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# RINKWATCH REPORT

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2023 - 2024



Department of Geography &  
Environmental Studies

**Wilfrid Laurier University**

75 University Ave. West  
Waterloo ON, N2L 3C5



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 [/RinkWatch](#)  [rinkwatchproject@gmail.com](mailto:rinkwatchproject@gmail.com)

 [www.rinkwatch.org](http://www.rinkwatch.org)

# A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

To all RinkWatchers, a warm welcome and sincere appreciation for your consistent dedication and support throughout the year.

The winter of 2023-2024 was one of the most challenging and unusual ones we have seen since RinkWatch was established in 2013. The tail end of an extended El Niño affected many rinks this year, especially in eastern North America and the midwestern US.

For those who are unfamiliar with the term, the El Niño Southern Oscillation is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon associated with an abnormal, temporary warming of sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean that disrupts global weather patterns. It occurs once or twice a decade, and can lead to unusual fluctuations in temperature and precipitation.

December and early January were unusually warm in many parts of North America, and as a result a lot of rinks never opened at all in southern Ontario, Atlantic Canada, and the northeastern US, and rinks in western North America experienced skating seasons shorter than usual. Ottawa's Rideau Canal – the world's biggest outdoor rink – opened for only 10 days this past winter – an improvement over the winter 2022-23, when it never opened at all, but well short of the 60-70 days it would be open back in the 1970s and 1980s. Many favourite skating ponds never froze well enough to be safe this past winter, with frequent freeze-thaw cycles making natural ice especially treacherous.



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## A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

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January 2024 saw wildly fluctuating temperatures across North America, including a week when temperatures in the southern US dropped below freezing for several days. Over a hundred new rinks were added to the RinkWatch map during that brief deep freeze, including the two southernmost rinks we've ever recorded, one near Dallas and another near Atlanta.

Rink makers who kept trying despite the frustrating conditions in December and January were rewarded with some decent late season skating days in February and March, but by then a lot of people had thrown in the towel and were getting the golf clubs ready. Fortunately, the El Niño is expected to be finished by the time next winter comes around, and hopefully we'll see some much better skating in 2024-25



Image provided by Jason Vlahos of East Lansing, Michigan

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# A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

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In non-skating news, RinkWatch was featured on the NHL Green website in April 2024, and our report on the future of outdoor skating included beautiful rink photos submitted by RinkWatch Sentinels. Additionally, in April 2024 NHL legend Mike Richter visited the Laurier campus and met current and former student researchers who have worked with the RinkWatch project, a real treat for all of us. Richter was awarded an honorary degree by Laurier in June 2024 for his entrepreneurship and public service in the field of environmental sustainability.

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RinkWatch would not be possible without the dedicated Sentinels who logged data, allowing us at RinkWatch to create our reports and continue to analyze skating trends year after year. Additionally, thank you for the patience from our Kestrel Device users as we navigate and expand our knowledge of how to efficiently use the Kestrel Devices. A special shout-out to our sentinels who logged their rink data into individual spreadsheets. As RinkWatch continues into the 2024-2025 year, we hope you join us again for another exciting year of skating on your outdoor rinks. We hope to connect to you later this year, and we hope you have a great rest of the year!

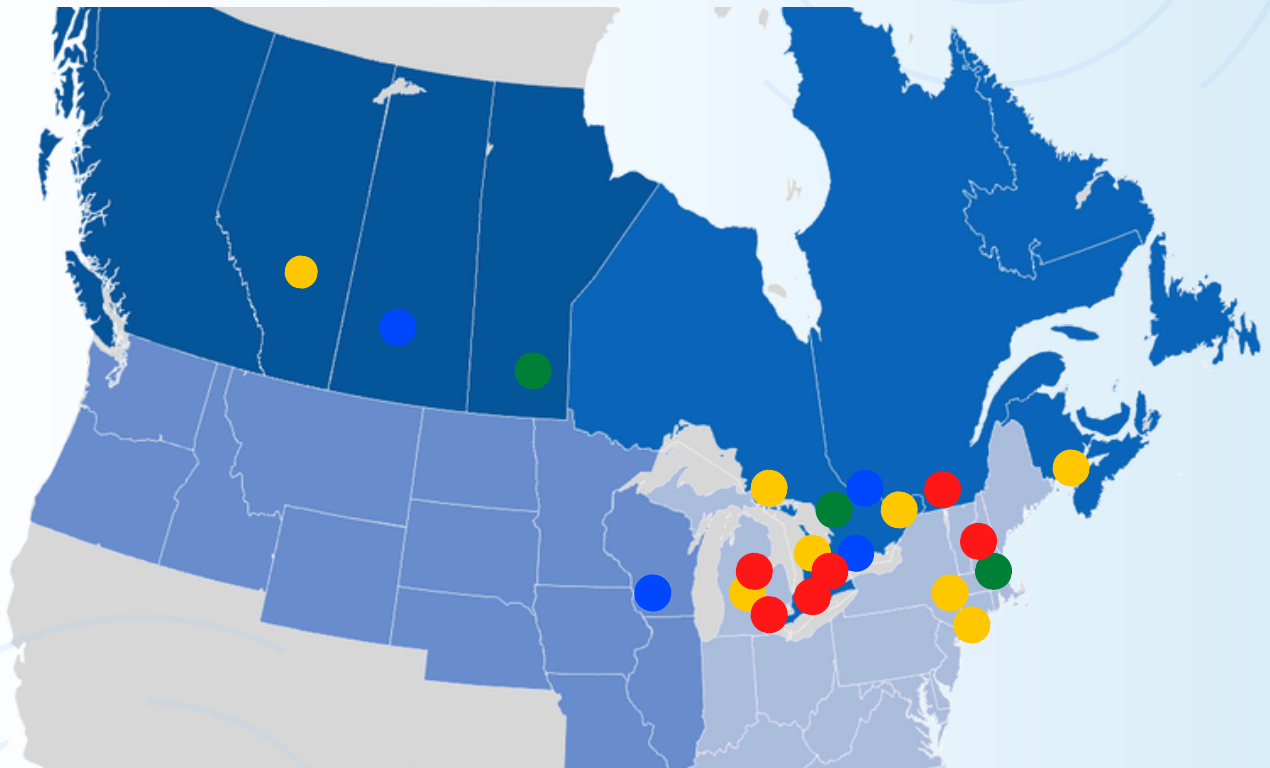
Best Wishes,

**The RinkWatch Team**



Image: NHL star Mike Richter receives an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Wilfrid Laurier University in June 2024. Standing, foreground, from left to right: WLU Dean of Science Anthony Clarke; WLU Chancellor Eileen Mercier; Dr. Mike Richter; WLU President Deborah MaLatchy. Standing, right rear, background, in blue gown: RinkWatch's Robert McLeman, who gave the presentation speech

