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OUR MISSION

The sole purpose of the Crested Butte Avalanche Center (CBAC) is to prevent the loss of life, limb, and property to natural and triggered avalanches in the backcountry surrounding Crested Butte. The CBAC provides valuable and needed information and education to residents, visitors, and recreational users in the Gunnison Valley, disseminating content through website, email, radio, TV, social media, newspaper, and outreach events. The CBAC issues daily avalanche advisories and mountain weather forecasts for two forecast zones in the Gunnison Valley. The CBAC provides additional resources, such as daily observations, weekly videos, weather stations, and educational events and material.

OUR TEAM

FORECASTERS

Zach Guy Lead Forecaster **Evan Ross** Forecaster Eric Murrow Forecaster Agron Peterson Outreach

STAFF

Kirk Haskell

Andy Sovick Emma Vosburg

Than Acuff Executive Director Karen Williams Development Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Keitha Kostyk President **Steve Banks** Vice President **Seth Tucker** Secretary Jim Duffy Treasurer Tara Allman Ben Breslauer John Dugenske







ZACH GUY / LEAD FORECASTER

Zach began avalanche forecasting for the CBAC and Irwin Guides in 2011 after completing a master's degree in snow science at Montanta State University. After a short break from the Colorado snowpack to direct the Flathead Avalanche Center in Montana from 2017-2020, he returned to the Gunnison Valley and the CBAC for the vast mountains and loving community.

EVAN ROSS / FORECASTER

Evan Ross has been actively studying snow science since the early 2000s, joining the CBAC team in 2014. Evan grew up ski racing in Jackson Hole before attending college at Fort Lewis in Durango. It was here that Evan was exposed to the world of backcountry skiing for the first time, leading to a move to Crested Butte in 2011.

ERIC MURROW / FORECASTER

Eric Murrow joined the CBAC as an intern in 2017, working into full-time Forecaster the next season. He teaches AIARE avalanche courses, works snow safety for the Gothic Mountain Tour and the Elk Mountain Grand Traverse and is a board member and volunteer for Crested Butte Mountain Rescue.

AARON PETERSON / OUTREACH

After college, Aaron traveled west to work as a guide in Colorado, Alaska, and California and as a ski patroller in the Sierras. He and his family settled in Crested Butte in 2014. Today Aaron works as a splitboard guide, avalanche educator and a chiropractor specializing in adjusting horses. The rest of the time he chases his young son around on skis, bikes, or running trails.

5 EASY WAYS TO STAY INFORMED...





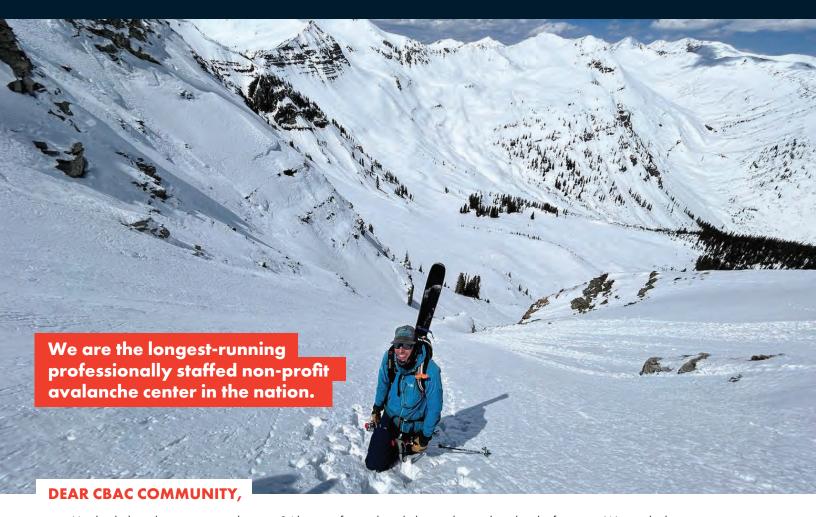








A MESSAGE FROM CBAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Hard to believe but we wrapped up our 24th year of providing daily weather and avalanche forecasts. We are the longest-running professionally staffed non-profit avalanche center in the nation. That longevity is directly the result of our continued support locally and the effort of our staff and board. We have quite the team each and every year!

