# 2020 // ANNUAL REPORT

Promoting avalanche safety throughout Colorado since 1972.







## MISSION// CAIC & FRIENDS OF CAIC



The mission of the CAIC is to provide avalanche information, education, and promote research for the protection of life, property, and the enhancement of the state's economy.



The mission of the Friends of CAIC is to support avalanche forecasting and education throughout Colorado.





## LETTER FROM CAIC// ETHAN GREENE

The Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) is a program of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The program is a partnership between the DNR, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), and the Friends of the CAIC (FoCAIC), a 501c3 group. The mission of the CAIC is to provide avalanche information, education, and promote research for the protection of life, property and the enhancement of the state's economy. This effort began as the Colorado Avalanche Warning Program in 1972 in the United States Forecast Service and moved into the State of Colorado in 1983.

The 2019-2020 avalanche year started with snow in early October. There were few avalanches until the end of November, but snow in December brought the settled snowpack over the long-term average. Avalanches slowly grew larger and we experienced our first avalanche death when a backcountry skier was killed near Cameron Pass. By January, we had a variety of weak layers in the snowpack and fairly consistent snowfall produced a set of avalanche cycles. Between January 18 and January 25, 11 people were caught in avalanches and an ice climber was killed near Ouray. The next fatal accident came in early February when three motorized snowbikers were caught in a slide north of Vail. Two of them were killed.

March arrived and winter recreation in Colorado changed in ways nobody saw coming. COVID-19 shut many aspects of society down including the ski industry. Visitors were asked to return home. Residents were asked to stay home and recreate within 10 miles of their domicile. Many Colorado counties limited travel and some closed completely. This period coincided with a fairly stable snowpack in the Northern Mountains and some of the most dangerous avalanche conditions of the year in the Southern Mountains. There were several significant rescues and two fatal accidents. About 1/3 of the avalanche involvements, and fatal accidents, for the season occurred after March 13. At the end of the avalanche season we had recorded 3896 avalanches, 85 incidents with 96 people caught, and six people killed. This was the second year in a row that we faced a challenge beyond anything we had experienced before in March. In 2019 the challenge was two weeks of historic and devastating avalanches. In 2020 it was the effects of a global pandemic. This time around we were in a supporting role, trying to help the public health sector any way we could. We supported other state and many local government groups, provided avalanche safety information to people working and living in the mountains, and encouraged people to adjust their recreation plans to fit within an unusual and evolving environment. As I've experienced several times in recent years, the staff of the CAIC and Friends of the CAIC worked tirelessly and adapted to the challenge they were presented. I am proud to work with a group of people able to navigate a dynamic situation and provide support for the public and partner groups all struggling to adapt to conditions none of us had experienced before.

Writing this letter in October it is hard to think back about last winter and the last year. Times before March seem very far away. Events that seemed important for the Avalanche Information Center before we felt the impact of COVID-19 now seem disconnected from the challenges we are facing and the events we anticipate. The only thing certain is that 2020 was a very challenging year.



Sincerely,

Etham Greene

Ethan Greene Director Colorado Avalanche Information Center

## LETTER FROM FRIENDS OF CAIC// AARON CARLSON



The Friends of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center is a 501(c) organization that was created to support the CAIC, while contributing to avalanche awareness and education throughout Colorado. Since 2014 we have invested just over \$1.8 million into avalanche safety. This money has funded Know Before You Go, developed avalanche safety videos and signage, created outreach for new and existing users, built new web and mobile applications, and supported the CAIC's forecast operations.

The 2019/2020 season began with excitement for our organization as we added another full time staff member, expanded our board of directors, and started strategic planning for the years to come. It ended with uncertainty. On March 14, 2020 ski areas in Colorado closed abruptly due to the COVID 19 pandemic. After this closure we saw a mass influx of users in the Colorado backcountry. Our partner shops sold out of backcountry gear within days, closed ski areas experienced uphill user numbers skyrocket, and trailhead parking lots were packed. Also at this time Friends of CAIC canceled all fundraising events, our spring fundraising campaign, and all educational events. Our focus was to maintain our public safety messaging and communicate with the backcountry community on recreating responsibly during a global pandemic. These were uncharted waters for the Friends of CAIC. Despite the challenging and abrupt end to our fundraising and programming, the Friends of CAIC staff worked with absolute drive to pivot and adapt the organization. This dedication allowed us to make the 2019/2020 season a record breaking fundraising year for the Friends of CAIC. Because of this we were able to invest \$315,379.69 into avalanche forecasting, technology, and education last season and plan for the unknown for at least the next two seasons. I am proud to get to work with such committed individuals.

