

PARA Proposal - U16's Return to Regional Qualification

Revision date of proposal: 4/14/23

Introduced by: Bob Hunt & Derek Berger

Background:

In May 2020, PARA voted to institute an open 7-race statewide series for the U16's. Because of COVID-19, the series was not run in the 2021 race season, so the U16 Series has been running for 2 consecutive years. Over this time, PARA has seen an increase in U16 population size, with the percentage of the population participating in the U16 series remaining steady.

However, the Western region has seen a reduction in participation by its U16 population, as well as a negative impact on its U18+ population numbers and participation in PA Cups. With the increased cost and effort to race in the statewide series, Western athletes are choosing to leave the sport sooner, and have limited regional racing options. The Western region has three concerns regarding the current U16 Series race formats:

1. Cost / time to travel is too great - It's a 3 hour drive to most of the central mountain for us from the Western Region. Blue is a 5+ hour drive, and Elk is 6+ hours. The time, effort, and cost to get to the race series is deterring a large number of our athletes from traveling. For the past two years, only about 25% of the Western athletes have been willing to travel to all races in the U16 Series.

2. Impact on PA Cups - The Western Region U18 + U21 are down in 2023 by 33% from 2022 when the rest of the PARA population at this age has remained flat. Also, because of the lack of access to ski races for the U16's, many of our older athletes are questioning whether they want to stick with the sport, and we're seeing more athletes leaving the sport before they get to the PA Cup level. As a race organizer for the first races of the PA Cups, we have noticed a general shift in attitude towards the PA Cups. It is no longer seen as the pinnacle of our athletes' race careers, but merely another 2-3 years of additional travel required to race.

3. Race field sizes becoming too large - The average field size for the technical events increased by 18% this past year from 142 racers per race in 2022 to 168 racers per race in 2023. The U16 population is expected to increase next year, so a similar increase in field sizes would not be out of the question. The larger field sizes will reduce the quality of the events for all participants, making it even less attractive for U16 athletes to travel to out of region races.

The original regional qualification model allowed for local racing options for the extended U16 population, but allowed for the top U16 athletes to compete at a state and eastern region level. We would like to see a return to regional racing for the U16's.

Proposal:

For the U16's, eliminate the 7-race statewide U16 Series, and return to regional qualification. U16's would qualify from their regions to U16's Finals consisting of a 3-day race weekend including Super G, GS, and SL.

Supporting Data:

PARA Population data - The U16 population continues to rise. However, the U18+ population saw its first decrease (11 athletes) in size this past year.

All of PARA	2020	2021	2022	2023
U16's	170	156	207	224
U18's	96	106	120	115
U21's	26	13	31	25

Western Region Population data - The Western region saw a significant increase in its U16 population this past year with it finally returning to pre-pandemic levels. However, the U18 population dropped by 10, making the Western region the main driver for the drop in the PA Cup population this past year.

Western Region	2020	2021	2022	2023
U16's	38	30	34	55
U18's	23	24	22	15
U21's	7	2	8	5

U16 Series # of racers - The U16 series has seen growth in race field sizes across all 7 races in 2023. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the Western region's athletes participated in all races within the series with only 23.5% (in 2022) and 25.5% (in 2023) participating in all the races.

# of Racers	2022	2023
Race 1	151	174
Race 2	148	166
Race 3	137	157
Race 4	142	159
Race 5		88
Race 6	139	176
Race 7	136	174