The season was a mixed bag of emotions for all of us at the CBAC and in the community. While it was another great season of skiing and riding, we were hit hard by the loss of two friends to the mountains. As our lead forecaster Zach Guy put it, "A pursuit that brings so much joy to our community can so abruptly take that joy away."

Death is an unfortunate part of our passion for the backcountry and our friends, family members, and co-workers spend months enjoying what our local mountains have to offer. It's an important part of not just our physical health, but our mental health as well. We at the CBAC embrace that passion and will continue to be there every day of the winter season informing people of the hazards of traveling in the winter landscape so everyone can get out there, have fun, and return home safe and sound.

We are extremely lucky to have an experienced forecast staff with Zach at the helm and Evan Ross and Eric Murrow as full-time forecasters. Aaron Peterson took over as our Outreach Director and continues to spread the good word about the CBAC whether it's with the Gunnison Senior Center, the Land Trust, the local kids, through our trailhead Days or at our slate of Fireside Chats throughout the season.

We do it every day. We do it because we love it and we do it because want to keep people safe.

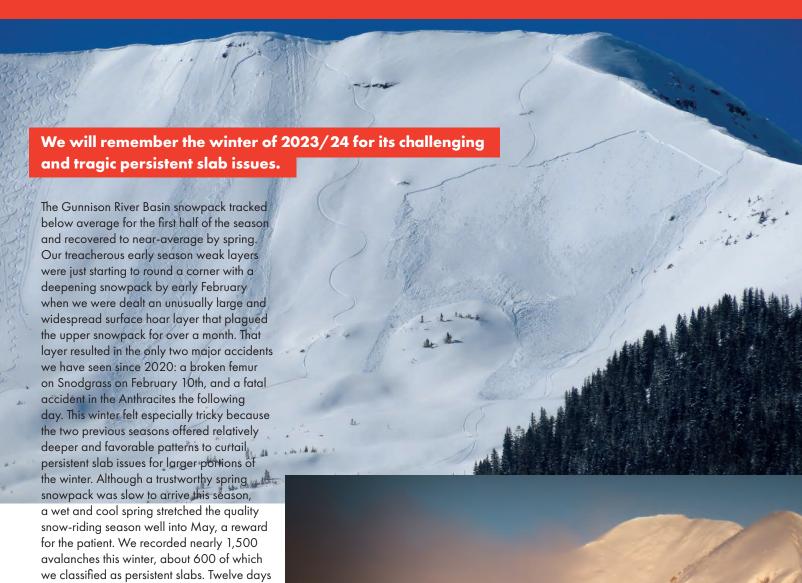
Spring skiing has been great with brief returns to winter providing some coverage of the dreaded dust layer and we now look forward to summer activities and jumping back in for our 25th year in operation starting again in October.

Wait, 25 years?! Again, hard to believe but then again, not really.

See you all next winter!

Than Acuff
Executive Director

A TROUBLESOME YEAR FOR PERSISTENT SLABS



A slow start.

A major storm around Halloween (up to 2.6" SWE) formed our early season base, which would subsequently metamorphose to depth hoar on colder aspects over th next two months of below-average snowfall starting with three weeks of quiet weather in November. Slabs began forming during snowy weather on Thanksgiving. Our first major avalanche cycle culminated on December 3rd, following a three-day storm that produced 2 to 3 feet of snow (up to 1.7" SWE). A month-long dry spell followed causing an abrupt downturn in avalanche activity through the rest of December. December's dry spell caused the snowpack to rot away on all aspects, leaving us with a widespread and fragile weak layer to take on the weight of a much snowier 2024.

were this winter.

featured High avalanche danger, and about half of the season (74 days) saw dangerous

avalanche conditions (Considerable or High

danger ratings). We received reports of nine

backcountry travelers caught in avalanches

one in a fatality. Seven of those avalanches were persistent slabs failing on old weak

layers. In contrast, the previous two seasons combined saw no injuries and 7 people

caught in small avalanches, most involving

just new or windblown snow. Involvements

only tell part of the story. There were nearly a hundred human-triggered persistent slabs

this season, 71 of which were remotely or

which were D2 or larger. These stats highlight how challenging our persistent slab issues

