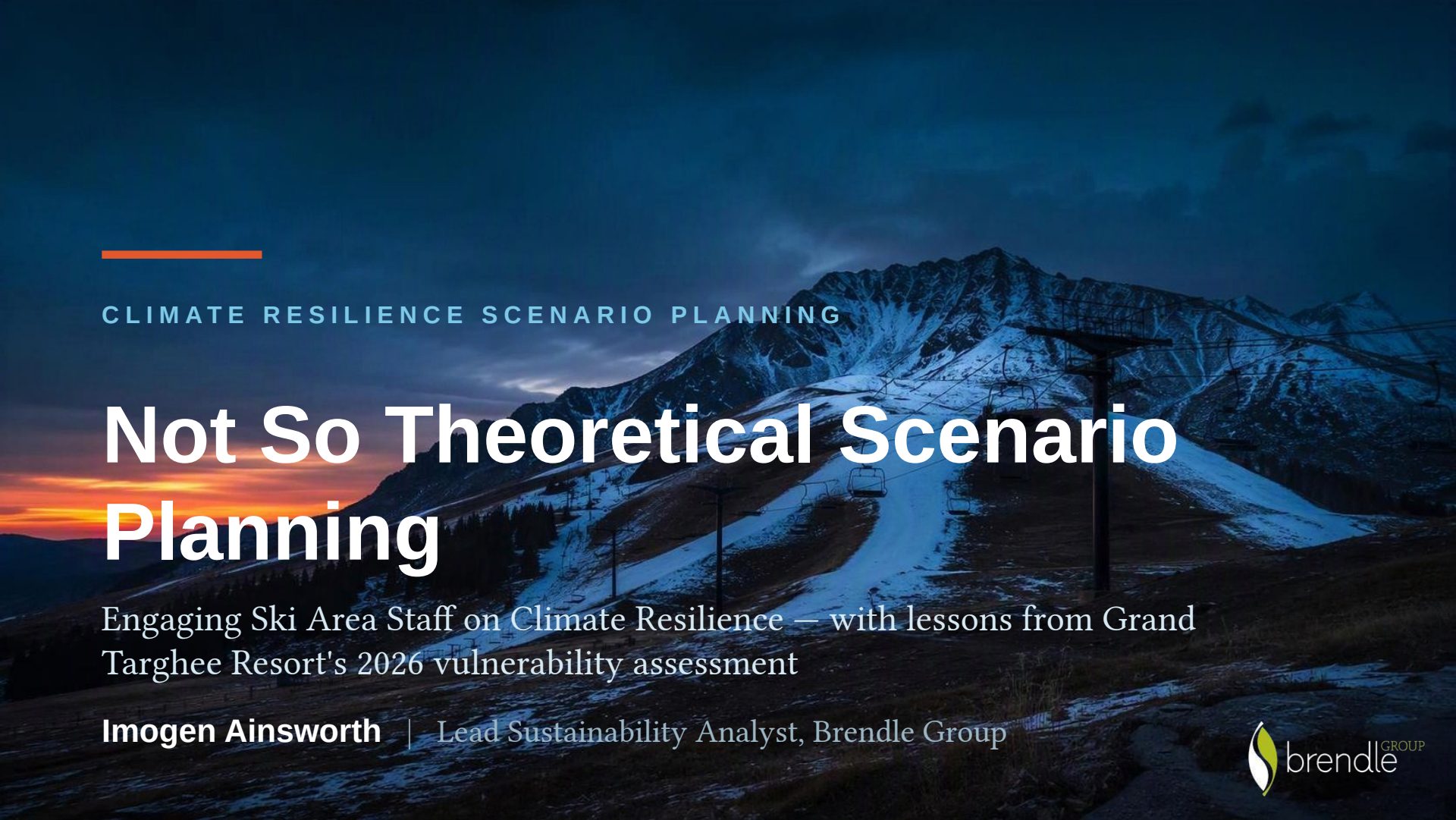

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CLIMATE RESILIENCE SCENARIO PLANNING

Not So Theoretical Scenario Planning

Engaging Ski Area Staff on Climate Resilience — with lessons from Grand Targhee Resort's 2026 vulnerability assessment

