

SIERRA AVALANCHE CENTER ANNUAL REPORT

2018-2019



Thank You

The Sierra Avalanche Center (SAC) continues to function as a partnership between the Tahoe National Forest and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. This relationship continues to strengthen both operationally and financially while continuing to gain support in the community.

Some of the accomplishments from this past season include:

- SAC's nonprofit branch contributed over **\$69,000** to the Forest Service avalanche forecasting efforts, and additionally **funded 81 professional observations** to supplement forecaster data.
- The Tahoe National Forest (TNF) provided **\$11,800** in infrastructure support. The USDA Forest Service provided **\$41,400** for forecaster salaries in the form of \$20,150 from Region 5, \$9,250 from Region 4, and \$12,000 from the Truckee Ranger District.
- The nonprofit generated approximately **\$76,000** net income in FY 2019 that will be utilized to support future operating budgets.
- During the 2018-19 season, SAC's advisory website was accessed nearly **925,000 times** by approximately **131,000 unique visitors**.
- SAC issued **145 daily avalanche advisories** and **2 early season snow condition reports**.
- Avalanche forecasters continued to strengthen their working relationship with the National Weather Service in Reno, local ski patrols, and other professional organizations.
- SAC hosted the sixth annual California Avalanche Workshop, providing a full day of continuing education for nearly **300 members** of the public.



- The nonprofit put on the seventh, very successful and well attended, **Professional Avalanche Workshop (PAWS)**, in memory of Bill Foster.
- The nonprofit operated **five three-day motorized level 1 avalanche courses** thanks to the G17 grant from California OHMVR Division.
- SAC presented **five motorized specific avalanche awareness presentations.**
- SAC presented **five avalanche awareness sessions** covering all the fifth grade classes in Lake Tahoe Unified School District. This was part of the EpicPromise Winter Adventure Program in partnership with South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition.
- Additionally, SAC presented over **20 other avalanche awareness presentations** at various venues ranging from local high schools and ski teams to regional outdoor shops and college campuses.
- In partnership with the Women of the Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows Ski Patrol, SAC issued **nearly 30 avalanche education scholarships** to the public, totaling approximately **\$15,000** in awards.

We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who has put forth time and effort to support the Sierra Avalanche Center.

Season Recap

Like all the winters in the Central Sierra Nevada Mountains, the winter of 2018-2019 was unique. After a long dry fall, a large storm dropped several feet of snow in late November and provided enough coverage for winter to get started. It stayed mostly cold through December but snowfall remained limited with less than 40% of average precipitation for the month. Still enough snow accumulated to add to the base and some avalanche activity did occur.

The skies opened up a little more in the first three weeks of January and temperatures remained cool. During the last week of January the weather warmed up and dried out. Still January came in at ~130% of average precipitation for the month. The largest storm of the season arrived during the first week of February. This large cold storm was the first in a series of strong winter storms that seemed to last the entire month.

Between Feb. 1 and March 13 only 8 days did not record measurable snowfall. During Feb. snowfall amounts averaged more than 8 inches per storm day. Needless to say avalanche activity increased with numerous reported avalanches and near misses. February more than doubled the average precipitation amounts. It was also one of the snowiest months on record. Stormy weather continued into March bringing more avalanches and incidents. Sunshine and spring weather remained elusive.

By the end of March, the storms had decreased in intensity if not in frequency. This trend continued into April with many small spring storms and no extended periods of warm sunny weather until the third week of April. By the third week of April when the spring weather finally arrived, the Central Sierra recorded more than 160% of average SWE. The snow cover was more widespread due to temperatures being cooler than many recent winters but still warmer than most winters before 2000.

Despite the huge snow year and several significant avalanche cycles, we were fortunate (and thrilled) that there were no avalanche fatalities within the Sierra Avalanche Center forecast region this season.

The Forecast Team

The Tahoe National Forest employs the avalanche forecasters who work in the Sierra Avalanche Center Program. Brandon Schwartz is lead forecaster and directs the avalanche forecasting program. Andy Anderson works as a senior forecaster under Brandon. Steve Reynaud works as third forecaster in the program under Schwartz and Anderson.

All three forecasters work 5 days per week collecting daily avalanche, snowpack, and weather observations. This data is combined with additional data received from the SAC professional observers, local professional backcountry guide services, local professional ski patrols, and the general public.

The Tahoe National Forest forecasters are solely responsible for the creation of the daily avalanche advisories issued through the SAC website as well as any issued avalanche watches and warnings.

Advisory Area

The advisory area of the Sierra Avalanche Center covers approximately 1,500 square miles of the Central Sierra Nevada Mountains of California and Nevada. The advisory area is bound by Highway 49 Yuba Pass on the north and Highway 4 Ebbetts Pass on the south.

The advisory covers the avalanche terrain along the Sierra Crest and extends to the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada. Two inroads to the west side of the Sierra Crest exist within in the advisory area at Carson Pass and at Ebbetts Pass, in order to include the backcountry terrain surrounding the established boundaries of the Kirkwood and Bear Valley ski areas.

Finances

INCOME (TOTAL)	\$370,299	EXPENSES (TOTAL)	\$293,811
CA State Parks OHV Grant	\$123,097	Forecasters / Observers	\$83,369
Individual Donations	\$78,878	Education	\$68,444
SAC Ski Day Lift Ticket Sales	\$60,250	Executive Director	\$55,859
Corporate Donations	\$44,227	Web/IT/Professional	\$26,268
Events	\$38,923	Social Media/Marketing	\$19,860
Nevada OHV Grant	\$11,410	Office/General Admin	\$16,676
Foundation Donations	\$9,831	Banking/other gains/losses	\$9,630
Other Income	\$3,683	Payroll taxes	\$6,956
		Equipment	\$6,749

Sponsors

The Sierra Avalanche Center operates thanks to the generous support of our sponsors.

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Extreme Sponsors

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