

2026

Annual Report

Providing life-saving avalanche information and education throughout the Inland Northwest since the mid-1980s.



IPAC

Idaho Panhandle
Avalanche Center



Friends of
IPAC

A person wearing a red jacket, a maroon helmet, and goggles is crouched on a snowy mountain slope. They are using a long-handled tool to probe a layer of snow. The background shows a steep, snow-covered mountain with some evergreen trees.

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Cover Photo: This avalanche was triggered by throwing an ECT-sized block of snow over the ridge onto the start zone. This spoke volumes to the fragile nature of the snowpack, and the ensuing sensitivity to trigger an avalanche increased with the next round of new snow and strong winds. Photo: Essex Prescott. **Above:** IPAC Forecaster Izzy Davis investigates the type of weak layer that failed in this avalanche. The slide was triggered mid-slope on a steep north-facing convex roll away from the ridge line. The avalanche failed on the Valentines Day surface hoar. Photo: Mikey Church

Introduction - Mission

The Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center (IPAC) operates as a collaborative effort between the Idaho Panhandle National Forests and the Friends of the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center (FIPAC), a 501(c)(3) organization, and additional support from the Lolo National Forest in Montana.

The IPAC is a USFS Avalanche Center that provides regular avalanche forecasting across four mountain regions and approximately 1.9 million acres of public lands in North Idaho and Northwestern Montana - the Selkirk, Purcell, and West and East Cabinet Mountains, and a portion of the Bitterroot Mountains in the Silver Valley.

FIPAC, IPAC's non-profit partner, is a grassroots organization aimed at supporting avalanche forecasting operations and avalanche awareness throughout the Idaho Panhandle. The long-standing commitment to provide quality and accessible avalanche education continues to be a fundamental part of our mission. FIPAC is guided by a passionate, community Board of Directors who promote community engagement and support of the avalanche program through public communication and events.

Federal funding only covers about 50% of IPAC's annual operating budget. Your donations and financial support through memberships and business sponsorship directly helps fund IPAC's forecast and education staff, and allows us to provide weather and avalanche forecasts, and avalanche education to our communities.



EDUCATION

423

Participants in classroom
and field based courses

31

Public Education Opportunities
(Motorized & Non-Motorized)

FORECASTING

90

Forecast Days

185

Forecast Products (148) and
Snowpack Updates (37)

6

Avalanche Watch to Warning Cycles

145

Mountain Weather Forecasts

Above the Cloud Accomplishments



Elephant Peak rising above the inversion, East Cabinet Mountains. Photo: Mikey Church.





Community Engagement

36,194

Total observation page views

232

Total observations (167 staff, 65 public)

35%

Percentage of public observations submitted through AVY APP

6

Portable beacon checkers placed at popular motorized and non-motorized trailheads



129,703

Total website page views

48,379

Total forecast page views

1,334

Forecast email subscribers

14,079

Combined Facebook & Instagram followers

Background: A natural avalanche on Star Peak in the West Cabinet Mountains. Photo: Aaron McMaster. **Left:** FIPAC setting up a beacon checker in the Silver Valley. Photo: Gabe White.



IPAC Director Letter

The Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center continues to make positive strides as a forecasting program. The injection of a consistent workflow process, distilling a culture of open, team communication, and broadening our snowpack data collection to gain a more holistic understanding of avalanche conditions is helping advance IPAC's public safety messaging and outreach. Ultimately, the successful growth and development of this program is a direct result of the hard work and dedication of team IPAC.



The 2025-26 season brought a few new faces to the team and we also invested in a couple off-grid cameras to watch PVC pipes with numbers get buried, and which provided us with vital snowfall information from data sparse areas.

Staff reinforcement in the form of two full-time Forest Service forecasters helped boost the program's capacity to continue issuing avalanche forecasts 5 days per week. Coalescing the team's strengths and skill sets, IPAC produced monthly snowpack and weekly weather videos to diversify our outreach portfolio with the goal of engaging more backcountry users about the “most current” avalanche and weather conditions.

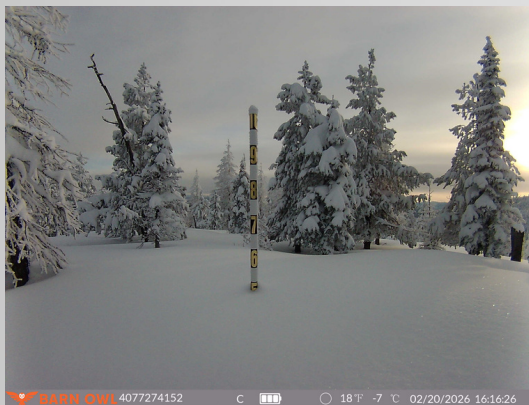
The new BarnOwl “eyes in the sky” cellular cameras braved the harsh, wet winter weather and gave us a real-time visual of what conditions were like in the mountains. Whether it was helping determine the flavor of precipitation or giving us a live look at how much new snow had fallen, we frequently used this information as a rock to stand on when we faced an on-the-line forecast decision. We are excited to expand our camera array next season.





And last but not least, thank you to everyone who participates in our avalanche program - whether that be checking the forecast before heading into the mountains, submitting an observation, or taking a class. While we don't hear about all the close calls, we are grateful that there were no avalanche-related fatalities for the second straight season. A few more mistakes or a little less luck could have contributed to a different outcome. Strong, community-based relationships are foundational to a sustainable forecasting program.

