

2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT



Colorado Avalanche
Information Center



friends of
CAIC

Promoting avalanche safety
throughout Colorado since 1973



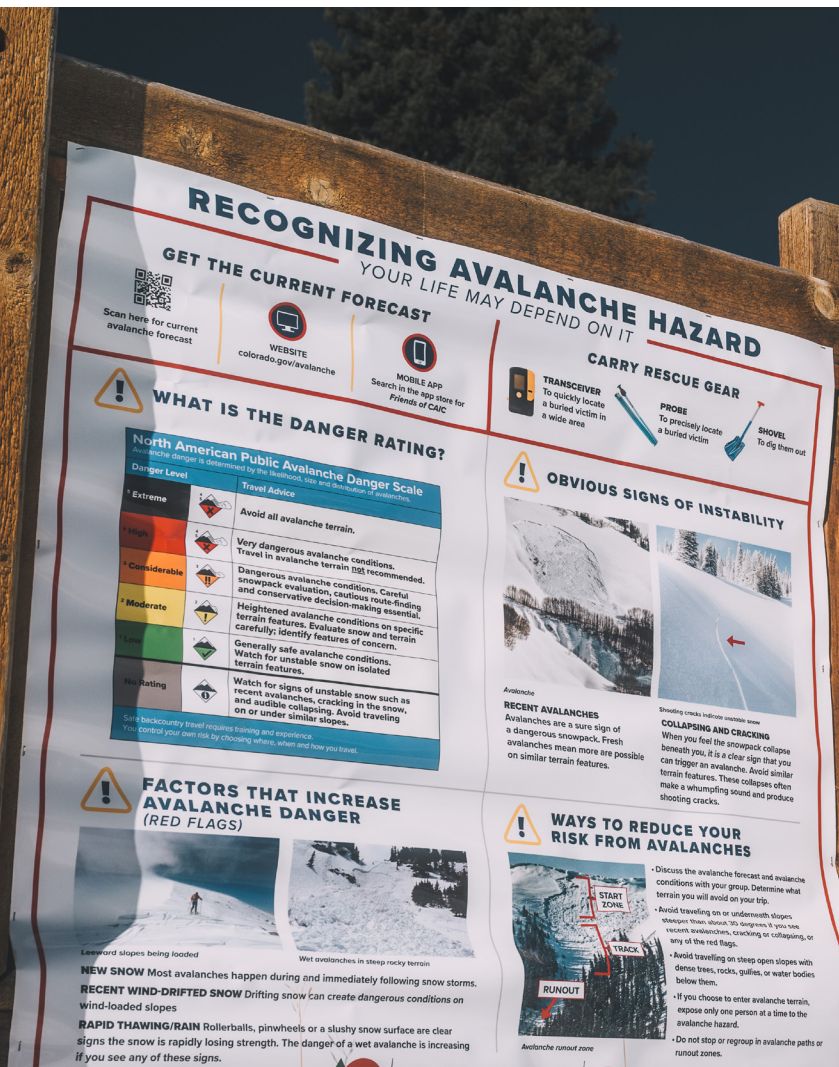
Mission



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 Friends of CAIC

Dear Friends,

This past winter challenged all of us. While the low snowpack made it feel like anything but a typical winter, the need for accurate avalanche forecasts and avalanche awareness never changed.

It was also a challenging year for the Friends of CAIC. The lack of snow impacted our events, fundraising, and engagement. We lost several important grants, and by late spring we were projecting that we could finish the year \$100,000 below our revenue goal.

I reached out to all of you then and was direct about where we stood. I asked for help, and you showed up. The response was incredible. Donors, members, and partners made significant gifts (large and small) that helped close most of that gap. We ended the fiscal year just \$21,000 below our budgeted revenue goal. That is a very different place than where we thought we would be just a few months earlier, and it happened because of this community.

Most importantly, we were able to keep supporting our mission and the work that really matters to all of us: avalanche safety and education.

This year, Friends of CAIC invested \$300,000 directly into avalanche forecasting operations at the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC). That funding helped maintain the forecasting program that we all use throughout the winter.

Despite the low snow year, our Trailhead Outreach Program still had another strong year. Our coordinators made 152 trailhead visits and connected with 6,072 backcountry users across Colorado. These conversations helped keep avalanche information and resources top of mind as users headed into the backcountry.