# OUTDOOR RINK LOCATIONS



**Red = 30 days or less | Yellow = 31-60 days | Blue = 61-90 days | Green = 90+ days**

Edmonton, AB

Navan, ON

Greenfield Park, QC

Midland, MI

Saskatoon, SK

Ottawa, ON

Oak Bay, NB

Nesconset, NY

Petersfield, MB

Richards Landing, ON

Verona, WI

Rhinebeck, NY

Holland Centre, ON

Wasaga Beach, ON

East Lansing, MI

Stow, MA

London, ON

Waterloo, ON

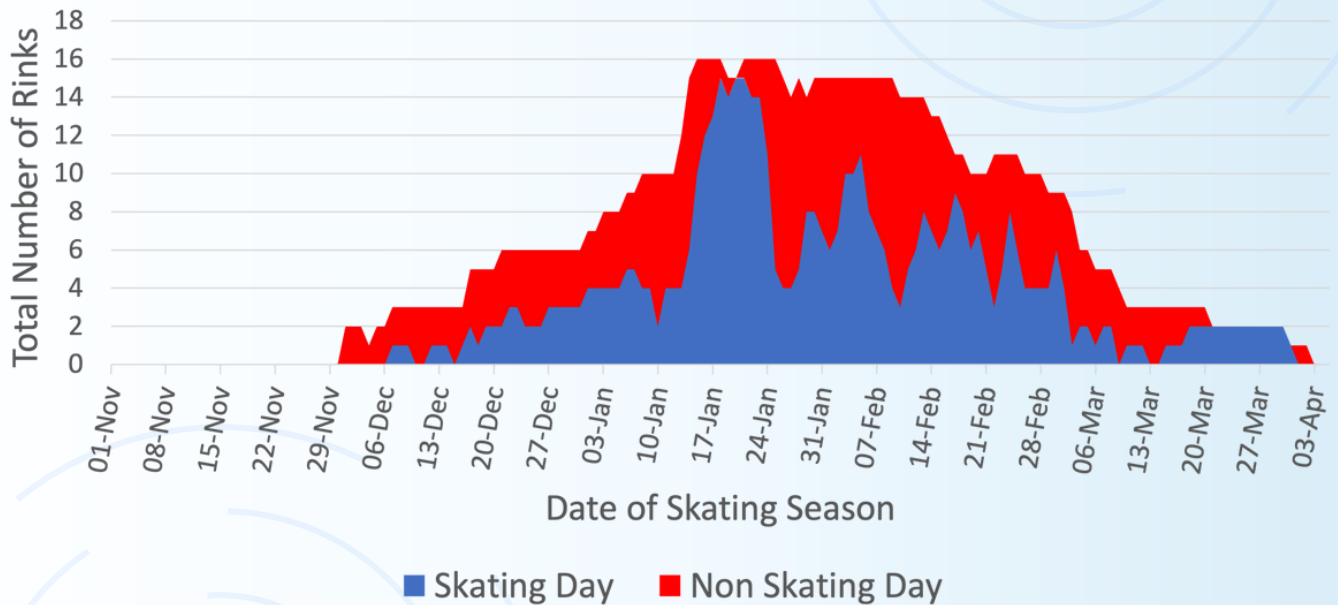
Plymouth, MI

Wellesley, MA

Mono, ON

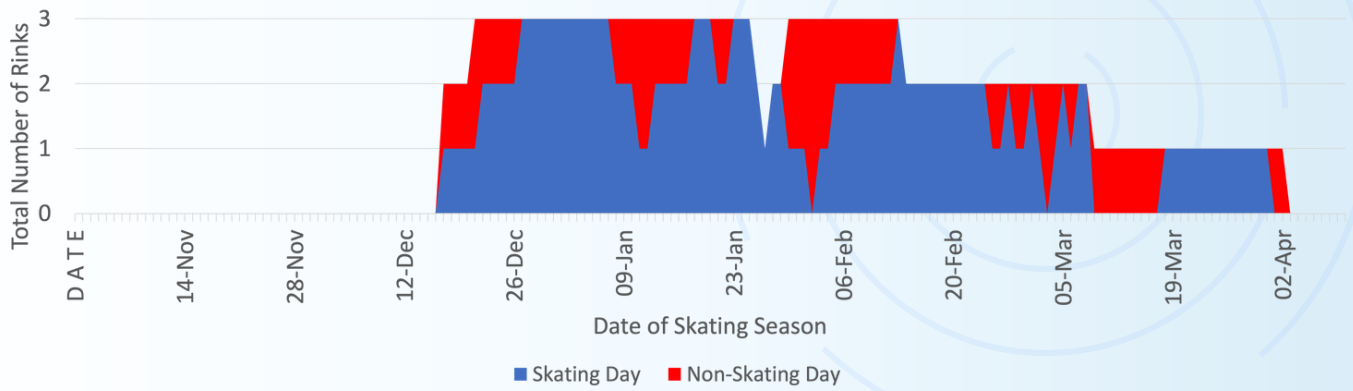
# SKATING SEASON DATA

## FIGURE 1: SKATING SEASON DATA - ALL RINKS

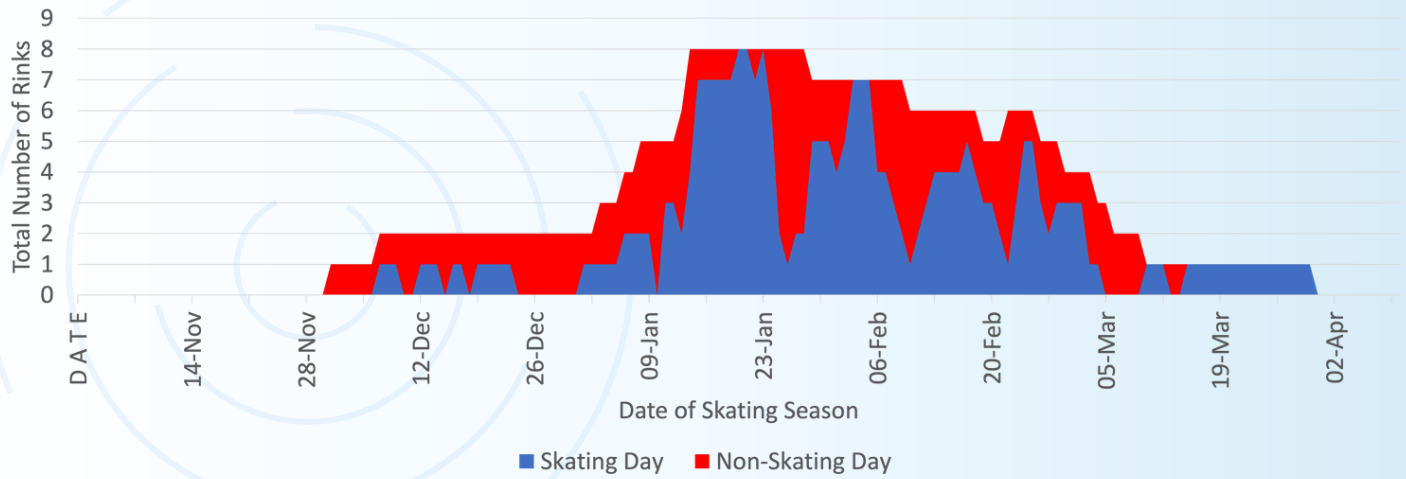


Figures 1-4 compare the number of skating days and non-skating days for all sentinel rinks and for sentinel rinks in specific regions in the winter of 2023-2024. The dates listed on the horizontal axis begin with the earliest reported skating day from our sentinel network (December 1, 2023) through to the final reported skating day (March 31, 2024). The number of sentinel rinks operating is seen on the vertical axis. The blue area of the chart reflects the total number of rinks reporting skatable conditions on a given date, and the red area reflects the number of rinks reporting unskatable conditions on that same date.