Chris Bilbrey
Director
Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
U.S. Forest Service



FIPAC Executive Director Letter



For those of you who may not know me yet, my name is Jill McFarlane, and I stepped into the role of Executive Director of the Friends of the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center last November, 2025.

As I've spent this season learning the ropes and working alongside our incredible staff, volunteers, board members, sponsors, and supporters, I've come to appreciate just how special this community is. The passion and commitment behind this organization are truly inspiring, and I feel fortunate to be part of it.

This year, I was empowered by our board and community to help move FIPAC toward a more professional and sustainable structure while maintaining the collaborative spirit that has always been at its core. What our team accomplished during a very low snow year was remarkable and speaks to the dedication of everyone involved.

Looking ahead, I see tremendous opportunity for growth. With continued support, we can strengthen forecasting, expand education and outreach, and build an even stronger foundation for the future. Thank you for helping make this work possible and for your commitment to keeping our mountain community informed, prepared, and safe.

Jill McFarlane
Executive Director
Friends of IPAC



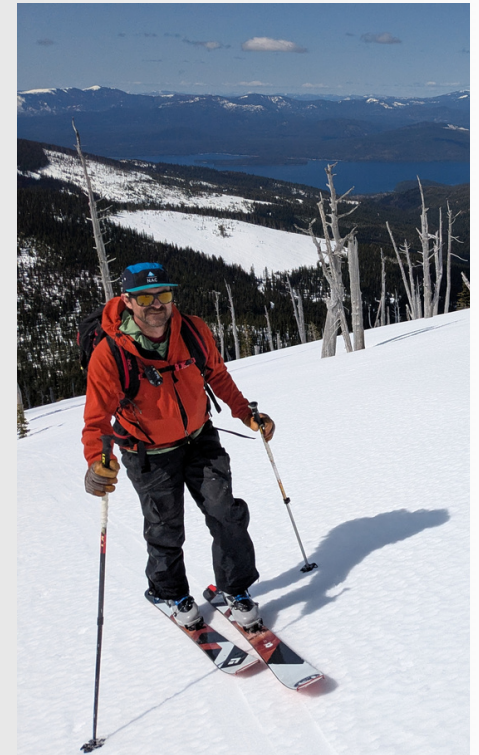
From Team IPAC

The IPAC forecast team wrapped up another great, though sometimes soggy, and rewarding winter season dedicated to providing avalanche forecasts, mountain weather information, and public safety messages to the Idaho Panhandle and northwestern Montana. This season brought a wide range of challenges, from unusual snowpack conditions to, at times, a lack of snow altogether. Mild weather, limited low-elevation snow cover and extensive tree blowdown made accessing the snow a challenge for most of the winter. The good news, we all feel more proficient running a chainsaw.

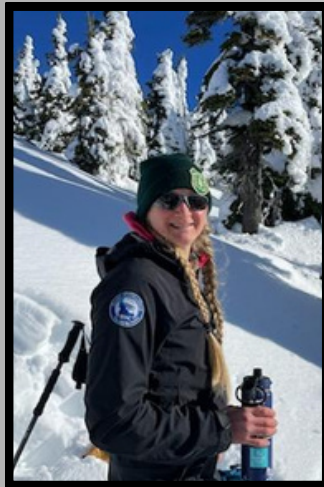
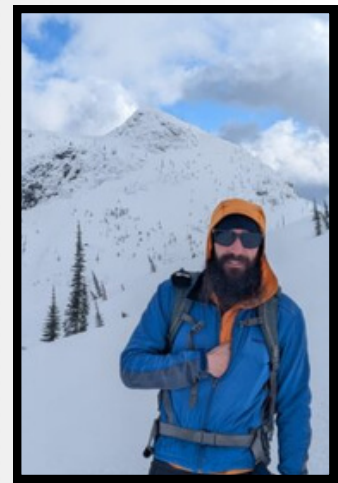
This winter required more head scratching and vigilance than prior seasons in recent memory. Unusual weather patterns - periods of heavy snowfall followed by torrential rains and warming events - multiple fragile persistent weak layers, and complex spring avalanche cycles kept the forecast team in a constant state of reassessment and adaptation. While this contributed to long days in the field and discussions lasting into the evening hours, the team remained positive and committed.

The program continues to expand the collaboration with our local avalanche community - motorized and non-motorized users, dedicated public observers, ski areas and their patrols, and local guides - and education outreach remains the foundation to our mission. We take pride in serving winter recreation and appreciate all the support to help make another successful season possible.

Jeff Thompson
IPAC Avalanche Forecaster



Forecast and Field Team

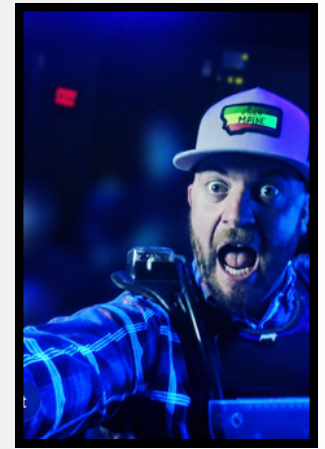
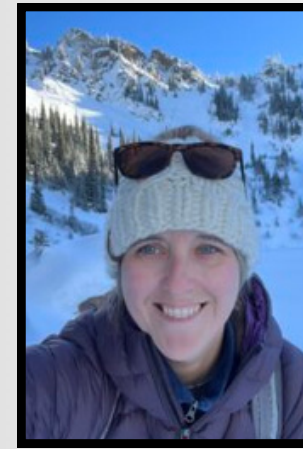
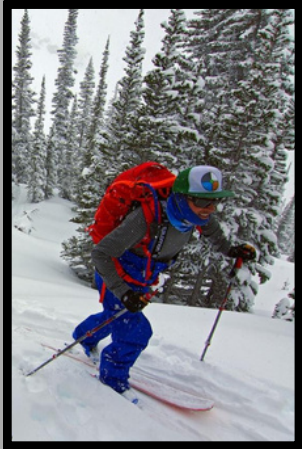


