

# Maine Winter Sports Center

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **MAINE GETS SECOND BIATHLON WORLD CUP THIS WINTER**

**PRESQUE ISLE GETS NOD FROM INTERNATIONAL BIATHLON UNION, GIVING MAINE ENTIRE 2011 IBU NORTH AMERICAN BIATHLON TOUR.**

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*Augusta, Maine* On Tuesday, June 1st, the International Biathlon Union (IBU) took steps to place Presque Isle's Nordic Heritage Center on the 2011 Biathlon World Cup schedule. This will be the Nordic Heritage Center's first World Cup, and will be held February 4-6, a week before Fort Kent's World Cup (February 10-13). It will also mean that the entire 2011 North American World Cup tour will be hosted by Maine. The sport of biathlon combines the precision of rifle marksmanship with the aerobic requirements of cross-country skiing.

The invitation came when Lake Placid, originally scheduled to hold the February 4-6 event, withdrew their name from consideration.

"The volunteers of the Nordic Heritage Center are honored by the trust the International Biathlon Union has placed in us," said Tim Vernon, Chairman of the volunteer-based Nordic Heritage Sport Club. "We are equally honored and excited to share the schedule with Fort Kent. Getting this event on eight months notice will present a number of challenges for us, but we believe that we have some of the best volunteers in the World and we are looking forward to hosting the world's best athletes in February."

Given the short window to prepare for the event, the fact that most of the Presque Isle volunteer's lives are just getting back to normal after the 18 months spent planning and hosting this March's 2010 Junior Olympic National Cross-Country Ski Championships

(JO's), and the fact that this will be Presque Isle's first World Cup, the MWSC has reached out to Max Saenger to assist in the preparation for this event. Saenger has as much experience as anyone in the world at these kinds of events, having been deeply involved in the 2004 Fort Kent World Cup, the 2005 IPC Paralympic World Championships, the 2006 Presque Isle Biathlon World Junior Championships and most recently, was in charge of the biathlon competitions at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Saenger was also the vice president of the Maine Winter Sports Center from 1999 to 2006, so he knows the communities, the volunteers and the venues.

Fort Kent's 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Ski Club hosted the first Biathlon World Cup in Maine history in March of 2004 and drew very favorable reviews from the athletes, European TV and from the IBU. The 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Ski Club also hosted the IPC World Paralympic Nordic Skiing Championships in 2006.

The 2004 Fort Kent World Cup created \$5.2 million in economic impact for the St. John Valley and was seen by 50 million viewers in Europe. It also had 17 hours of broadcast time in the United States on the Outdoor Life Network (now Versus). The 20,000 spectators in the stadium were a record for biathlon in North America, exceeded only by the 2002 Salt Lake Olympics, and most recently, the Vancouver Olympics.

Presque Isle's emergence onto the international biathlon scene came in 2006 when the Nordic Heritage Sport Club hosted the Biathlon Junior World Championships. The IBU considered that to be the best World Junior Championships event ever and is supporting the Nordic Heritage Center bid for that event again in 2014. Presque Isle's hosting of JO's this past winter brought superlative reviews from the US Ski and Snowboard Association (USSA), which awards the event.

“At a time when every state in the Northeast is struggling to maintain market share in their tourism industries, this development, and the 120 million European TV viewers that come with these two events, will give Maine a powerful new resource for attracting new visitors,” said Andy Shepard, President of the MWSC. “Over our eleven years of operation, thousands of volunteers, MWSC staff and people across the state have given selflessly to make this day possible. This announcement punctuates a once in a generation opportunity for us to play a role in changing the economic future of northern Maine—an opportunity made possible by the remarkable commitment and ongoing support of the Libra Foundation.”

Europe is a critical and emerging tourism market for the state of Maine. And with the average European tourist getting 4-6 weeks of paid vacation, taking at least one international vacation per year and typically spending 10 times more on their vacation than the domestic tourist, Europe is a market that makes a lot of sense to Maine. This second World Cup event will take the impressions from 60 million over one week of coverage to 120 million over two weeks in that market. While 60 million TV impressions over a week period will leave a strong impression, 120 million viewers over a two-week period allows Maine the chance to change the dynamic from *awareness* of Maine to *interest* in visiting Maine. This is a powerful tool in creating awareness of the year-round recreational opportunities of northern Maine.

The goal of the MWSC, and that of the Libra Foundation, which has funded the construction of all MWSC facilities, was to build world-class facilities, help the communities prepare themselves to be able to host international events and then to attract events like the World Cup that could create a new economic engine for northern Maine. This new development in the IBU calendar is a profound step in that direction.

These events do come with some sponsorship revenue from the IBU, but organizers will still need to find local sponsors interested in being a part of this evolution of northern Maine's economy in order to be able to hold these events.