sports for decades: equality of competition. We will be asking all major race sponsors, including the NCAA and domestic race organizers, to make this change. Today we are asking you, the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Cross Country Sport Committee to take the first step forward for equity and inclusion by equalizing race distances for women and men.
#SkiEqual

Sincerely,

The SkiEqual Team:

Jessica Diggins- 2014 and 2018 Olympian, 2018 Olympic Gold Medal, 2021 World Cup Champion

Bill Koch- 1976 Olympic Silver Medalist, 1982 Overall World Cup Champion

Molly Peters - Head Women's and Men's Nordic and XC Coach at St. Michael's College

Patty Ross - 1984 Olympian and Former Asst. Nordic Coach at Middlebury College

Nathan Alsobrook - Head Women's and Men's Nordic Ski Coach at Bowdoin College

Becky Woods- Head Women's and Men's Nordic Ski Coach Bates College

Tracey Cote - Head Women's and Men's Nordic Ski Coach at Colby College

Chris City - Head Women's and Men's Nordic Ski Coach at Harvard University

Torin Laliberte- Head Women's and Men's Nordic and XC Coach at Clarkson University

Ethan Townsend- Head Women's and Men's Nordic Ski Coach at St. Lawrence University

Leslie Krichko- 1980 and 1988 Olympian and Asst. Bowdoin Ski Coach

Sarah Konrad- 2006 Olympian in Nordic Skiing and Biathlon

Benjamin Lustgarten- Craftsbury Green Racing Project and World Cup Skier

Carl Swenson- 1994, 2002 and 2006 Olympian, USSA Board of Directors 2007

Susan Dunklee- 2014 and 2018 Olympian and member of the US Biathlon Team

Clare Egan- 2018 Olympian and Biathlon World Cup Medalist

Caitlin Gregg- 2010 Olympian, 2015 World Champ Medalist, Head Coach Loppet Team

Brian Gregg- 2014 Olympian, 20 US SuperTour podiums, 5 wins

Rena Anderson - 2021 U23 World Championships team member

Adam Terko - Head Coach, Mansfield Nordic Club

Kathy Maddock - Head Coach, Dublin XC

Judy Geer- 1976, 1980, 1984 Olympic Rowing Team, Director Craftsbury Outdoor Center,

Ollie Burress- Race Director, Craftsbury Outdoor Center

The Ski Equal Petition: <https://www.change.org/SkiEquality>

Figure 1: The top two graphs are with unequal distances. The two bottom graphs show the overlap when men and women race the same distance.