Forecast Team (from upper left) - Mikey Church, Izzy Davis, Jackson George, Jeff Thompson, and Micah Krmpotich, **USFS Professional Observers** - Kyla Berendzen, George Lagesse, Sean Smith, and Kali Rose Zurfluh

Idaho Panhandle National Forests (not pictured): Deputy Forest Supervisor Jason Brey, Recreation Staff Officer Josh Jurgensen



Team FIPAC



Board of Directors (from upper left): Sean Mirus (President), Tom Eddy (Vice President), Mike Brede (Secretary), Jon Totten (Treasurer), Larry Banks, Pat Green, Kim Grollmus, Gary Quinn, Brett Vangen-Weeks, and Gabe White, **Executive Director:** Jill McFarlane, **Sponsorship Coordinator:** Brendan Bonner



329

Documented avalanches
(299 natural, 30 triggered)

232

Professional and public
observations submitted

176

Avalanches size
D2 or larger

144

Rain triggered wet snow
avalanches



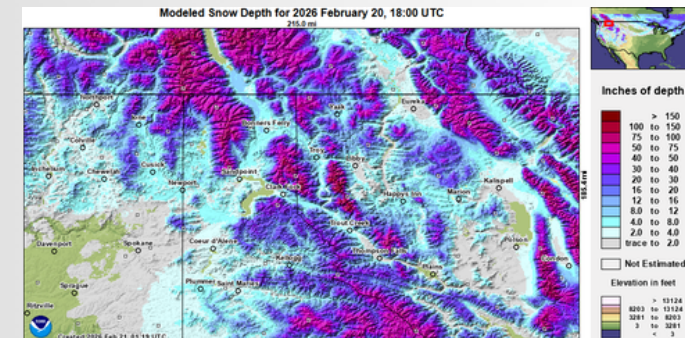
The first significant winter storm arrived in October blanketing the mountains with a foot plus of snow. Additional storms and unseasonably cold temps built a healthy early-season snowpack and set the stage for what we thought would be a relatively strong snowpack foundation. However, the snowpack took a turn for the worse when November arrived and storms brought elevated freezing levels and persistent rain.

For most of November, our forecast area received 4 to 5 inches of rain, but a few locations in the Selkirk and West Cabinet Mountains received over 10 inches. This sudden reversal took a toll on snow quality, decimated the snowpack at lower elevations, and the first natural avalanche cycle of the season ensued with many wet avalanches at higher elevations. By Thanksgiving, a welcomed pattern shift arrived with cooler temps and snow.

The more seasonal weather halted snowpack depletion and 2 to 3 feet of snow fell over two weeks. And like that, we were back to managing dry snow hazards above a robust rain crust. Dreams of powder riding slowly came to fruition, but the snowpack reminded us that change is inevitable. Cold temps, fresh snow, and shallow snow depths aided facet formation above the buried rain crust and large avalanches at this interface started to become more frequent.

Left: Rain runnels litter the slope. They formed during a heavy rain on snow event in early-December and likely triggered the avalanche in the center of the opening.
Photo: Mikey Church.

Season Review - Forecasting



Above: Modeled snow depth for IPACs forecast zones for February 20, 2026. Peak snow depths occurred on this date for the 2025-26 forecast season. Image: NOAA.



Forecasting

When the first Atmospheric River (AR) arrived in early-December, heavy snowfall quickly flipped to heavy rain over mountain top elevations. This event drenched our powder riding hopes and flushed them back into the river and lakes. The mountains received 5 to 9 inches of rain in 4 days and ridgetop winds exceeded 100 mph. Additional Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) loss from the snowpack caused rivers to surge and devastating flooding ensued taking out homes, roads, and infrastructure.

The plume ebbed and flowed for about a week and the forecast area got crushed with impressive rainfall and damaging winds. Roads frequently used for fieldwork were snow free and blocked by endless stacks of downed trees or large debris piles. Where we could access snow covered slopes, we found many large to very large natural avalanches that likely failed in the layer of facets above the November rain crust.

The last half of December oscillated between periods of snow, light to moderate rain, short-lived high-pressure, then rinse-repeat with another round of snow. One rain crust in particular was named the “Grinch Crust” because rising rain levels on Christmas Eve stole the nice riding conditions. Finally, an Arctic storm before the New Year delivered the next round of meaningful snowfall, but this time, no rain at the end.

The final days of 2025 were clear, calm, and bitterly cold. This spawned the season's first surface hoar event across the forecast area and at all elevations - even on many alpine slopes. We assumed at some point these problematic feathers would influence instability, but the magnitude to which instability played out was not fully anticipated.