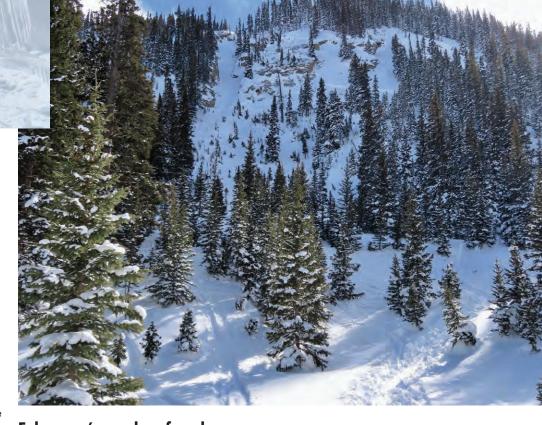
unintentionally triggered, and a third of

this season. Three of those resulted in injuries,



The January slab.

The storm track finally returned to the Elk Mountains in early January. By January 11th, up to 2.5" of accumulated SWE spurred the first of several cycles on our treacherous January weak layer. This first cycle was impressively widespread (150 D1 to D2 avalanches documented in a single day), with remote triggers and sympathetic releases up to a half mile away. Our most destructive cycle of the season followed on January 14th and 15th, as January storm totals exceeded 5" of SWE (80" of snow) under intense loading. Crested Butte was squarely and happily in the snow globe. Valley crushing D3s off of Gothic, Peeler, Italian, and several peaks in the Ruby Range highlighted the largest slides, while most activity was in the D2-D2.5 range. We documented 206 avalanches that ran during the MLK weekend slammer. On January 18th, a final pulse brought another foot of snow and continued the large natural cycle to a lesser degree. The danger was rated High on six days during the January storm cycle. Two people were carried and injured in avalanches during the storm: one in Elk Creek and one in a roof avalanche downtown. Large remotely triggered and natural avalanches continued for an unusually long period after the storm passed. During the last two weeks of January, under dry and unseasonably warm weather, we documented 28 natural persistent slabs that failed from warming-related releases or modest wind events. Continued persistent slab activity like this long after the storm has ended is highly unusual, further demonstrating our challenging setup in January.



February's cruel surface hoar.

As the late January high-pressure system departed, our mountains were blanketed in a horrifically large (up to 20mm) and widespread surface hoar layer, destroyed only on sunbaked southerlies. The first snowfall on this layer arrived under light winds, burying our February 2nd layer from the valley floor to the alpine. Over the next 36 hours, the Ruby Range produced a significant avalanche cycle as it got walloped by 3 feet of snow (3" SWE), while the rest of the forecast area remained intact with storm totals less than a foot. Thus began a period of heartache and headaches caused by relentless avalanche activity, mostly on our buried surface hoar layer. In the following five weeks, there were only a few days without a triggered or natural persistent slab avalanche. The buried surface hoar layer was particularly devastating for our community during the second week of February: a skier sustained minor injuries in the Anthracites on February 7th; a snowboarder was severely injured on Snodgrass on February 10th, and a skier was killed in the Anthracites on February 11th. During this timeframe, several burials and successful rescues occurred in other parts of the Central Mountains. Throughout the month, we watched easily triggered and natural persistent slab avalanche activity gradually shift from the snowbelt to the shallower parts of the forecast area. Apart from the initial cycle in the Ruby Range, February never produced the major crush and flush storm we hoped for. Rather, small and medium storms kept the danger pegged at Considerable for most of the month. The danger rose to High on February 27th, during the most potent storm and avalanche cycle since the start of the month. A powerful cold front delivered up to 1.5" SWE and strong winds, and it produced fifty D1 to D2 avalanches and one D3 that broke at the ground on Mt. Axtell, smashing through Green Lake. Park Cone buried Taylor Canyon Road with a D3 outside our forecast area.

A TROUBLESOME YEAR FOR PERSISTENT SLABS

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24



A stormy March.

