

REQUEST FOR DECISION

BLACK ICE TRACKING ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Background

The Ice Allocations Framework

The Grande Prairie Regional Recreation Committee recognizes the social return generated from investment in publicly available ice arenas. In 2019 the GPRRC decided to review the allocation of ice time in regional arenas to ensure that these facilities were being utilized to their full potential, therefore maximizing available ice time, and in turn creating a greater social return. The Ice Allocation Framework was developed in 2020 and brought to each partner Municipality of the GPRRC for decision and implementation in 2021. The framework is a multi-step approach, and each Municipality has the autonomy to implement the framework in stages as approved by individual municipalities. Please see Attachment A – to find the Ice Allocation Framework document in its entirety.

The Ice Allocation Framework was guided by the following vision for recreation as outlined in the 2016 Grande Prairie Regional Master Plan:

“The local municipalities believe that public recreation services enable the development of communities in which everyone is engaged in meaningful and accessible recreation experiences that foster individual wellbeing, community wellbeing, and the wellbeing of our natural and built environments.”

Black Ice Tracking

GPRRC-12-10-2020-05 (made by Bob Marshall) to direct AWG to come back to a future meeting a proposal on how the Region can better track Black Ice, specifically ice that is allocated, paid for, and not being used on an ongoing basis and carried.

The Administrative Working Group responded to this motion by working with regional ice managers to track Black Ice. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2022/2023 was the first “normal” season where Black Ice was tracked, as 2021/2022 season still had some restrictions for user groups that affected normal use of ice. Black Ice reports are submitted monthly by ice managers and tallied by the GPRRC Coordinator.

Unfortunately, while the number of hours booked by the largest user group has stayed relatively stable year over year, the total number of hours of Black Ice has increased. For this past season, September 2022-March 2023, a total of 199 hours of Black Ice have been reported for all user groups. This amount is an increase from the 2021-2022 season of 25.75 hours from Sept 2021-Mar 2022. It is anticipated that this is due in part to increased awareness and improved tracking by facilities and staff. Improvements also include staff training and reporting tools such as a custom designed Black Ice Tracking Sheet for use by arena staff (see attachment B). Restrictions were also still in place in 2021-2022 which likely affected the number of ice users as well as the number and type of bookings.

September 2022 had 54% of the Black Ice for the season. After that first month of the season, the Administrative Working Group reached out to the user group reporting the most Black Ice to discuss Black Ice reduction strategies. September is

traditionally the month with the most Black Ice as a result of a more unpredictable schedule due to the variable nature of the tryouts that are occurring for some user groups.

Table 1. Regional Black Ice 2022/2023 Season

MONTH	MONTH TOTAL
Sep-22	107.5*
Oct-22	17.25
Nov-22	9.75
Dec-22	5
Jan-23	10
Feb-23	23.5
Mar-23	26
Total	199

*September which is tryout season, represented 54% of the Black Ice for the season.

Table 2. Black Ice by Regional Facility

	2021-2022 Season	2022-2023 Season
ARENA	TOTAL HOURS	TOTAL HOURS
Design Works Centre	1	98.5
Dave Barr Arena	8	60.25
Bonnett's Energy Centre	10.75	0.75
Crosslink County Sportsplex	6	35
Beaverlodge	0	4.5
Total	25.75	199

Challenges and Solutions

Variations within regional arenas reporting Black Ice differently continues to be a challenge. Some arenas are municipally owned and operated while others are operated by Agricultural Societies and rarely report Black Ice. Without consistent definitions and recording practices for Black Ice, the conclusions drawn regarding the data collected are to be made with caution.

The AWG continues to discuss with municipalities, arena managers and arena employees who are recording the data. The clarification of a universal definition of prime-time ice and therefore “Black Ice”, as well as the timeframe for recording (tryout/playoff season and/or regular season) is important to ensure that all data being collected is standardized and can be used to draw conclusions.

Another challenge identified during discussions with the Grande Prairie Minor Hockey Association representative is the fact that the ice allocation meeting at the City of GP occurred previously in June. GPMHA stated that by June their seasonal schedule was already in progress and requested that the meeting be no later than end of May to better allocate reserved ice within their schedule. In response to this request, the City of GP held their Ice Manager meeting on May 10th, 2023, and this meeting will be held in May going forward. Administration has met with the largest user group multiple times throughout the season to understand their needs and discuss strategies to reduce black ice. One of the suggestions raised was to track Black Ice under one hour as “not sellable” and track it separately from ice that could be resold to another user or used by municipalities for programming. There is also some inconsistency in recording hours related to tryouts and playoffs. For example, the City of GP arenas included ice not utilized during the tryout period in September, while other arenas did not capture this data.

The AWG will continue to collaborate with the regional facilities by hosting an ice manager meeting prior to the start of the season in early September 2023. This will provide an opportunity to support ice managers in educating ice user groups with regards to Black Ice tracking, and it will also provide tips for ice managers to promote awareness of Black Ice and training about how to report it.

Impact to Arenas

The impact of Black Ice is predominantly one of reduced social return. Financially, the ice is still being paid for by the user groups but there is under utilization of a highly sought after and limited recreational resource. With sufficient notice unused ice time could be reallocated with high social return as a public skate, stick and puck or similar public program.

Next Steps

The AWG identified the following next steps that should be taken to improve ice management in the region.

- 1. Review definitions in framework and tracking practices to ensure that they work for municipal partners to promote consistency across the region.**
- 2. Update the tracking form to include agreed upon definitions to enhance awareness of arena staff.**
- 3. Implement agreed upon definitions and recommendations to improve data integrity and quality.**
- 4. Create a forum with regional arena operators to share ideas on best practices and how to support all user groups and participation in general.**
- 5. An annual ice manager meeting will be conducted at the start of the fall season.**

6. Continue to work with RC Strategies to develop a Facility Allocation Policy for arenas including guiding principles for prioritizing ice booking requests.
7. Explore opportunities to utilize the new GPRRC social channels to advertise last minute available ice within the region.

Alternatives

- Option 1:** That the Grande Prairie Regional Recreation Committee accept the Black Ice Annual Report 2022/2023 for information and continue tracking for the 2023/2024 season.
- Option 2:** That the Grande Prairie Regional Recreation Committee accept the Black Ice Annual Report 2022/2023 for information and discontinue tracking. Tracking responsibility transferred to individual municipalities for the future.
- Option 3:** As the Grande Prairie Regional Recreation Committee directs.

The Administrative Working Group recommends **Option 1**.

MOTION-GPRRC-09-20-2023-01 (made by Reeve Marshall) to choose option 1-That the GPRRC accept the Black Ice Annual Report 2022/2023 for information and continue tracking for the 2023/2024 season.