The backcountry community is growing and we are proud to be a part of it. Despite the continued uncertainty, the Friends of CAIC will continue to help build the most robust avalanche forecasting operation in the United States and to make avalanche awareness an essential part of the winter backcountry community's daily plan.



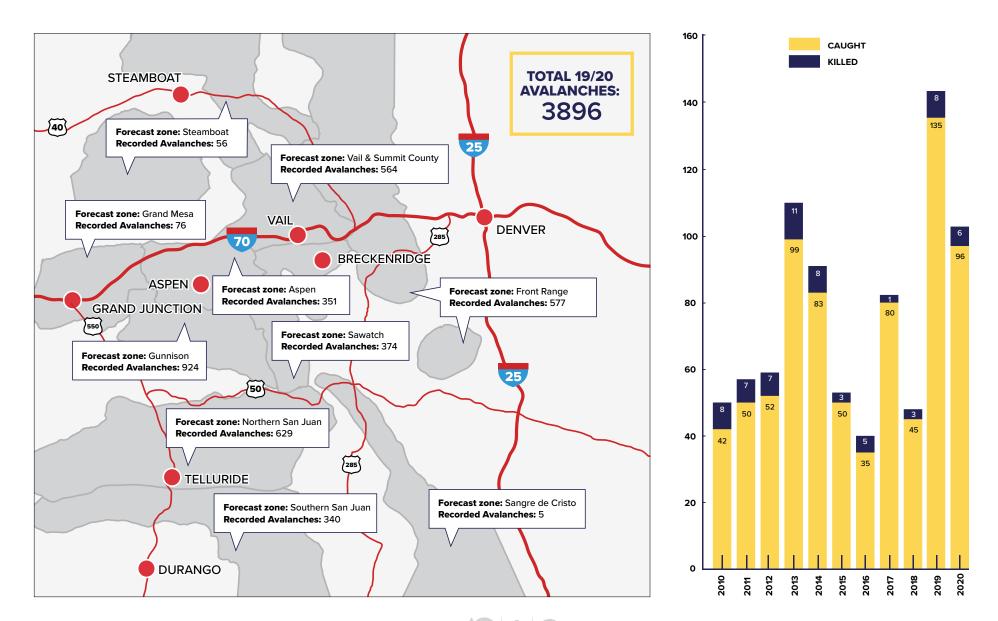
Sincerely,

Aaron Carlson *Executive Director Friends of CAIC* 



## BY THE NUMBERS//AVALANCHES & ACCIDENTS

The CAIC recorded data on more than **3896** avalanches. There were **96** people caught in **85** separate avalanches. Of those caught, **6** were killed. The CAIC published **20** detailed accident reports.



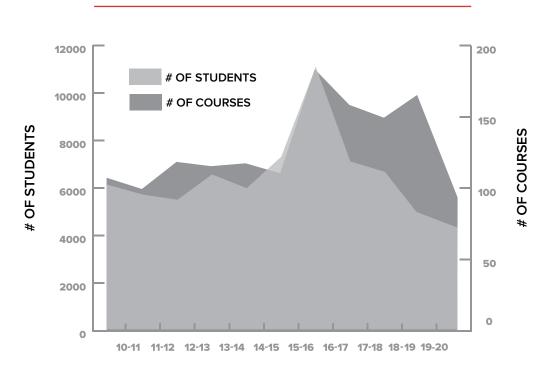


The 2019/2020 total seasonal snowfall was near or above the long-term average in most parts of the state for most of the season. The season started early, with above-average snowfall in October and early November. Many sites fell below their average in late November during a three week dry spell, but rebounded close to the long-term average by December as snowfall returned before Thanksgiving. Continuous light snowfall continued through January and February, though February included a couple intense storms in the first two weeks of the month. Statewide snowpack stayed near long-term average through April, peaking at 103% of 30-year median peak snow water equivalent on April 4. The snowfall data in the table below is incomplete. Many ski areas stopped measuring snowfall after thier closures due to Covid 19.