The biggest zone-wide hit on our surface hoar layer came on March 4th, with up to 2.5" of SWE and extreme winds, and the danger rose to High again. Natural persistent slab activity was concentrated in the shallowest part of our forecast zone, with numerous D2 to D3 avalanches off Whetstone. Persistent slab activity waned after that, with a handful of notable natural and triggered D2 to D3 slides through mid-March concentrated to terrain with shallower snowpacks. Just east of our forecast area, a heroic rescue saved the life of a snowmobiler who was buried by a large persistent slab on Lambertson Peak. Avalanche activity patterns and improved snowpack results indicated that our persistent slab issues were finally diminishing in all but unusually shallow areas where early-season facet layers were weakest. By mid-March, Low danger appeared on the map for the deeper Northwest Mountains for the first time since early January, and both zones experienced a lull in avalanche activity. The respite was shortlived: a prolonged windy storm system closed out the end of March, causing the Grand Traverse to reverse course and bringing yet another round of persistent slab activity to the forefront. The week-long storm period produced over 3" of SWE and a string of 90 D1 to D2.5 avalanches. This time, avalanches broke on the small-grained facet layer formed during the mid-March dry spell or on old, early-season weak layers.

Spring arrives in April.

Several modest warmups throughout March started transitioning the snowpack to a more spring-like structure on southerly aspects. However, the snowpack didn't start its decline until early April, fostered by a handful of notable warmups throughout the month. These increased wet avalanche activity and effectively eliminated lingering concerns for persistent slabs. April was our quietest month for avalanche activity in our operational season, with 19 D2 avalanches (mostly wet loose), and a pair of D3 wet slabs that ran off of Schuylkill Ridge during a warm spell at the end of the month. Finally, a trustworthy spring snowpack arrived to finish off our forecast season. Stormy periods in late April and in the first half of May slowed down the spring meltout and helped prolong the spring riding season well into June, offering shortlived doses of powder between wet shed cycles.

billy barr measured 299" of snow and 24.4" of snow water equivalent, which was Gothic's 31st wettest winter since 1975. Irwin and CBMR reported 439" and 278" of snow, respectively.

THE SEASON IN STATS

1,498

Avalanches documented by the CBAC, 590 of which we classified as persistent slabs.

12

High Danger days

9

Number of people caught in backcountry avalanches.
All but two were persistent slabs.

20mm

the size of our February buried surface hoar layer in some locations; the worst surface hoar layer we have dealt with in operational memory.

2

Serious accidents, both involving our February buried surface hoar layer.

6

Days in January, February, and March without a sign of instability or avalanche reported.

96

Human triggered persistent slabs this season, 61 of which were remotely triggered.

209

CBAC forecaster observations

329,414

Website page views, an all-time high

20,783

Social media followers who receive our daily posts.

16

Outreach or educational events hosted by CBAC

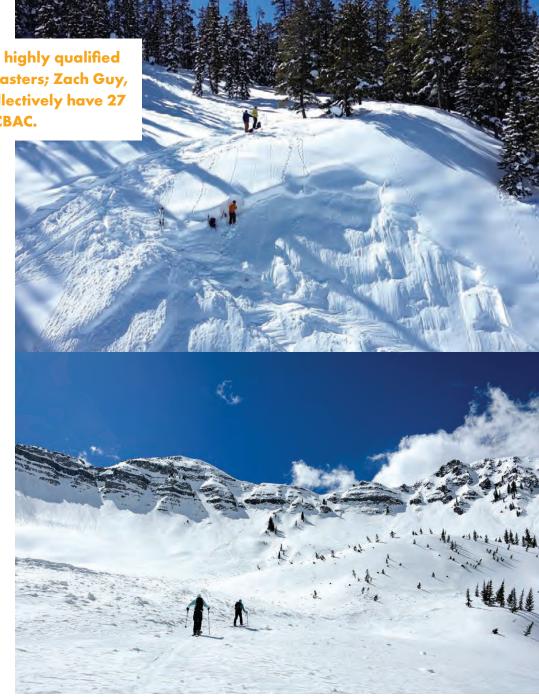
The CBAC has operated as a non-profit 501c3 avalanche center since 2001.