## FIGURE 2: WESTERN CANADA



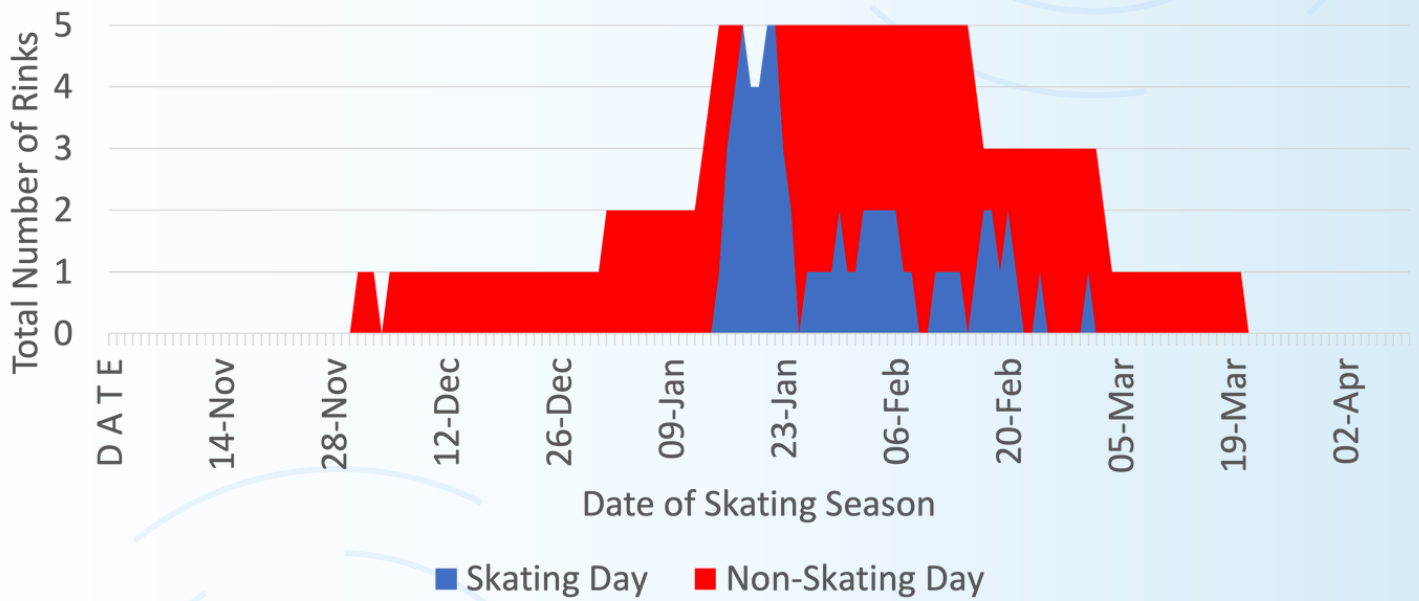
## FIGURE 3: EASTERN CANADA



# SKATING SEASON DATA

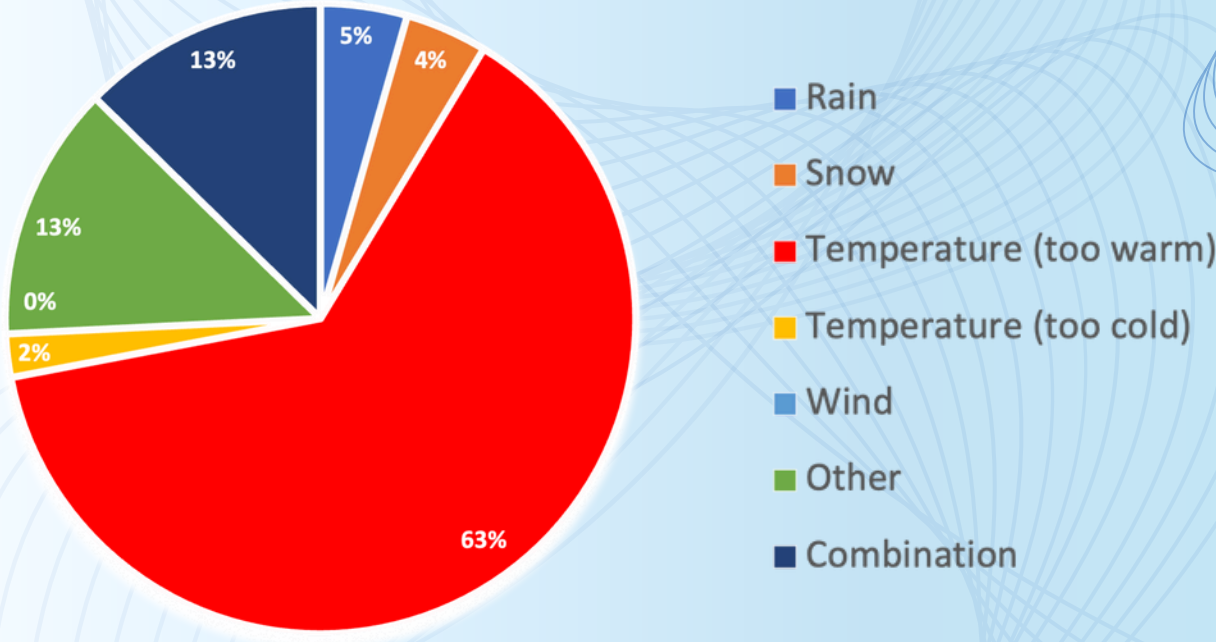


FIGURE 4: USA



SKATING SEASON  
**DATA**

# FIGURE 5: WEATHER FACTORS - ALL RINKS



Figures 5 through 8 summarize the reasons given by Sentinels for days during the winter when their rink was not skatable or was less-than-optimal.