		SNOWFALL IN INCHES						
LOCATION	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	TOTAL	% OF AVG
ARAPAHOE BASIN	17	42	39	71	-	-	135	61%
BEAVER CREEK	51	42	51	70	17	-	199	82%
BERTHOUD PASS	18	57	58	60	36	53	282	95%
BRECKENRIDGE	23	70	64	128	13	-	298	89%
COPPER MOUNTAIN	13	41	35	95	10	-	158	69%
KEYSTONE (NORTH PEAK)	18	48	44	64	42	12	184	97%
LOVELAND BASIN	27	61	51	91	50	55	295	97%
STEAMBOAT	22	54	84	85	13	-	195	77%
VAIL	26	51	64	91	42	47	276	101%
WINTER PARK	40	66	70	89	45	28	338	114%
ASPEN HIGHLANDS	24	44	35	34	35	-	134	98%
ASPEN MOUNTAIN	25	43	38	35	14	-	122	93%
GOTHIC	18	45	30	32	58	25	188	67%
MCCLURE PASS	25	45	51	46	34	10	211	92%
MONARCH MOUNTAIN SKI AREA	49	70	47	42	9	-	178	86%
RED MOUNTAIN PASS	48	66	51	49	57	24	295	98%
TELLURIDE	41	60	50	30	56	-	220	92%
WOLF CREEK SKI AREA	61	114	43	35	69	-	301	103%
MONUMENT PASS	35	51	45	26	26	15	198	86%
COAL BANK PASS	49	80	37	20	61	9	256	92%
MOLAS PASS	43	67	34	30	56	13	243	97%



## EDUCATION COURSES//ATTENDANCE & EVENTS



YEAR OVER YEAR



COURSE BREAKDOWN



\*Many 19-20 courses were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic

#### **OTHER EDUCATION COURSES INCLUDE:**

- Colorado Snow and Avalanche Workshop
- Non-motorized awareness programs
- Snowmobile awareness programs
- Workplace safety awareness programs
- Mountain Weather Forecasting seminars
- Ski Patrol in-house training
- Rescue clinics
- Training for Government and Search & Rescue groups
- Colorado Backcountry Avalanche Workshop



## MEDIA CONTACTS//WEBSITE, APP & SOCIAL MEDIA

#### MEDIA CONTACTS

SOCIAL MEDIA

CAIC staff gave **146 INTERVIEWS** to press and media contacts, including Colorado, national, and international news organizations.

WEBSITE & MOBILE APP



2,176,198 PAGE VIEWS WEBSITE VISITS



**18,000** CURRENT ACTIVE APP USERS

	fiends of calc	<b>⊗ CAIC</b>
Facebook	<b>19,322</b> FOLLOWERS	<b>19,491</b> FOLLOWERS
Instagram	<b>18,326</b> FOLLOWERS	<b>27,031</b> FOLLOWERS
Twitter	2,047 FOLLOWERS	3,712 FOLLOWERS
You Tube YouTube	N/A	<b>1,500</b> FOLLOWERS





## LETTER//FRIENDS OF CAIC DONOR



# DONOR HIGHLIGHT

As a former Friends of Colorado Avalanche Information Center (FoCAIC) board member and the co-founder of an outdoor gear company, I have a vested interest in supporting FoCAIC's mission. I believe in the work they do: I use the forecasts the CAIC produces and think my friends, family, and customers should use them too.

But those aren't the only reasons why I support the Friends. I do it because I know that government funding doesn't pay for the entirety of this program and I don't want to lose any of these valuable services.

Just look at how far the CAIC has come in just 15 or 20 years. Back when I was telemarking, you'd call a phone number on your landline and get a 30-second recording. Now you go to the CAIC website or Friends of CAIC app and there are multiple layers of detail available to help you plan your outings: regional forecasts, weather station data, field reports, avalanche observations, accident reports, class schedules, even videos of forecasters doing recent stability tests.

# One thing's for sure: I'm getting a lot more for my donation buck now than I was 15 years ago!

That's only the forecasting side. Along with the Utah Avalanche Center, Friends of CAIC and CAIC are founding partners of Know Before You Go 2.0, a youth education program that I believe has prevented teen riders from getting killed. As a father myself, this is dear to my heart. Avalanche safety isn't a field in which you can learn from your mistakes: they're usually deadly. This program is getting to young riders at just the right time in their lives: when they're starting to think about those enticing backcountry access gates. If it weren't for programs like this, we'd be seeing the fatality rate explode over the past decade just as fast as the increase we've seen in backcountry use.

But we can't take this for granted. We've seen other avalanche centers close in the past when budgets got tight. And is recreating in avalanche terrain truly "essential" in the eyes of a typically urban politician? I encourage you to join me in making an annual donation to Friends of CAIC. This will enable CAIC forecasters and educators to continually improve their offerings—and maintain stability in the face of constantly shifting government priorities.