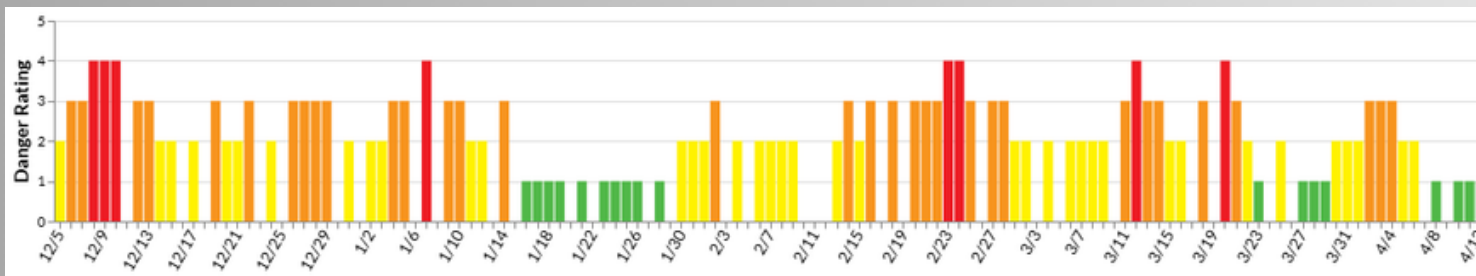


Figure: Tier 1 danger ratings for the 2025-26 season. Image: IPAC. **Right:** There she goes! Historic rain-on-snow events are benchmark events because they happen so rarely, if at all in past times. Lower Lightning Creek road, West Cabinet Mountains. December 12, 2025. Photo: Kevin Davis.



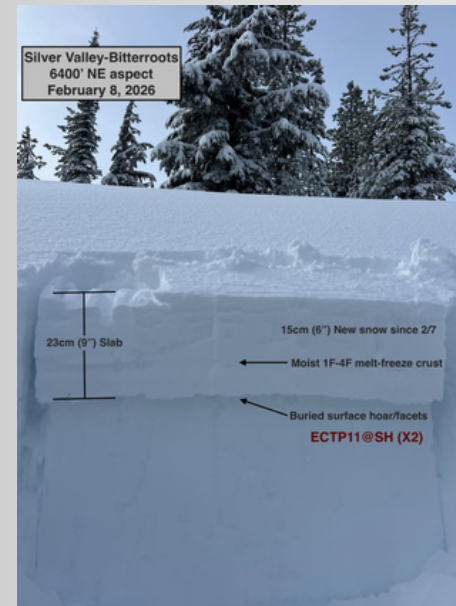
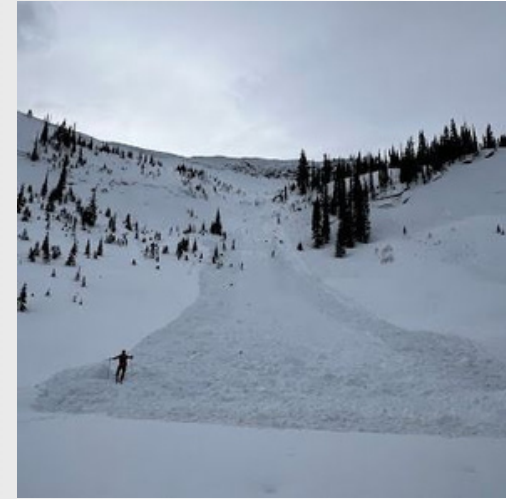
Forecasting

Snowfall returned in early-January and lasted about two weeks. Light winds allowed the surface hoar to get buried intact, but as slabs thickened, their weight slowly overloaded the surface hoar below and avalanche activity increased. A strong warm front eventually blew through and pushed the rain line higher in elevation. As slabs got wetted from the rain, the added weight walked instability into a natural avalanche cycle. In just shy of two weeks, we documented 52 avalanches large enough to bury, injure, or kill a person all failing in the layer of surface hoar from varying snow loads and weather moments.

For the rest of January, high-pressure dominated. Arctic air overtook the region and the avalanche danger plummeted to LOW (1 of 5) as moist upper snowpack layers refroze into a thick mass. This made it more difficult to impact the buried surface hoar. Status quo conditions lasted for two weeks along with discussions about whether the weight of the overlying slab would slowly squash the surface hoar, or if it would remain upright and intact.

February offered a reprieve from the up and down weather-coaster. Incremental snowfall improved riding conditions, access, and kept avalanche conditions mostly in check. The surface hoar layer responsible for all the excitement prior sat mostly dormant, but lingering sensitivity in tests kept our hackles up. Additionally, small storm loads and limited avalanche activity distilled extra uncertainty about how much load will be enough to flip the script.

Top Right: A large natural avalanche triggered by rapidly warming temperatures following an extended period of cold, snowy weather. Photo: izzy Davis. **Bottom Right:** A fresh batch of large surface hoar (15 to 20 mm) that formed during the January dry slump. Photo: Mikey Church. **Left:** Surface hoar on top of a crust with weak facets below the crust all sitting below a consolidating slab. A bad recipe for recreating in steeper terrain. Photo: Izzy Davis.



