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Northeast Passage Establishes Paralympic Athlete Development Center For Nordic Skiing

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Northeast Passage has recently secured a contract with U.S. Paralympics, a division of the U.S. Olympic Committee, to develop Nordic skiers with physical disabilities and/or visual impairments for elite level competition.

The Paralympic Games is an international competition among each nation's elite athletes with physical disabilities and is second in size only to the Olympic Games. The Paralympic Games follow the Olympic Games at the same venues and facilities. The next Winter Paralympic Games will be held in 2010 in Vancouver, British Columbia.

As part of the U.S. Paralympics' new strategy, Northeast Passage is currently one of two sites in the country for grassroots Nordic development. The other is Park City, Utah.

The Jackson Ski Touring Foundation in Jackson will be the main training site for this program. Jackson has a long history of hosting and developing adaptive cross country skiing and held the World Championships for Disabled Nordic Skiing in 1990.

"This is a superb opportunity to partner with Northeast Passage," said Thom Perkins, executive director of JacksonXC. "This program offers folks with mobility impairments an introduction to the wonderful winter sport of cross country skiing."

The Weston Ski Track in Weston, Mass., will also serve as a training site.

Former Paralympian Craig Gray of Scarborough, Me., competed in Nagano in 1998. He says he is excited about the prospect of new, young athletes joining the sport.

"The United States will see better results in Nordic skiing when we match young athletes up with coaches who can teach them the discipline and techniques it will take to win at the world class level, while their endurance capacity is still increasing," said Gray. "This program has the potential to drastically change the sport of disabled Nordic skiing."

Northeast Passage is a program of the University of New Hampshire's School of Health and Human Services, and is an affiliate of Disabled Sports USA. Northeast Passage develops and delivers innovative, barrier-free recreation and health promotion programs. Northeast Passage is also a Paralympic Athlete Development Center and offers student-athletes the opportunity to train and attend the University of New Hampshire.

Northeast Passage is looking for interested athletes to participate in this new program. This opportunity is open to people with physical disabilities and individuals with visual impairments, ages 8-35. No previous skiing experience necessary. For more information, visit the Northeast Passage Web site (www.nepassage.org) for "Learn to Ski" group dates or call (603-862-0070) to schedule a private lesson to try the sport or develop skills.