The center strives to maintain a highly qualified and experienced team of forecasters; Zach Guy, Evan Ross, and Eric Murrow collectively have 27 seasons of forecasting for the CBAC.

Additionally, the team brings years of guiding, instructing, snow safety, and/or forecasting experience from other organizations, both locally and from outside of the region. Aaron Peterson joined the CBAC this season to lead the Outreach Program. Elise Brizes served as this year's intern.

The CBAC produces daily avalanche forecasts and makes daily field visits during its operational season from mid-November through mid-April. The center forecasts for two regions surrounding the valley: the Northwest and Southeast Mountains. This separation allows forecasters to highlight spatial differences in avalanche danger or avalanche problems into more locally accurate products. The CBAC has established a strong field presence to improve forecast accuracy while supplementing the forecast products with publicly accessible observations. Field observations typically include photos of avalanche activity, signs of instability, and annotated snow profiles to help the public visualize written descriptions. The CBAC populates and maintains a comprehensive database of regional avalanche activity - critical for validating forecasts and predicting patterns of future activity. The CBAC also produced 28 field videos to help demonstrate current and anticipated conditions.

The CBAC's website is the primary source for delivering avalanche information. We utilize a mobile-friendly forecast platform consistent with most other avalanche centers nationwide. The CBAC adopted a new observation platform and avalanche database this season, with improved visualization and analysis capabilities such as mapping, filtering, and



searching. The website also hosts a weather station platform and educational resources. In addition to the website, the CBAC disseminates information daily using emails, radio broadcasts, social media posts, local TV messaging, and a danger sign at the town entrance to reach a broader audience.

OUTREACH

The CBAC has been expanding its outreach efforts to get avalanche information into the hands of all user groups. The Outreach Program was implemented in 2019 due to a spike in backcountry usage and accidents during the pandemic.

Highlights from the season:

Website

cbavalanchecenter.org is our primary tool for disseminating avalanche information to the public. Usage has trended upward over the past decade. This winter, the website saw 21,155 unique visitors (a 10% increase from last year), with 329,414 page views (an all-time high, up 41% from last year). A little over half of the traffic to the CBAC website is from the Gunnison Valley. The rest originates mainly from Front Range cities such as Denver, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, etc. There is additional traffic from the western slope of Colorado and from most of the Western states the Gunnison Valley markets to, including Dallas and Phoenix. Most of CBAC's users connect on a mobile device.

Social Media

Our Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube presence continues to reach more users and drive a larger audience to our website. We post creative content daily to draw attention to conditions, share timely updates or observations, and encourage users to read our forecasts. We have 20,783 social media followers (a 13% increase from last season).

News and Radio Media

The Gunnison Valley's community radio station, KBUT, aired CBAC's avalanche forecasts every morning. CBAC staff also participated in several radio programs highlighting unusually dangerous conditions, avalanche news, or other CBAC updates. The CBAC authored regular "Backcountry Notes" for the Crested Butte News and interviewed with the Gunnison Times on several occasions throughout the season. The forecast bottom line is also published daily on CBTV.

Videos

CBAC forecasters produced 28 field-based videos highlighting current or anticipated hazards or describing terrain management strategies. The videos were shared on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and our website.



Trailhead Days

CBAC staff continued its weekend presence at popular trailheads to provide information and interact with locals and visitors. This was an effective way of engaging with different user groups spanning all levels of avalanche awareness and demographics. We hosted 7 trailhead days and connected with hundreds of backcountry travelers.



Fireside Chats

One of our flagship events, we coordinated four in-person events with featured speakers: Legendary mountaineer George Lowe, snow safety director Krista Hildebrandt, snowmobiler Kain Leonard with an avalanche rescue story, and past Grand Traverse snow safety directors. The free, hour-long sessions include a snowpack synopsis presented by CBAC staff and provide a fun venue for community members to connect with their peers.



Awareness Night

CBAC's iconic kick-off event returned to a full house at the Center for the Arts. The event featured talks by several forecasters and avalanche industry professionals, gear expos, the world-famous raffle, and entertaining times connecting our backcountry users together.