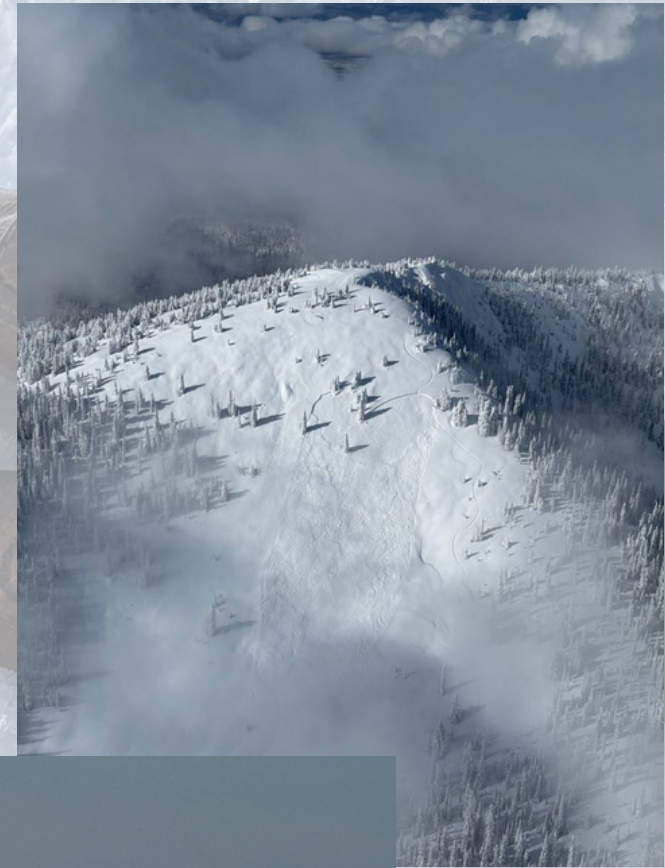
Forecasting

The active weather pattern waned before Valentine's Day and clear, cold conditions returned fueling more surface hoar growth. These grains grew much larger than the New Year layer but in a slightly narrower elevation band. Then over several days, the snowpack received 3 to 4 feet of snow. Generally light winds again kept the feathers intact and the snowpack now had a double-whammy setup with two vulnerable weak layers 1 to 2 feet apart.

This structure made conditions exceptionally touchy and dangerous, and reports of avalanches or close-calls trickled in. Over 11 days, we documented one or more wide-breaking natural avalanches, human-triggered avalanches, or avalanches triggered from adjacent slopes or when a block of snow was thrown onto the slope below. We issued a Special Avalanche Bulletin in tandem with other regional Avalanche Centers in an effort to increase attention to the abnormally dangerous conditions. Through it all, no fatal accidents.

Conditions progressively settled out in March. Slabs stiffened and triggering an avalanche became less likely, but the high-consequence of a mistake lingered. The next snowpack punch arrived mid-month with another AR event. Like prior AR's this season, conditions started cold then warmed giving way to high-elevation rainfall. This AR event was accompanied by the strongest jet stream recorded for this time of year and brought more damaging winds.

Top: A skier-triggered avalanche that failed on a fragile layer of recently buried surface hoar. This one sympathetically triggered two additional slides lower down in the terrain and looker's left, and fortunately no one was caught. Photo: Essex Prescott. **Bottom:** A large natural avalanche that likely ran on February 19 on a southeast-facing slope of Trout Lake Peak around 7,500 feet. This slide broke wide and estimated to run around 1,000 feet downhill. Photo: Chris Bilbrey.



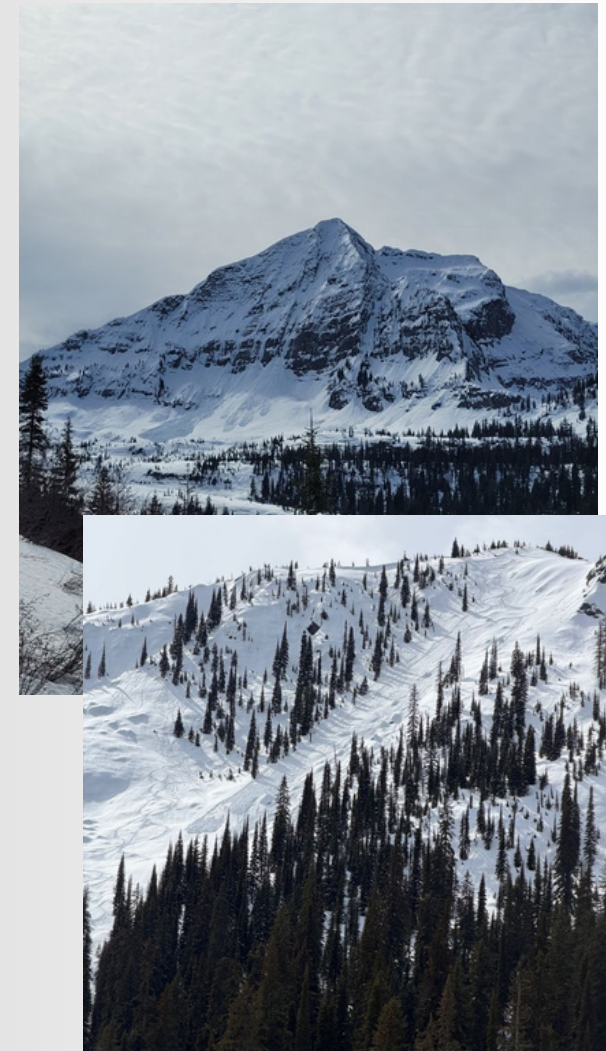
Forecasting

The first part of the storm delivered several feet of wet, dense snow, but the snowpack tolerated the new load despite its recent vulnerabilities. While we observed an uptick in avalanche activity, there were much fewer documented avalanches than recently. Once the heart of the AR event arrived, steady rain saturated upper snowpack layers, contributed to notable snow cover loss at lower elevations, and wet loose slides were the dominant flavor of avalanche hazard.