Imogen Ainsworth | Lead Sustainability Analyst, Brendle Group

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FOSSIL FUEL POLLUTION

JULY 1, 2026



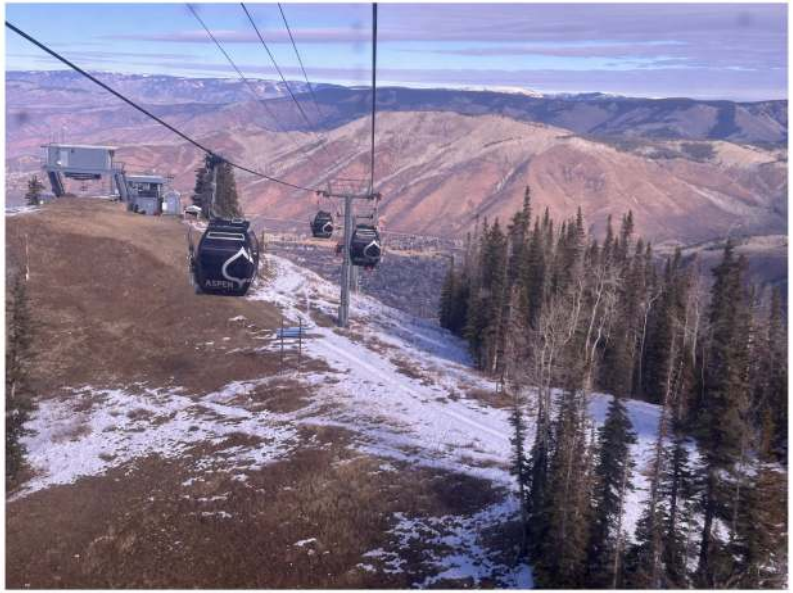
NEWS: OUTDOORS

Ski industry hopes to bounce back from dismal 2025-26 season, but drought remains a challenge

Rocky Mountain Community Radio | By Caroline Llanes

Published September 25, 2026 at 9:49 PM MDT

▶ LISTEN • 7:52



Regan Mertz / Aspen Public Radio

Aspen Public Radio

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b. 25, 2026. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

Visitation to U.S. and Colorado ski areas 1978-2026

The 2025-26 ski season saw a 9 million-visit collapse in annual visitation following one of the worst seasons for snowfall in half a century in the West.

Source: The National Ski Areas Association, The Colorado Sun

Made with Flourish • Create a chart

Colorado Sun

COPIRG

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Climate change makes seasons like 25/26 more likely

NEWS › ENVIRONMENT • News

Last winter's extreme snow drought was a sign of the West's future, Colorado study finds

Climate change made record-low snowfall four times more likely to occur, School of Mines study finds

The lack of snow has translated this summer to extreme drought, parched rivers and reservoirs, water use restrictions and increased wildfire risk across Colorado and the region.

Similarly dry winters will become more common across the West if greenhouse gas emissions are not curbed and climate change continues to intensify. Through the end of the decade, the chance of such a winter will hover around 10%, according to the study.

Denver Post

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But resilience solutions exist and ski areas are already adapting

Aspen Snowmass Saved Last Season's Snow. You Can Ski On It This Weekend.

Snowmass preserved last season's snow under insulated blankets and is turning it into a rail park for this weekend.

Listen 3 Share Save Search



(Photo: Courtesy of Aspen Snowmass)

SkiMag

NEWS

How a Beloved Idaho Ski Area Is Adapting To Fire Danger

Bogus Basin has invested in snowmaking adjacent systems to help mitigate wildfire in the Boise National Forest.

JUL 16, 2026 1:55 PM EDT



The Claremont Fire spreads in the Boise Foothills, Monday, July 6, 2026, in Idaho. The fire quickly grew to more than 300 acres. (Sarah A. Miller/Idaho... Sarah A. Miller/Idaho Statesman/Tribune News Service via Getty Images

Powder

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Quick poll: which has your mountain experienced?

Hands up if your ski area has experienced this in the last three seasons.

1. A delayed opening or early closing due to low snow or warm temperatures
2. Smoke, heat, or wildfire closures disrupting summer operations
3. Staffing fallout from an uncertain start date — late hiring, early departures
4. A formal climate risk or vulnerability assessment already completed