We also made significant progress toward the goals set in our 2030 Strategic Plan. This year, Friends of CAIC established the Sustaining Avalanche Forecasting and Education (SAFE) Fund, a quasi-endowment dedicated to supporting avalanche forecasting and education in Colorado for the long term. The fund launched with an incredibly generous \$100,000 gift from a very special donor, along with \$50,000 designated by our board from Friends of CAIC's reserves.

The idea behind the SAFE Fund is simple. We don't want the future of avalanche forecasting and education in Colorado to depend entirely on how much snow falls, the state's political climate, or how much money we can raise in one year. This past winter was a good reminder of why that matters.

As the SAFE Fund grows, it will provide an ongoing source of funding that we can count on when other revenue falls short. It won't replace fundraising or the support we receive from this community, but it will give us another tool to make sure this work continues through both good years and difficult ones.

I am proud of a lot from this past year, but I keep coming back to how this community responded when we needed a little extra help. We asked, and you showed up.

Thank you for continuing to believe in Friends of CAIC and the work we do together.



Best,

Aaron Carlson
Executive Director

Friends of the Colorado
Avalanche Information Center

Letter from CAIC

Dear Friends,

The 2025–26 snow season reminded us that no two Colorado winters are alike, and that avalanche safety remains essential even when Mother Nature doesn't deliver the snow we hoped for.

This was one of the lowest-snow years in Colorado's recorded history. Long dry periods and extended stretches of LOW avalanche danger tested our patience and made it easy to become complacent in familiar terrain. The season also challenged a common public misconception that less snow means less avalanche danger. After a few months of lackluster winter weather, we got three weeks of heavy snowfall and strong winds in February. This rapidly loaded a fragile snowpack. Avalanche danger shot up to CONSIDERABLE for 18 days, with five days of HIGH danger.

This season underscored the importance of timely forecasts, clear public safety messaging, and a community prepared to respond when conditions become dangerous. Day after day, our team collected field data, analyzed changing conditions, and provided trusted information to people traveling and working in avalanche terrain.

That work is strengthened by Friends of CAIC and by every donor, sponsor, partner, and community member who supports our shared mission. Your contributions help CAIC reach more people, collect more information, improve the tools we all rely on, and develop education and resources that support safer decisions in the mountains across Colorado.

Over the past year, CAIC introduced a map-based weather station display, expanded the avalanche accident data available to the public, improved its media gallery, and upgraded our public field reports. CAIC also partnered with AIARE and the Northwest Avalanche Center to launch a free, self-paced online version of Avalanche Aware. Development also continued on an updated mobile app with Avalanche Canada, scheduled for release ahead of the 2026–27 winter season.



Avalanche safety has always been a shared effort. It depends on forecasters, educators, observers, rescue professionals, land managers, outdoor brands, and individuals who take the time to read the forecast, share what they see in the field, and help others make informed choices. Friends of CAIC brings many of those people together around a common purpose: reducing avalanche risk and helping everyone return home safely.

Thank you for being part of that work. Your continued support gives CAIC the ability to learn from challenging seasons, strengthen our programs, and prepare for what comes next. Together, we are building a more informed, connected, and resilient avalanche community, and creating momentum that will carry into the seasons ahead.