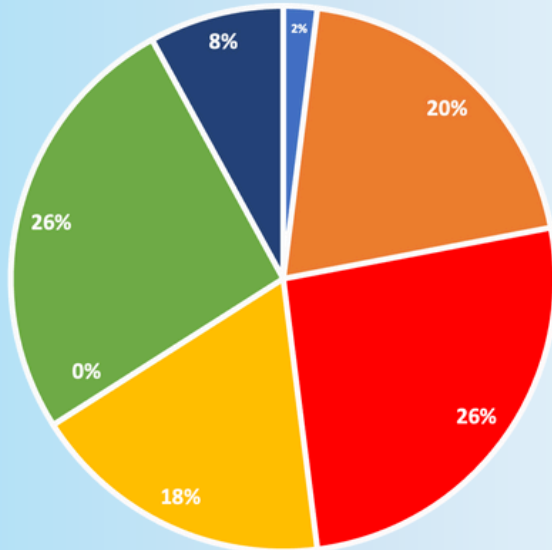
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## WEATHER FACTORS

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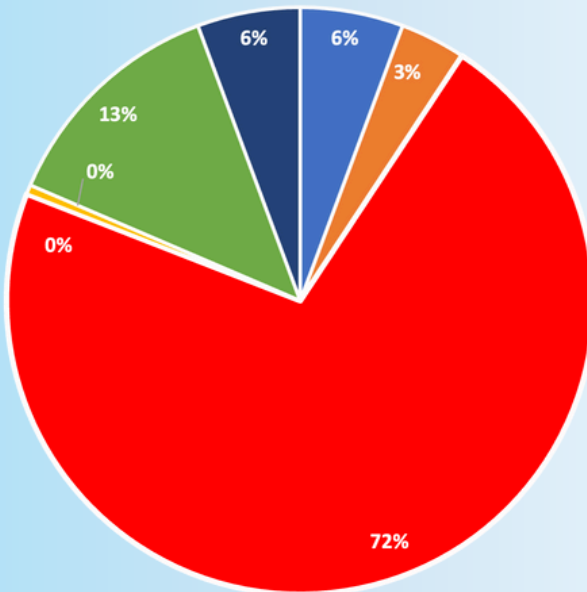


## FIGURE 6: WESTERN CANADA



- Rain
- Snow
- Temperature (too warm)
- Temperature (too cold)
- Wind
- Other
- Combination