Days of steady rain drove liquid water deeper into the snowpack inching it closer to the two surface hoar layers. However, the stout slab sitting above those weak interfaces soaked the water like a sponge and the surface hoar was quiet. We documented a few wet slab avalanches in March, but they were generally small and isolated to steep, rocky slopes or areas below cliff bands where rain had a direct pathway to deeper snowpack weaknesses.

April arrived and it looked more like late spring than the first few weeks of spring. Winter hung around 5,000 feet and higher, but the snowpack continued to melt out below that as warm weather persisted. The last flurry of cold, snowy weather came mid-April blanketing the mountains with several feet of snow. As soon as the April sun emerged, it triggered a shed cycle of the new snow. The last avalanche hoorah produced 37 notable loose snow avalanches over 3 days.

The faster than normal snowpack melt-off made getting into the mountains a bit more challenging but conditions became more predictable with each freeze-thaw cycle. Nonetheless, the moisture we received during April kept the snowpack right around or slightly below average by the time forecasting concluded on May 1.

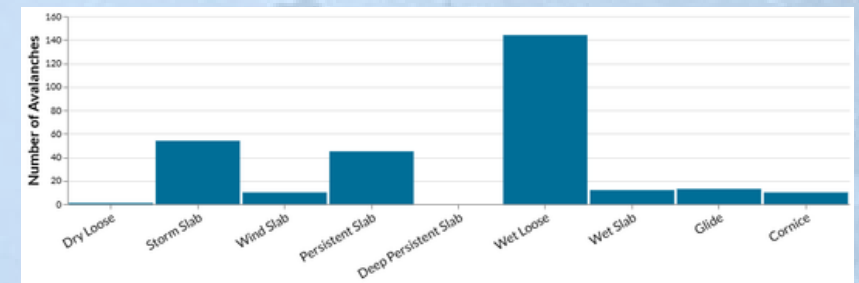
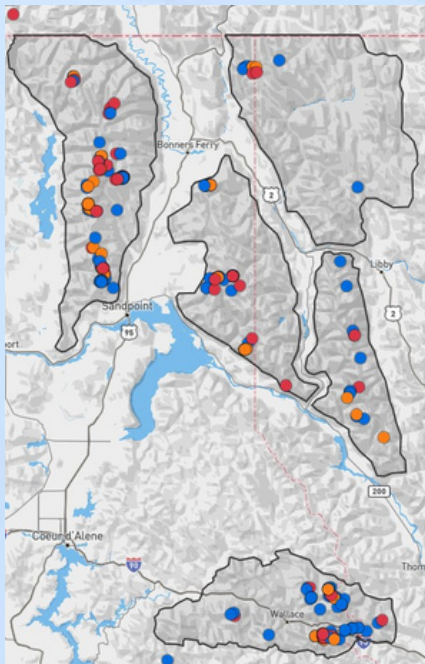
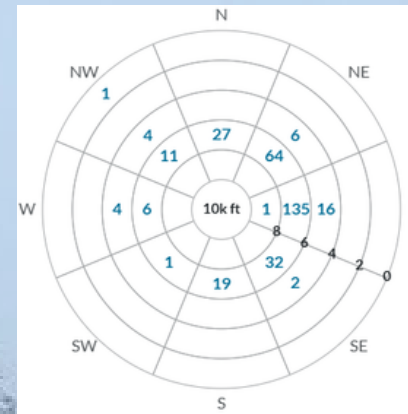
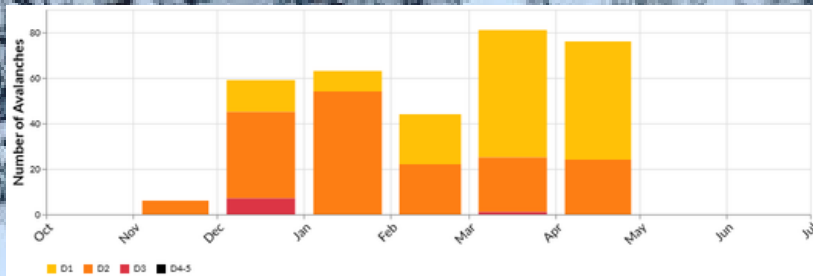


Top: Numerous large avalanches likely ran during an extended period of rain and above freezing temperatures around March 20. Photo: Micah Krmpotich.

Bottom: A small skier-triggered avalanche that failed in softening snow above a crust. The initial slide sympathetically triggered a second, smaller slide on the same slope. Photo: Pat Green.



Avalanches Observations Instabilities



Bottom left: Spatial distribution of professional and public observations for the 2025-26 season. **Top left:** Number of observations and signs of instability (avalanche observed, cracking/ collapsing, no signs of instability), and number of avalanche by size over time. **Top right:** Observed avalanche count by aspect and elevation for all forecast zones. **Bottom right:** Number of avalanches by problem type for all forecast zones. Images: IPAC.