Looking forward to another great season!

"Edge"



## FORECASTER HIGHLIGHT//MARK MUELLER



## FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO PAGOSA SPRINGS Mark Mueller shares his snow forecasting journey

I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and started skiing while I was in high school. I worked in several Bay Area ski shops, so when I decided to move to the mountains and ski I found it easy to

find ski area employment. While working in the Alpine Meadows ski shop in the Tahoe area I met Dave Beck, a Sierra legend and developed an interest in ski mountaineering. As an aspiring ski mountaineer I needed to know something about avalanches. This led to an unplanned early encounter with an in-bounds avalanche at Alpine. It had a very fortunate outcome, and did nothing to squelch my enthusiasm. If nothing else, being in an area with a large avalanche mitigation program only stoked my interest. Tossing explosives and skiing powder, now that sounded very interesting and fun.

I left Alpine and enrolled in the new Ski Area Technology (now called Ski Area Operations) at Colorado Mountain College (CMC) in Leadville, CO. My enthusiasm for avalanches hadn't dimmed and I took a five day Professional Avalanche Course from Rod Newcomb's American Avalanche Institute in Jackson Hole. At CMC, Ken Host, the Ski Tech instructor encouraged me with this advice: "you can make a life out of this". How very true that became.

After graduation from CMC in 1976, I wrote to a number of western ski areas looking for patrol work, but it was a drought year and there was nothing available. I returned to the Sierra and scored a lift operator job at Squaw Valley. The next winter that turned into a patrol job when abundant snows returned to the Sierra. My first day of patrol work in November 1977 was a snow safety day on Gold Coast Ridge and I was in - tossing explosives, triggering avalanches, and skiing powder! Many more snow safety days followed on the numerous control routes at Squaw Valley with tons of adventure and abundant opportunities to learn about mountain weather, snow, avalanches, and myself. I rose through the ranks and became Ski Patrol Director. I held that position for 12 of the 15 winters I spent on the Squaw Valley Patrol. I worked year-round at Squaw and put to good use many of the skills I learned in the Ski Area Tech program at CMC.

All good things must come to an end and the end at Squaw was timely as a new highway avalanche forecasting program was beginning in Colorado. I spent one winter on the Wolf Creek Ski Area Patrol waiting for the funding to kick in for the highway forecaster position at Wolf Creek Pass. Talk about getting in on the ground floor. Don Bachman and Denny Hogan in the Silverton Forecast Office and CAIC Director Knox Williams and Nick Logan, Assistant Director offered guidance and encouragement, but I was pretty much on my own and was allowed to create the position as I saw it. Learning to forecast without the instant



## FORECASTER HIGHLIGHT//MARK MUELLER

access to explosive testing was a challenge. But that improved and enlarged my snow knowledge and every winter since has added to that accumulation of knowledge, experience, and intuition. My wife Sandy, an avalanche professional in her own right, and I made our home in Pagosa Springs. Along with Wolf Creek, I also monitored and forecasted for other highways in south central Colorado: Cumbres, La Manga, Monarch, and Slumgullion Passes.

From this vantage point the years seem to have flown by. All that we've accomplished together - both at CAIC and with CDOT, leaves me with a tremendous feeling of gratitude and appreciation for the role that I've been able to play.

It's not hard to remember how little we had to work with in the early 1990s. Not much in the way of internet resources, limited real time weather and snow condition info, and limited tools for mitigation. Progress seemed slow at times, but we always were moving forward. Our tools now include numerous weather models, widespread remote weather information, the ability to communicate almost anywhere by radio or cell phone, and very effective and efficient mitigation tools – Remote Avalanche Control Systems (RACS) and howitzers. All that being said, I learned the job on skis and for me nothing has replaced being out on a stormy day poking around in the snow, feeling the snow under my skis, making up my mind about spatial distribution and sensitivity to triggers and most importantly: is snow going to reach the highway? When and where? It is really easy for me to see how far the two organizations, CAIC and



CDOT have come. As I get ready to leave CAIC after 27 winters, I'm so impressed with my colleagues at CAIC- their passion, expertise, and commitment - as well as the dedicated and skilled crews I have worked with at CDOT. It's been a pleasure and a privilege to be a part of it all!

Although I won't be a professional anymore, I know my passion for the mountains in winter, snow, and avalanches won't diminish. Sandy and I have lots of plans to travel and see the world, both on skis and off.