Other Education/Events

We continue to provide avalanche education opportunities targeting broad user demographics. Our outreach staff provided field-based and indoor training to the Gunnison Senior Center and the Crested Butte Land Trust, with plans for more youthbased education next season. We also set up information booths or assisted in several other community events, such as the Al Johnson race, film showings, and beacon trainings.

Avalanche Danger Sign

We launched a community beacon park two

years ago, which we continue to maintain and troubleshoot as equipment issues arise.

The beacon park is located behind the

venue for all users.

community school in the town of Crested

Butte and provides an accessible practice

CBAC's large roadside sign at the town's entrance advertises the current avalanche danger and our website for more information. The sign helps inform and increase awareness for visitors and locals alike.

2023 FINANCIAL REVIEW 2024

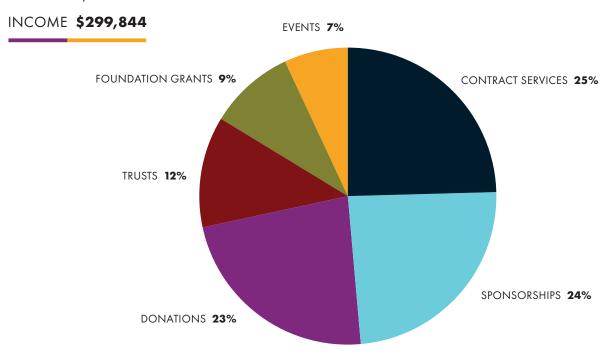
BUDGET

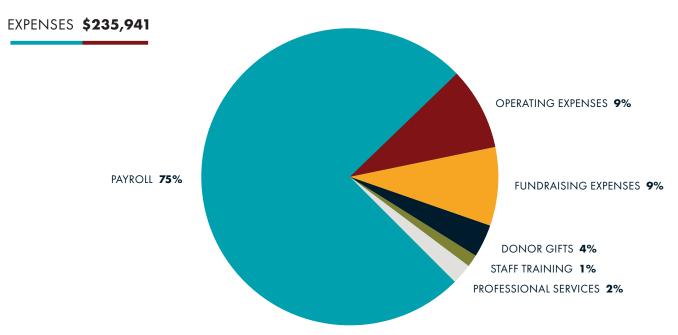
The CBAC continues to operate a well-staffed, Type 1 avalanche center while maintaining a relatively modest budget relative to other centers nationwide. Most expenses go directly to staff salaries, followed by operating expenses such as vehicles, website, and office costs. Under this model, the center has been able to employ a highly experienced and well-qualified staff. To meet the increased cost of living in the valley, the CBAC board launched a forecaster endowment campaign this year to raise \$50,000 specific to forecaster salaries, the first step toward ensuring staff retention. We reached the initial goal and will continue to build those reserves in 2024 and 2025.

If you wish to support our forecaster team, you can do so by scanning here.



The CBAC draws its funding from various sources, including business sponsorships, local municipalities, donations, trusts/grants, events, and contract services. Contract services include regular avalanche mitigation work on avalanche paths that impact the Town of Crested Butte and snow safety work at local events such as the Gothic Mountain Tour.





DIGITAL REVIEW 2024 2023

CBAVALANCHECENTER.ORG

WHO'S OUT THERE?

Overall traffic is concentrated in Colorado, including destinations the Gunnison Valley is marketing to.

58% Gunnison Valley

Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Ft. Collins + beyond



Additional traffic comes from the western slope of Colorado, Dallas and Phoenix.

TOTAL **WEBSITE** 21,155 UP from 19,265 2022/23

The average person visited the CBAC website 8.47 times which is up from 3.09 times last season.

WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS

329,414

Up from 233,129 last season.

Page views were at an all-time high this season with a 41% increase!



2.9 pages viewed per session vs. 3.33 pages last season.



THE AVERAGE PERSON SPENT 5.34 MINUTES ON OUR WEBSITE (up from 3.09 minutes last season) We have worked hard to improve our content, and this shows this effort has been successful!