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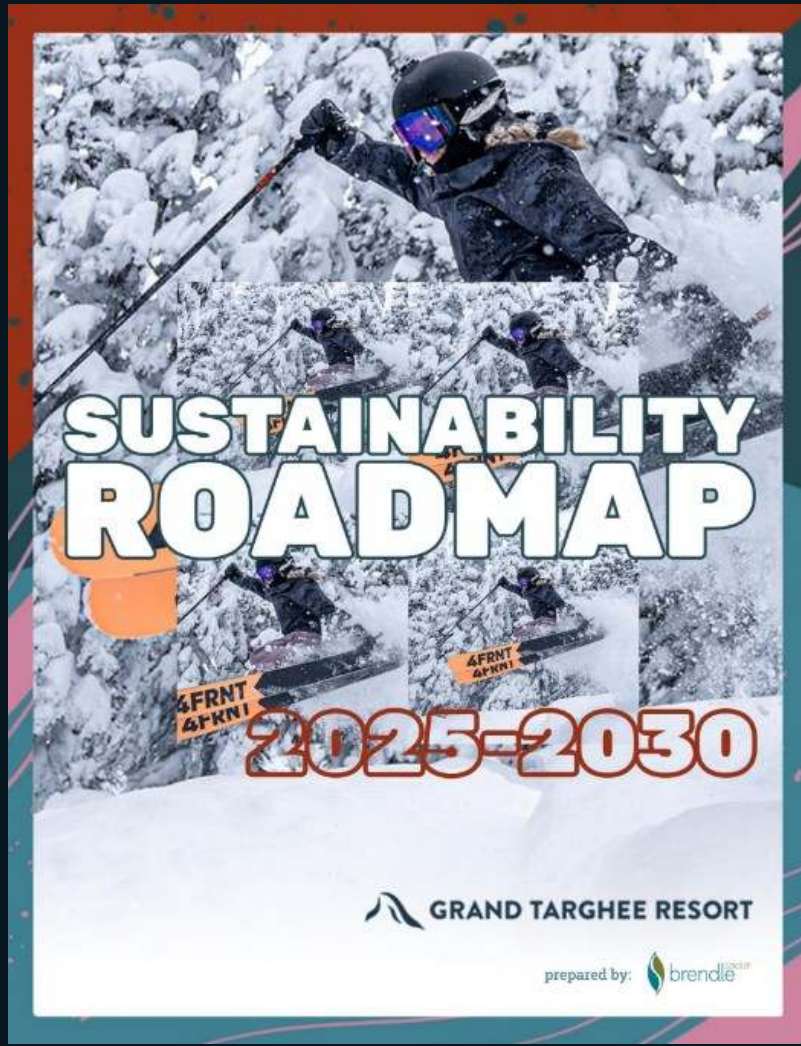
CASE STUDY

Grand Targhee Resort

Sustainability Roadmap outlines Targhee's commitment to a thriving future for the resort, the community, and the environment that sustains them.

Includes a strategy to conduct a vulnerability assessment that identifies the impacts of climate change and Targhee-specific resilience solutions.

In 2026, Grand Targhee held a **climate scenario planning workshop** with key staff to reflect on the 25/26 season and think creatively about strategies to mitigate negative future impacts.



THE METHOD

What climate resilience scenario planning actually is

Climate resilience scenario planning is a **structured conversation centered on plausible future climate-related disruptions** specific to a ski area's geographical, climatological, and operational reality.

STEP 1

Exposure

What climate impacts are we facing?

Observed and projected data — temperature, snowpack, wildfire, water.

What the exposure review covered

Warming

~2.5°F since 1900, most pronounced in spring; further warming by 2100, fewer nights below 28°F.

Snowpack

Reduced % of precipitation falling as snow, future snowpack reduction, earlier spring runoff.

Wildfire & smoke

Increased number acres burned, worsening regional smoke and insect-driven forest mortality.

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STEP 1

Exposure

What climate impacts are we facing?

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→

STEP 2

Sensitivity

Which systems and operations are vulnerable to those impacts?

A facilitated scenario exercise with staff who run the systems.

What staff were asked to do:

- Connect potential future impacts to operations
- Surface hidden dependencies
- Recognize potential opportunities
- Acknowledge risks but focus on solutions

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→

STEP 3

Adaptive capacity

What can we do now to build resilience?

Brainstorm and prioritize solutions by impact and level of effort.

THE EXERCISE

Two scenarios, written to feel uncomfortably familiar

Scenarios were deliberately plausible and specific. Staff were asked what they would actually do, drawing on experiences from the 25/26 season.

Winter scenario

November 18 — six days to opening

- 14 inches at the base against the 60 needed for a full opening.
- Temperatures 35–42°F, no significant snow in the 10-day forecast.
- Staff hired and on site; lodge at 85% capacity; passes already sold.
- Below-average, wetter snow for the rest of the season.

Summer scenario

July 28 — peak of summer operations

- Stage 2 fire restrictions on both adjacent national forests.
- A 120-acre lightning fire eight miles south, moderate containment.
- Air Quality Index 'unhealthy' for three straight days.
- A second, larger fire 45 miles out; no rain, winds holding.

THE EXERCISE

Ripple mapping reveals hidden connections

The ripple effects of an initial disruption are revealed through conversation with staff.