## FIGURE 7: EASTERN CANADA



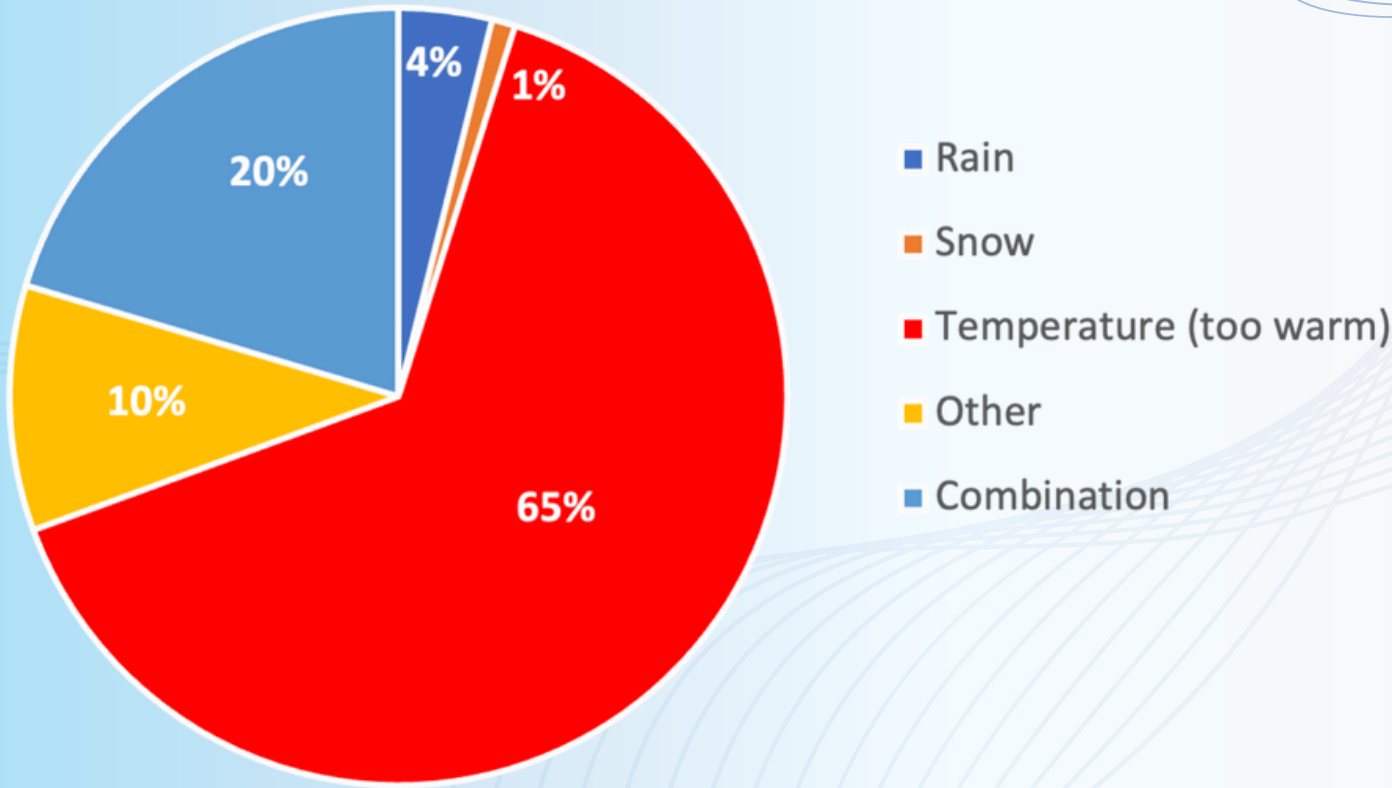
- Rain
- Snow
- Temperature (too warm)
- Temperature (too cold)
- Wind
- Other
- Combination

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# WEATHER FACTORS

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FIGURE 8: USA



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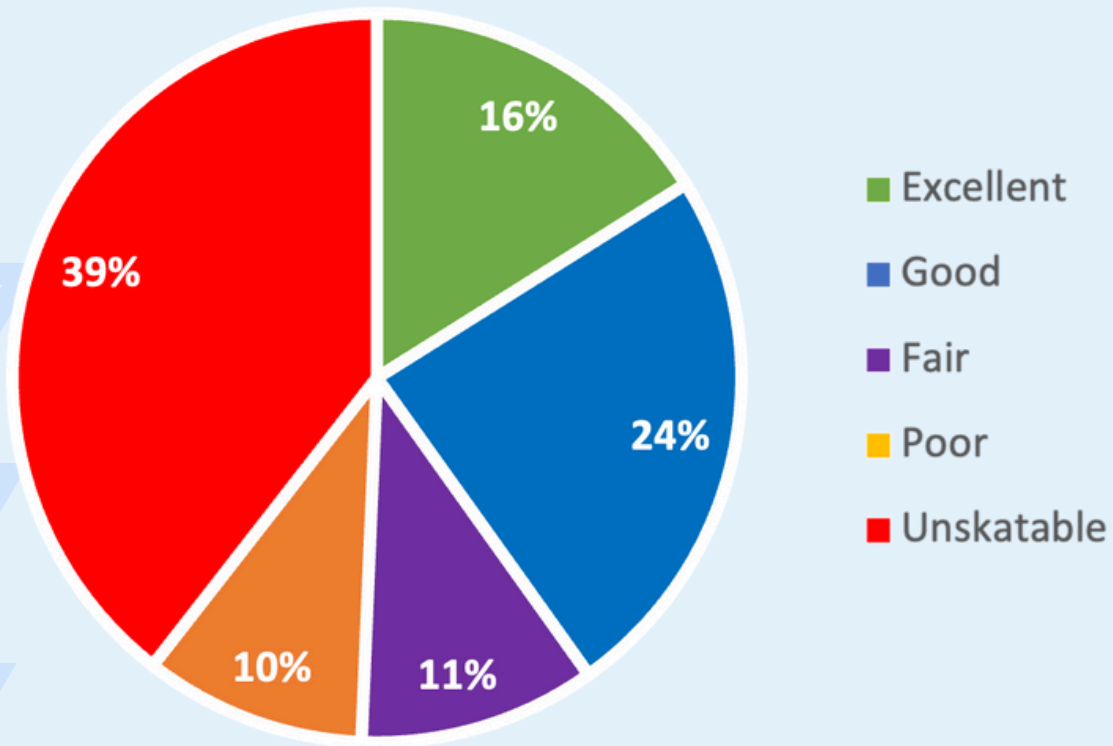
WEATHER  
**FACTORS**

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# ICE CONDITIONS

FIGURE 9: ICE CONDITIONS - ALL RINKS



Figures 9 through 12 summarize the relative skating conditions reported by sentinels during the season.