## **THANK YOU FOR 27 YEARS OF FORECASTING, MARK!**



## STAFF & BOARD//CAIC & FRIENDS OF CAIC

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Weather Specialist

**Mike Cooperstein** 

Jason Konigsberg

Avalanche Forecaster

Avalanche Forecaster

Avalanche Forecaster

Jeff Davis

**Bill Nalli** 

Brandon Levy

Weather & Avalanche Forecaster

Weather & Avalanche Forecaster

#### CAIC STAFF

Ethan Greene Director

Brian Lazar Deputy Director

Naomi Hodges CAIC Admin

**Rebecca Hodgetts** Lead Avalanche Forecaster

Mark Mueller Lead Avalanche Forecaster

**Spencer Logan** Lead Avalanche Scientist

#### FRIENDS OF CAIC STAFF

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Ann Mellick Avalanche Forecaster

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**Colin Mitchell** Avalanche Forecaster

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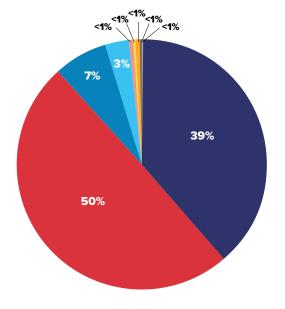
Jonathan Lantz Board Member David Clark Board Member

Samantha Killgore Board Member

Ethan Greene Non Voting CAIC Liaison Aaron Carlson Ex-Officio



## FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN//CAIC



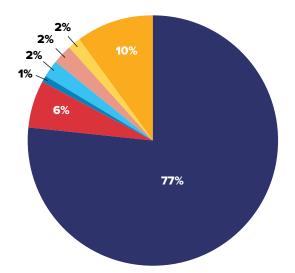
#### FY20 CAIC REVENUE

Severance Tax	\$690,514
CDOT Intergovernmental Agreement	\$883,128
Friends of CAIC	\$125,000
United States Forest Service	\$50,000
Colorado Ski Country USA	\$10,000
Interest Income	\$8,030
Education Programs	\$7,712
Snowmobile Fund	\$2,000
Other Private Sector Donations	\$1,800
Total Revenue	\$1,776,384

#### FY20 CAIC EXPENDITURES

Total Expenditures	\$1,767,510.06
Total Administrative Costs	\$176,698.28
Travel Expenses	\$29,016.37
Cost of Goods and Services	\$41,174.89
Telecommunications and Utilities	\$41,078.99
Leases	\$15,075.80
Vehicles	\$107,860.36
Personnel Services	\$1,356,605.37



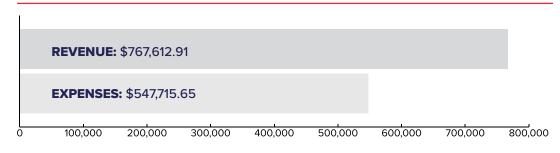


## FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN//FRIENDS OF CAIC

#### EXPENSE BREAKDOWN BY CLASS

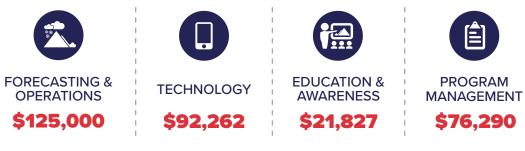


#### REVENUE & EXPENSES



#### COST BREAKDOWN

The Friends of CAIC invested **\$315,379.69** into avalanche forecasting and education in Colorado during the 2019/2020 season.





## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

2019-2020 FRIENDS OF CAIC DONORS

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Doug Pflugh and Katie Weber Doug Schwartz Doug Swartz **Douglas and Suzanne Goforth Douglas Gammell** Drew Anderson **Drew Griffith Drew Saunders Dudley Locke Dustin McQuate Dustin Williams Dwight Hall Dwight Henninger Dylan Anderson** Dylan Droxler **Dylan Hettinger** Ed Wasserman Edward Fornataro Edward Trzcienski **Eileen and Walter Kintsch** Eli Bernstein Eli Feldman Elisabeth Aron Elizabeth Pansing **Elizabeth Rose** Elizabeth Schoeberlein Elizabeth Talenfeld Ellen Rosenberg Ellie Stanton Elliot Clymer **Emerson Fuller** Emilio Alcala Emily and Steven Curray **Emily Hudish** Emily Olsen **Emily Wasserman** Eric and Alice Wurtz Eric and Heather Distad Eric Benson Eric Branton Eric Brownson

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