SOCIAL MEDIA

We continue to post daily content each winter to help educate more users and draw a larger audience to the website. Community feedback has been overwhelmingly positive that our social media platforms are informative, creative, funny, relevant, and interesting.

OF CBAC'S USERS ARE CONNECTING ON A MOBILE DEVICE.

CBAC Forecasters produced 31 YouTube videos and shorts, which is 11 more than last year.

HOW YOU FOUND US:

DIRECT SEARCH GOOGLE SEARCH ORGANIC SEARCH SOCIAL MEDIA LINK REFERRAL

20,783

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

2,446

FOLLOWERS

13.3%

INCREASE IN WEBSITE TRAFFIC FROM SOCIAL MEDIA



www.youtube.com/user/CBavalanche



www.instagram.com/cbavalanchecenter/



www.facebook.com/cbavalanchecenter



PARTNERSHIPS + SPONSORSHIPS

The CBAC collaborates with national, state, and local snow safety organizations to share resources, observations, and guidance. The work of the CBAC would not be possible without the many local business sponsors and donor support. Thank you to everyone who donated to make our operation successful!

The CBAC is a member of the National Avalanche Center (NAC), which provides guidance, support, and cost-sharing opportunities for the website platform and associated products. The CBAC works with the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) through observation sharing and forecaster discussions. The CBAC also exchanges observations and benefits from weather stations operated by Irwin Guides, Crested Butte Mountain Resort, and billy barr/Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory.

The CBAC is contracted by the Town of Crested Butte to perform avalanche mitigation and forecasting for several avalanche zones within town limits. This winter, there were no incidents, public involvement, or structural damages at any municipal avalanche zones, and no road or terrain closures were implemented.

The CBAC also has an email alert system for notifying other local agencies of exceptionally dangerous conditions. We deployed this system on a number of occasions to warn against large-magnitude natural avalanches.



NEW THIS YEAR

Observation Platform

The CBAC adopted a new platform for sharing and viewing observations and avalanche activity. The platform is designed and hosted by the NAC, and most U.S. avalanche centers now use it, making for consistency across state borders. Some improvements from our existing database include geotagging for spatial analysis, flagging observations with avalanches or signs of instability, advanced filtering and searching capabilities, and improved media capabilities. Like our previous avalanche database, users can explore avalanche activity using a number of visualization tools. The data can be viewed graphically to highlight patterns in terrain and avalanche characteristics.

More Field Days

The CBAC budgeted an extra field day for each of our three forecasters this season to create more overlapping field days with staff and a larger field presence.

Avalanche Terrain Map

The CBAC has worked with OnX Backcountry and Beacon Guidebooks over the past two years to develop an Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale map for the CBAC forecast area. The map uses a terrain modeling approach validated by historical data to categorize terrain exposure into simple, challenging, complex, or extreme avalanche terrain. Our website hosts the map for free to help the public plan their exposure to avalanche terrain.

Dan K Weather Station Upgrades

Funded by Dan K's family, we revamped the communication and data logging systems for our weather station at Elkton and installed a radar precipitation sensor to supplement existing sensors.

Aerial Drone

CBAC forecasters utilized a small drone during field outings to gather aerial media and gain views of obscured terrain for documenting avalanche activity.

Research Publications

CBAC staff presented studies at the International Snow Science Workshop last fall. Topics included wet avalanche cycles and using remote game cams to monitor snowfall.