# ICE CONDITIONS

FIGURE 10: WESTERN CANADA

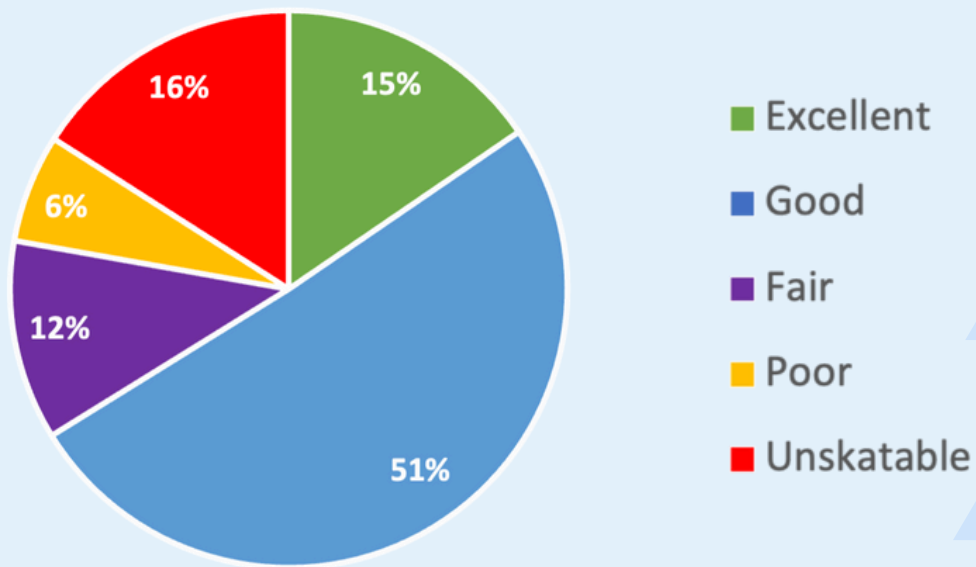
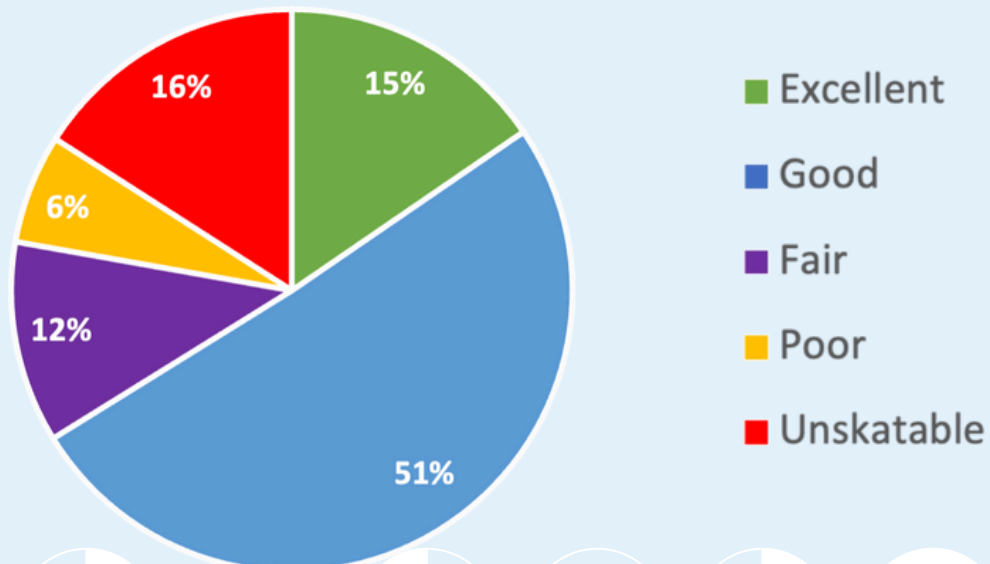