Trigger + first ring

- The initial change or disruption
- Activities or services affected
- Immediate resource needs

→

Second ring

- Dependencies between teams
- Staffing and budget pressures
- Changes in customer experience
- Gaps in plans or responsibilities

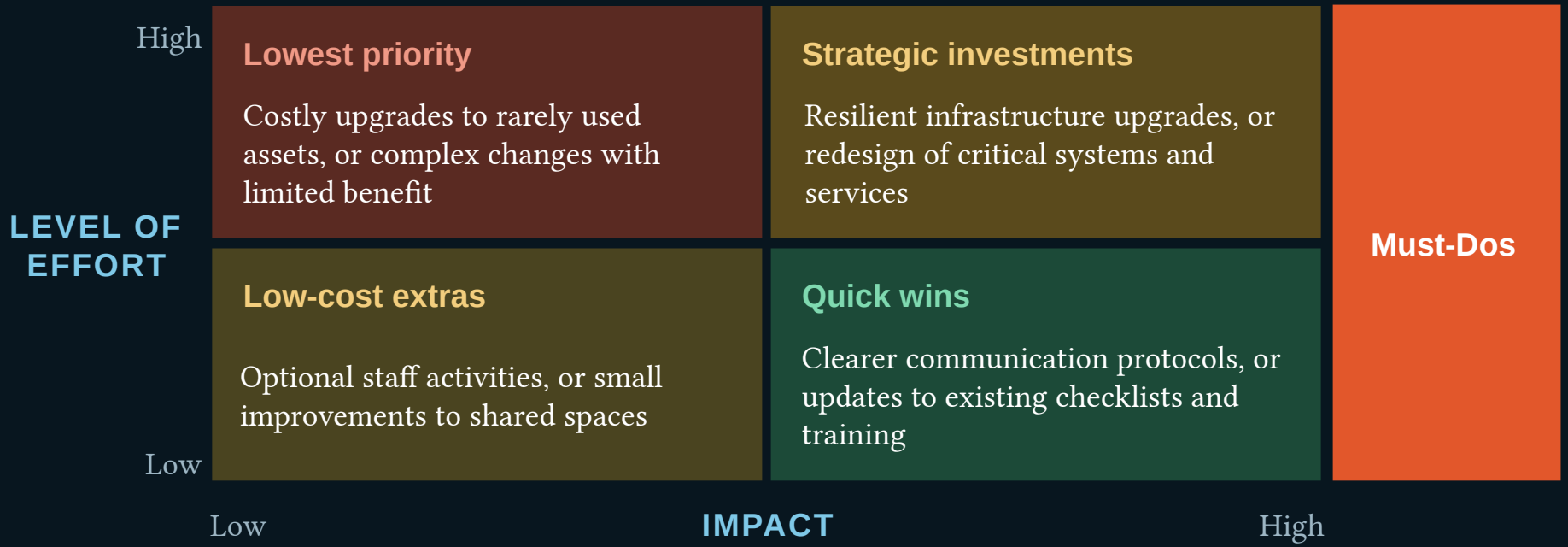
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Third ring

- Effects on community partners
- Longer-term workforce needs
- Implications for trust and reputation
- Shared challenges that need joint action

Prioritizing solutions by impact and level of effort

Illustrative examples only. Teams assess impact and effort in their own context to identify quick wins and longer-term priorities.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The value of collaborative resilience planning

Lessons from the Grand Targhee process.

Shared understanding	A common scenario gives teams a concrete starting point for discussing an uncertain future.
Staff expertise	People who run day-to-day operations connect climate information to the decisions they make.
Connected thinking	Mapping ripple effects helps teams see dependencies across departments and beyond the organization.
Clear priorities	Comparing impact and effort helps teams focus their ideas and discuss trade-offs together.
A basis for action	The conversation creates a starting point for agreeing next steps and identifying who needs to be involved.

Resources for understanding your climate risk

KEY STARTING POINTS

NSAA Climate Resilience Toolkit

U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit

Current conditions

NRCS SNOTEL
National Weather Service
USFS Fire Occurrence Data

Future projections

Climate Explorer (U.S. Toolkit)
NOAA State Climate Summaries
Local climate assessments (e.g., Greater Yellowstone)
Climate Smart Snowmaking Study
Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptation (CMRA)

Questions & discussion

Three questions to take back to your resort:

What would your winter scenario say?

Who would need to attend your climate scenario planning workshop?

And what is the one quick win you already know you should start?

Imogen Ainsworth
Lead Sustainability Analyst, Brendle Group

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