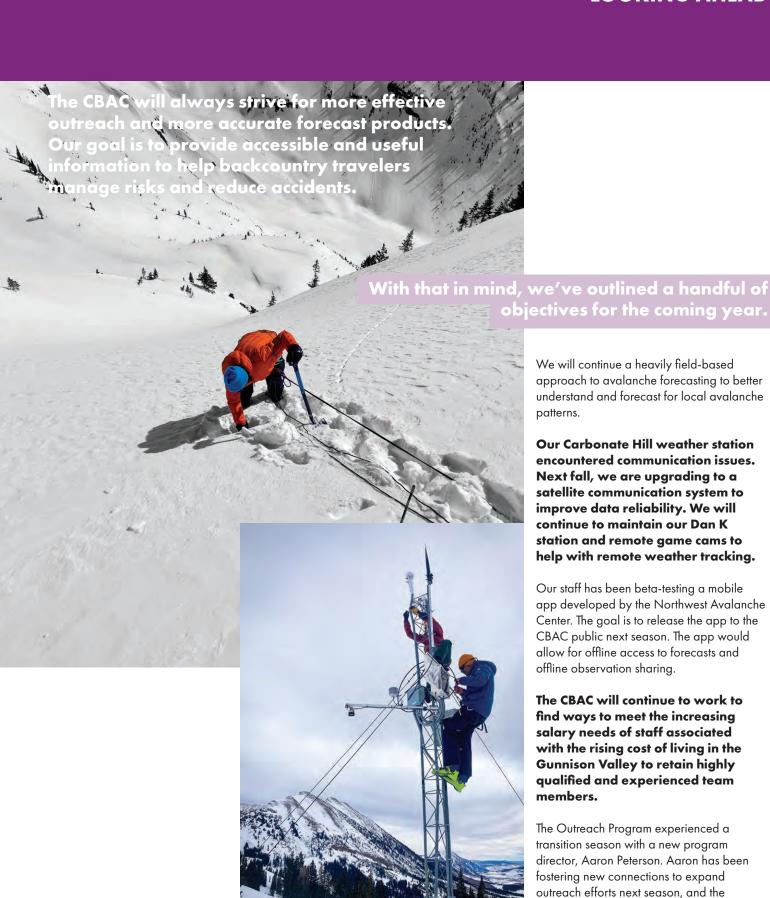












program will continue its efforts through trailhead days, fireside chats, and other

education opportunities.

DONORS + SUPPORTERS

The work of the CBAC would not be possible without the many local business sponsors and donor support. Thank you to everyone who donates to make our operation successful!

SNOWPOCALYPSE \$5,000 +

Gunnison County Met Rec Andrico Wines Community Foundation of the **Gunnison Valley Gunnison Valley Orthopedics Irwin Guides** Jean Thomas Lambert Foundation Skyhigh Offroad **Timberline Mechanical** Yamaha OAI

WHITEROOM \$3,000 +

Alpineer **Blister Review** Chris Mikesell Foundation Club at Crested Butte Crested Butte Nordic Dan K Weather Station Flylow Gunnison/CB Tourism and Prosperity Project Midnight Marketing Solutions Mountainside Concrete Timberline Mechanical

WAIST DEEP \$1,500 +

Intuition Consulting Limitless Guiding Michael Weil Custom Homes **Epic Promise** Glacier Earthworks Hargrove and Kidd Construction Pinnacle Orthopedics REG Top Tier Roofing

THIGH DEEP \$750 +

Action Learning Altitude Auto Artisan Rug Gallery Backcountry Cafe Crested Butte Bank Crested Butte Builders Crested Butte Publishing + Creative Crossroads Construction ES Nauman Houseright High Nowhere Tattoo Huckstep Law Julbo **KBUT KNS Reps** Law Offices of Michael Vaughn Mountain Moto School Mountain Nugget Bodywork Nuntuak Alternative Energy Organic Housekeepers **Precise Painting RMD** Powersports Rocky Mountain Trees ROMP Talk of the Town Teocalli Tamale Top Tier Construction **Uphill Motorworks** Western Mountain Rescue Team Western Wilderness Pursuits Weston Backcountry

KNEE DEEP \$500 +

B&B Printers Beth Appleton Law Guy and a Lawnmower Mountain Colors Old Town Inn Vermont Sticky

BOOT TOP \$250 +

Alpenglow Rentals Big B's Juice Crested Butte News Fullmers Ace Get Bent Blacksmith Mountain Flow/Eco Wax

CONTRACT SERVICES

Town of Crested Butte

FOUNDATION GRANTS

Chris Mikesell Foundation **Brad Sethness Foundation**

FORECASTER ENDOWMENT + INDIVIDUAL DONORS

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EVENT SPONSORS

BCA Black Tie Ski Rentals Pinnacle Orthopedics Timberline Mechanical





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