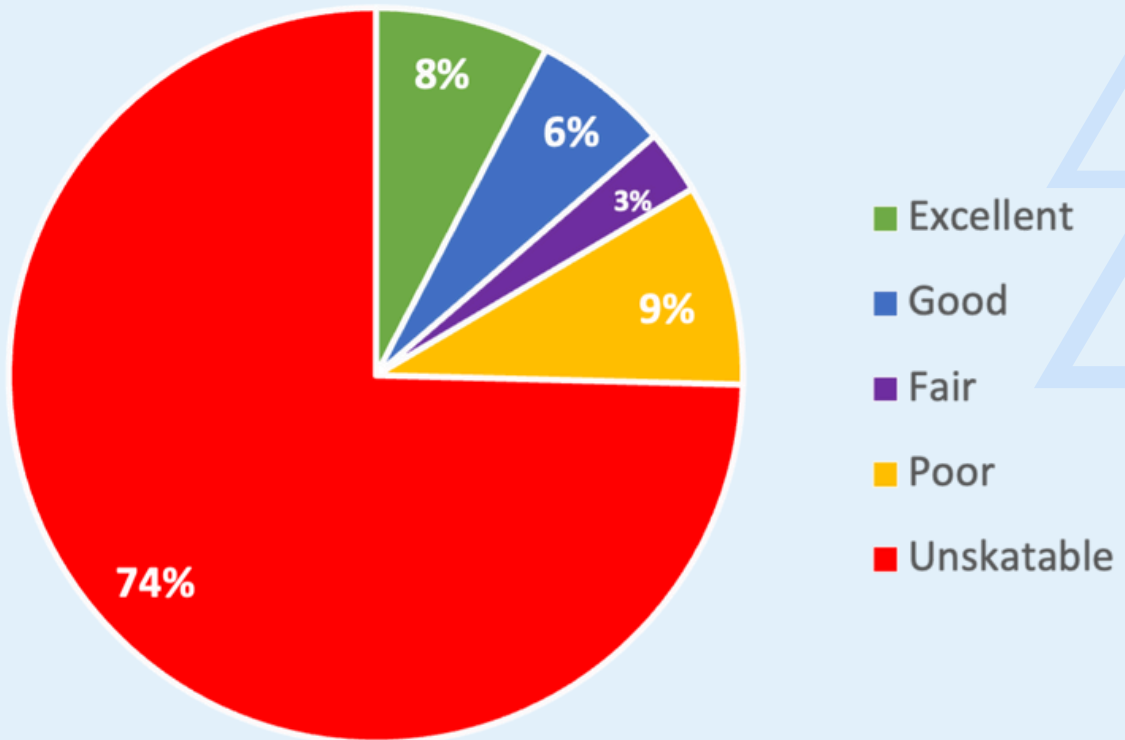
FIGURE 11: EASTERN CANADA





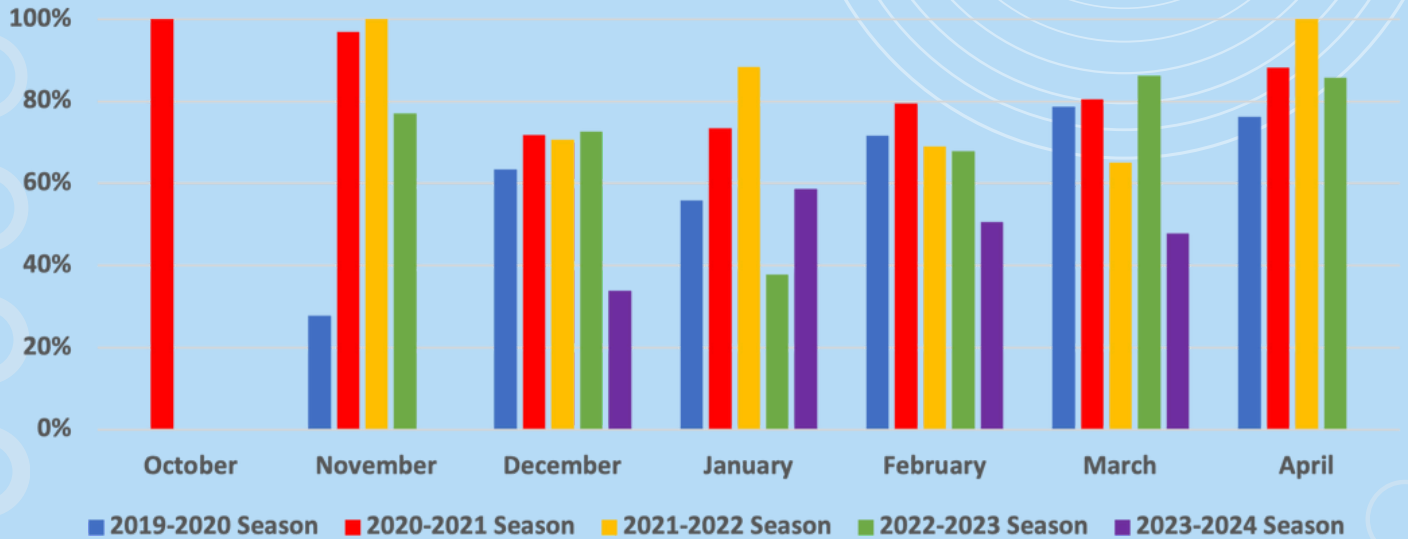
# ICE CONDITIONS

FIGURE 12: USA



# FIGURE 13: SKATING SEASON COMPARISON

## ALL RINKS

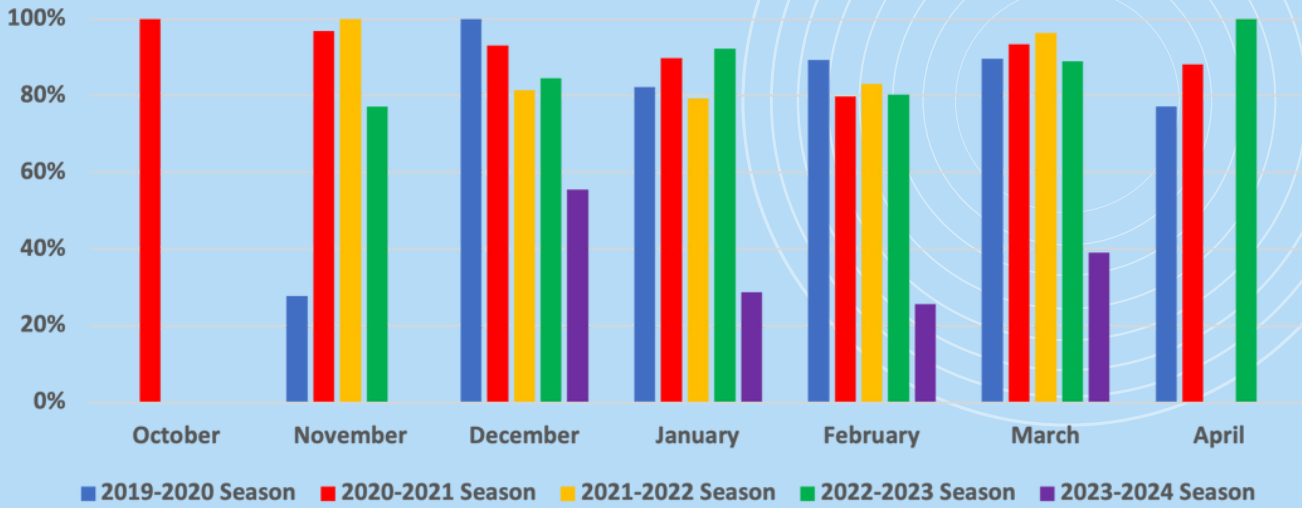


Figures 13-17 compare the percentage of skatable days per month between the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 skating seasons. Please note, the data displayed for the months between October and April only reflect the days included in the skating season in each respective month.