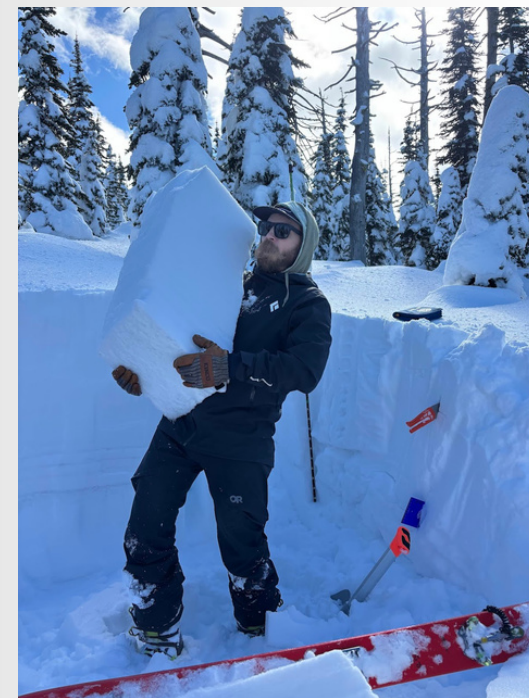
Avalanche Education

FIPAC had another successful avalanche education program during the 2025/26 season, serving **423 students across 26 courses** with the support of our dedicated instructors and volunteers.

This season included a leadership transition in the education program since hiring our Executive Director, and overall participation and feedback remained very positive. We also added another awareness opportunity with our monthly “Pit Chat” where the forecasters do a deep dive into the snow conditions.

With a low snow year, we were still able to accomplish almost everything we hoped thanks to our resort sponsors flexibility and the hardworking instructors. We also saw an increase in motorized participation again this year and have plans to continue to reach more of this group of backcountry users.

Thank you to all of the students, instructors, volunteers, and host venues who made this season a success.



Doug Abromeit Scholarship

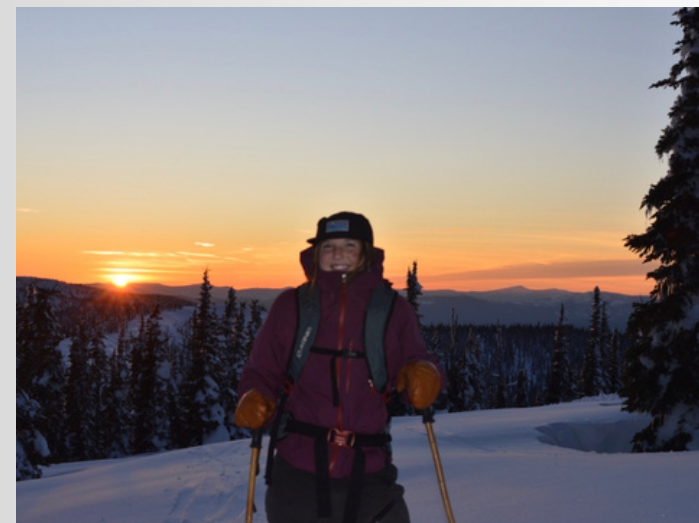
Every year the Friends of the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center (FIPAC) celebrates the work and life of Doug Abromeit (1948-2013) by starting the winter season with the **Doug Abromeit Avalanche Scholarship**. Doug was a native of Sandpoint, Idaho. The scholarship is intended to further avalanche education and awareness for those in our forecast regions of North Idaho, Eastern Washington, and Western Montana. The scholarship is open to all youth in the Inland Northwest with parental consent.

The 2025-26 season marked the 11th annual scholarship opportunity where applicants write a 400-word essay stating why they should be selected to attend a “free” Level 1 Avalanche Course taught by the FIPAC, and how they will use this education to promote avalanche awareness. **This year’s recipient was Isabelle Davidson.**

As a Sandpoint High School senior, Izzy participated in avalanche education to build the skills needed to safely navigate the backcountry. An avid skier, climber, kayaker, and backpacker, she sought advanced training to improve her ability to assess terrain, evaluate conditions, and make more informed decisions in winter environments.

Izzy hopes to pursue a career as a ski patroller and is committed to sharing avalanche safety knowledge with her peers. She aims to promote responsible backcountry recreation and help foster a strong culture of avalanche awareness within her community.

Congratulations Isabelle!



Top: The late Doug Abromeit (1948-2013). **Bottom:** Isabelle Davidson, 2026 Scholarship Recipient. Photos: IPAC.



FRIENDS OF THE IDAHO PANHANDLE AVALANCHE CENTER

2025–2026 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



TOTAL REVENUE

\$119,884

Community support received during the 2025–2026 season



TOTAL EXPENSES

\$102,621

Invested in forecasting, education & operations

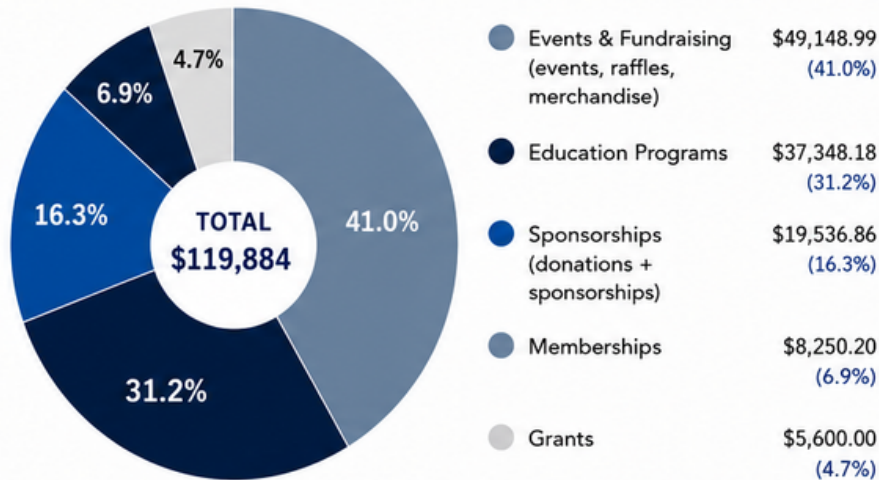


YEAR-END SURPLUS

\$17,264

Reinvested to strengthen programs for next season

WHERE SUPPORT COMES FROM (REVENUE SOURCES)



Totals may not add perfectly due to rounding

HOW WE INVEST YOUR SUPPORT (EXPENSES BY CATEGORY)



Totals may not add perfectly due to rounding



EVERY DOLLAR SUPPORTS AVALANCHE SAFETY.

