

# WAVE STARTS!

## Far West Nordic's Recommendations for Safer Racing by the Far West Nordic Competition Committee

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he start of a cross-country ski race can be pretty stressful. The usual start scenario has hundreds of racers starting in a fairly wide area that quickly constricts down to a narrow ski trail wide enough for one to two skiers. The gun goes off and it's a mad scramble to get towards the front without getting stepped on, tangled up, or breaking a pole. These hectic starts can be exciting, but for some, the stress can severely impact the fun of the whole experience.

The Competition Committee of the Far West Nordic Ski Education Association has received a fair amount of input from local citizen racers, asking if there are ways to make the starts safer and less crowded. In the Far West Division (California and Nevada) the citizen races are organized and hosted by the individual XC ski resorts. These ski areas put on the races and have the ultimate say in how they want to run their individual races. Within the context of these ski area races, Far West Nordic creates the Sierra Ski Chase and Fischer Cup race series and determines the Far West Masters team. There is great cooperation between the ski areas and Far West Nordic, and together we try to put on fun, safe, and competitive ski races for all ages and abilities.

First a brief explanation of some different start formats. There is the "mass start" where everyone starts together and the first one across the line is the winner. These are the easiest races to put on from a race organization standpoint and can be very exciting as everyone is racing head to head. Another format is the "wave start" which breaks the mass start up into smaller waves that start a few minutes apart. The waves can be split by speed (faster racers in one wave, slower in another), or by sex, age, or technique (skate wave, classic wave.) Wave starts can drastically reduce congestion at the start but can be difficult to host because race areas have to oversee that racers sign up for the right wave, actually start in the wave they've signed up for, and get timed correctly. Finally there are "interval start" races where racers start individually and race against the clock. Usually the interval between racers is 15 or 30 seconds. Interval start races are the least congested but are the most difficult to host and also lack the head-to-head excitement of group racing. In the Far West Division, interval start races can be found at Auburn Ski Club's Snowshoe Thompson classic race and Paco's Fun Race. Wave starts can be found at Auburn's Sierra Nordic duathlon and some of the bigger races like the Great Race,



One wave start example is the Gold-Silver-Bronze Rush at Royal Gorge.  
Photo by Olof Carmel

Tahoe Rim Tour, and the Gold Rush. After receiving input from racers, Far West Nordic is encouraging more local races to implement wave starts in order to increase safety, promote a better overall race experience, and make it easier to attract more racers.

One simple way to divide the field is to have two starts: an "open" wave and a "women's-only" wave. In races that have a separate start for men (open) and women, women who start in the men's start will not show up in the women's results. For Far West scored series—Fischer Cup, Masters Team, and Sierra Ski Chase—racers will be scored in the category they start in. Women who start in the open wave will not be scored in the Women's field.

Race entry forms should have designated sign up boxes for Wave 1 (men and open) and Wave 2 (women.) Race results should have a separate list for open and women.

No matter what the start format a race has, Far West Nordic hopes that racers will cooperate with the individual ski areas and follow their guidelines. If racers have questions about scoring for Far West series races, please direct those to the Competition Committee at [web@farwestnordic.org](mailto:web@farwestnordic.org). Even though the United States Ski Association does not sanction the Far West Race Series, we generally follow USSA rules in all matters of racing.