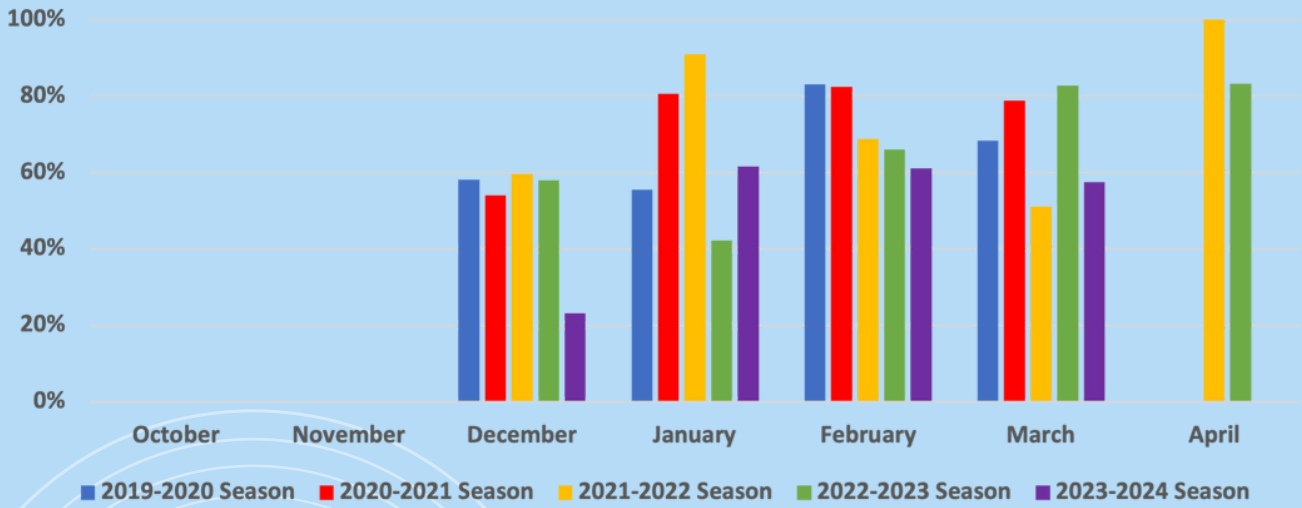
# SKATING SEASON COMPARISON



# FIGURE 14: WESTERN CANADA



# FIGURE 15: EASTERN CANADA

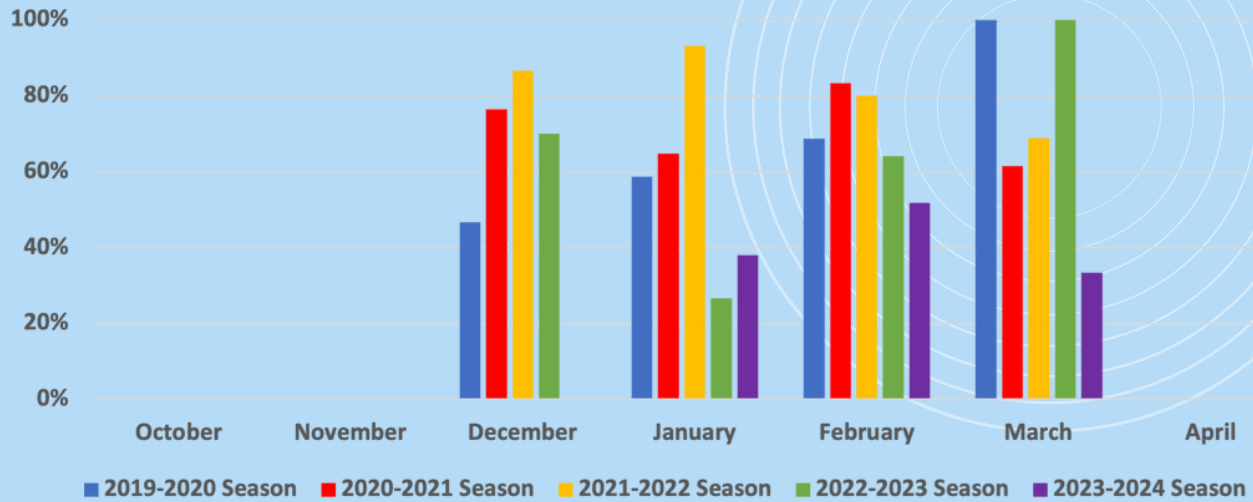


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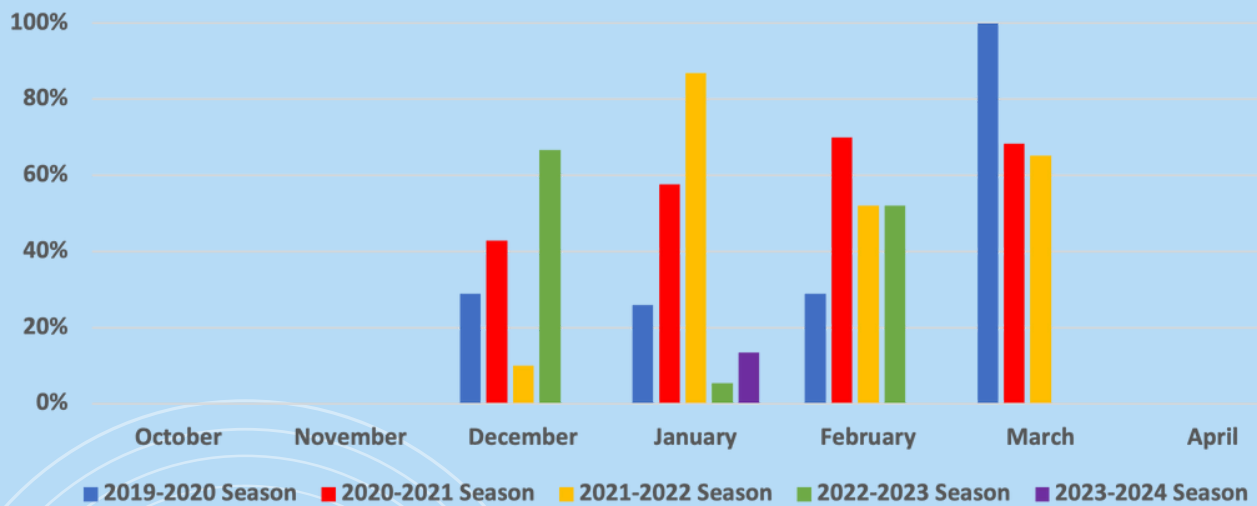
## SKATING SEASON COMPARISON

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# FIGURE 16: MIDWESTERN USA



# FIGURE 17: EASTERN USA



## SKATING SEASON COMPARISON



# THANK YOU

## **The 2023-24 RinkWatch Sentinel Program honour list of volunteers:**

Kaija Hupila, Carole Hunt-Ford, Jason Vlahos, Kevin Riley, Maurice Cormier, Michel Godbout, Philippe Allard, Tom Trottier, Zach Weston, Adam Chiasson, Andy & Dawn, Aric Dodd, Chris Fraser, Dan Sanborn, Derek Coulombe, Mathew Blanchard, Max Farley, Roberta Bond, Sean Gill, Sean Howard, Shelley Jackson, and Rick Nasta, Kevin Pline, Pat Blake and Jean-François Ouimet

Additionally, we'd like to thank Carole Hunt-Ford, Shelley Jackson, Aric Dodd, Kaija Hupila, Jason Vlahos, Michael Godbout and Sean Howard for sharing their incredible photos with us. Check out the Shelley Jackson Design Facebook page [here](#) to learn more about her work.