During the 2025–2026 season, Friends of IPAC invested more than **\$102,000** to support daily avalanche forecasting, avalanche education, community outreach, and the infrastructure needed to keep these programs running. Strong participation in education courses and fundraising events helped the organization finish the year with a positive operating surplus, strengthening our ability to serve the Idaho Panhandle for years to come.



THANK YOU

to our members, donors, students, event participants, and community partners. You make this work possible.



Thanks for The Unwavering Support

Avalanche season often starts like the 100 m sprint then quickly transitions to a marathon - testing the physical and mental fitness of even the most seasoned forecaster. Having a holistic understanding of the twists and turns through the powder cloud of avalanche conditions requires the forecast staff to be fully immersed in the daily, weekly, and even sometimes hourly evolution of change that influences avalanche problems.

The Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center (IPAC) could not accurately tell the snowpack story without the generous support and engagement of our avalanche community. **Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time accompanying us in the field and/ or provided us with information about what you saw when out and about in the mountains.** Having public input truly helps make our forecast products better throughout the entire season.

A huge thanks is in order for **Allsport Racing**. They provided us with three loaner snowmobiles to use for fieldwork operations. We were thrilled to have two Polaris Khaos and a Ski-Doo Summit Adrenaline in our sled fleet!

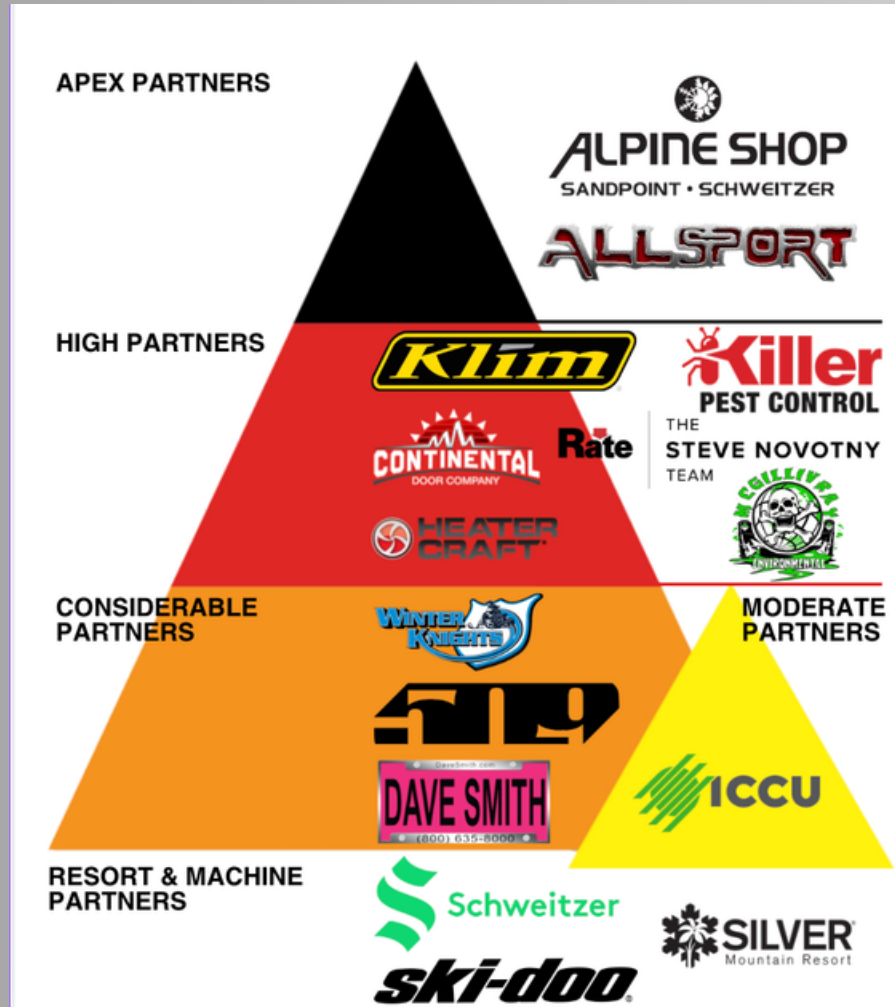
Thank you to **Schweitzer** and **Silver Mountain Ski Patrols** for continually sharing snowfall and avalanche information with the avalanche center. We are also grateful to **Lookout Pass Ski Area** for assisting with uphill access for IPAC staff to regularly conduct fieldwork in the popular Stevens Peak backcountry area.

Thank you to the **Forest Service**, and the many **members and business sponsors** for your continued, unwavering support of this avalanche program. Have a fun and safe summer and see you next fall!



Sponsor Highlight

We are incredibly thankful for our supporting businesses that contributed this season!



Membership



Best Friend of the Avalanche Center

19 members



Friend of the Avalanche Center

101 members

idahopanhandleavalanche.org/members





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