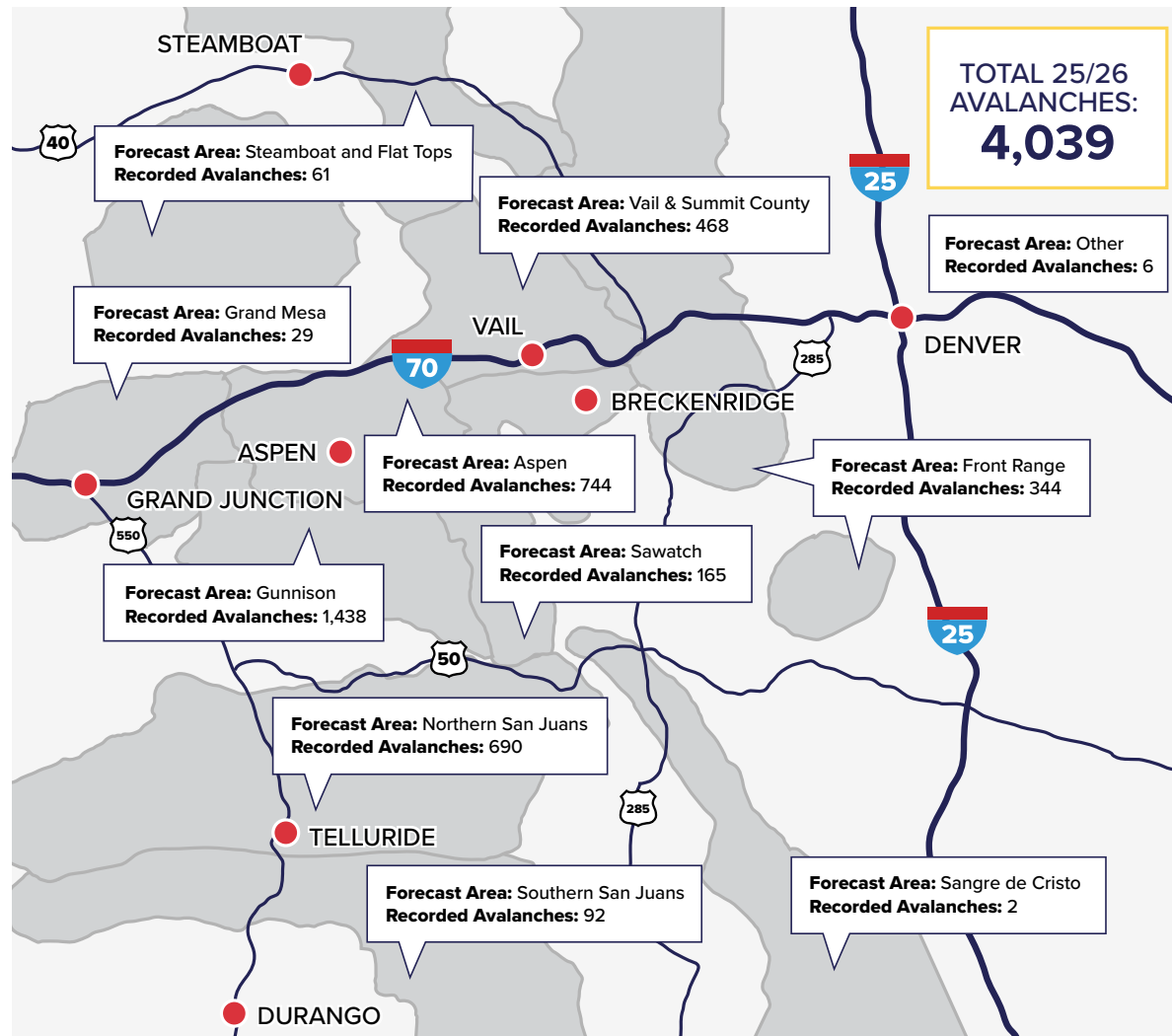
Sincerely,

Ethan Greene
Director
Colorado Avalanche
Information Center

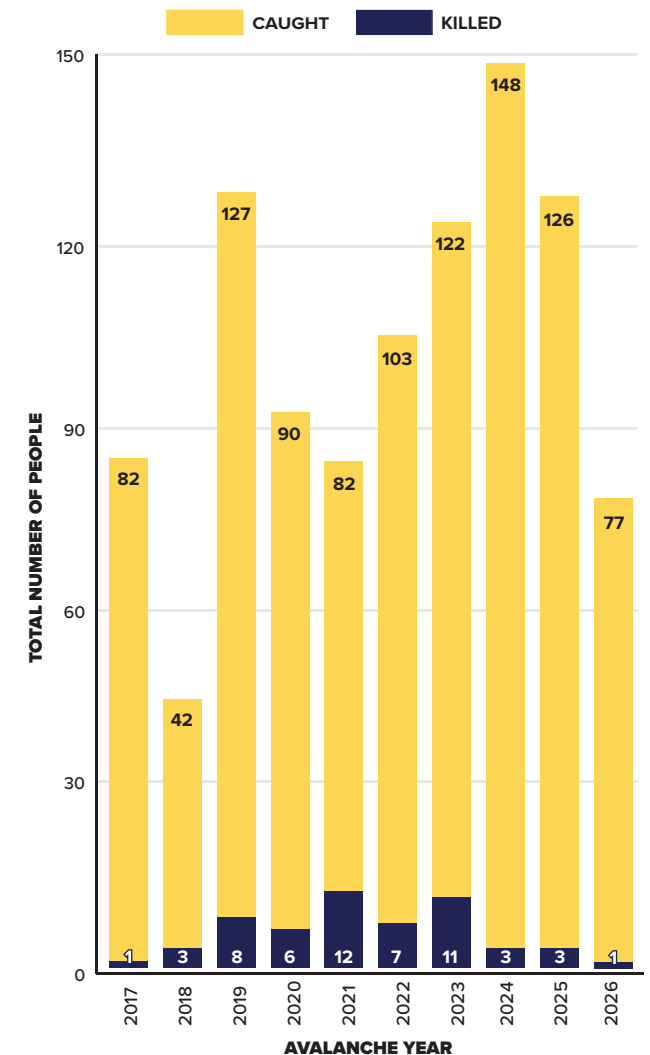
Avalanches & Accidents by the Numbers

- ▶ The CAIC recorded data on more than **4,039** avalanches between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026.
- ▶ There were **77** people reported caught in avalanches. Of those caught, **1** was killed.
- ▶ The CAIC published **212** days of forecasts throughout the season – each one of these requires staff time to research, discuss, write, and publish.

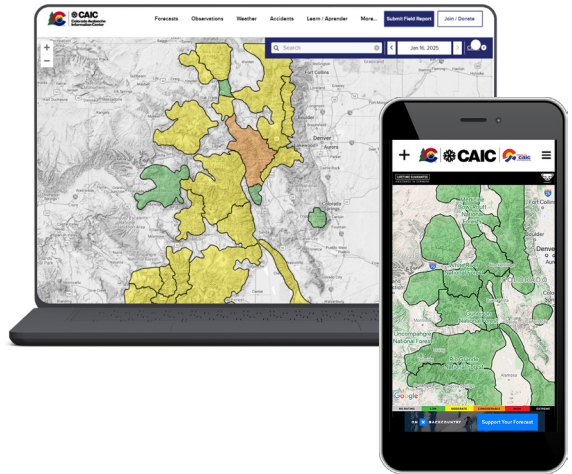
AVALARICHES BY FORECAST AREA



PEOPLE CAUGHT & KILLED



Media Overview



WEBSITE

 **1,705,317**
Pageviews

 **249,000**
Users

MOBILE APP

 **1,081,271**
Mobile App Pageviews

 **18,791**
Users

PRESS INTERACTIONS

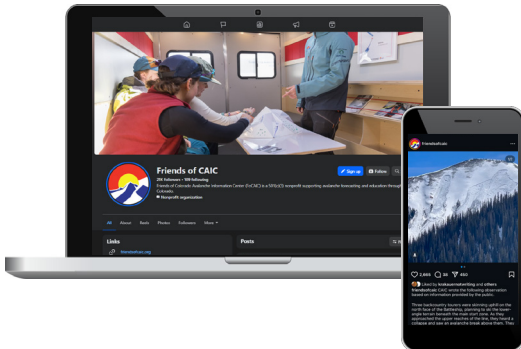
 **146**
CAIC Interviews

 **39.4 billion**
CAIC/Friends of CAIC Combined
Press Coverage Reach



SOCIAL MEDIA

 **17,848,278**
CAIC/Friends of CAIC Combined Impressions
Organic social media channels



Wet Slab Avalanches ROCK!

Start Zone Characteristics and Timing of Wet Slab Avalanches in Colorado

By Brandon Levy, Avalanche Forecaster
Colorado Avalanche Information Center

Editor's note: This article is adapted from research led by CAIC highway forecasters Brandon Levy and Ron Simenhois, in collaboration with CAIC and U.S. Geological Survey scientists. This work was prepared for presentation at the 2026 International Snow Science Workshop in Whistler, British Columbia, Canada.

Natural wet slab avalanches occur when meltwater reaches and flows along a weak layer, dissolving the bonds between snow grains. In Colorado's cold, dry snow climate, these slides occur mostly in late winter and spring, as meltwater moves through the snowpack during warm, sunny weather. As the climate continues to warm, rain events during winter months are becoming more common, and, under certain circumstances, rain-on-snow can increase the danger from wet slab avalanches. The bottom line is that forecasting when and where wet slab avalanches occur is difficult.

To address this challenge, we examined more than 700 photos of wet slab avalanches. We focused on the characteristics of the start zone in each avalanche path and grouped each slide into five start-zone categories: (1) Cliffs/Rocks, (2) Trees, (3) Slopes under a Cornice, (4) Couloirs bounded by cliffs or rocks, and (5) Open Slopes. We recorded the location, elevation, and aspect of each avalanche path. Then we looked for trends to find patterns that would help us predict where wet avalanches are most likely to occur.

We found that 64% of natural wet slab avalanches near and above-treeline started in terrain with rocks or cliffs present in the start zone.



Image 1. Wet slab avalanche in a rocky start zone (Ben Pritchett, CAIC)

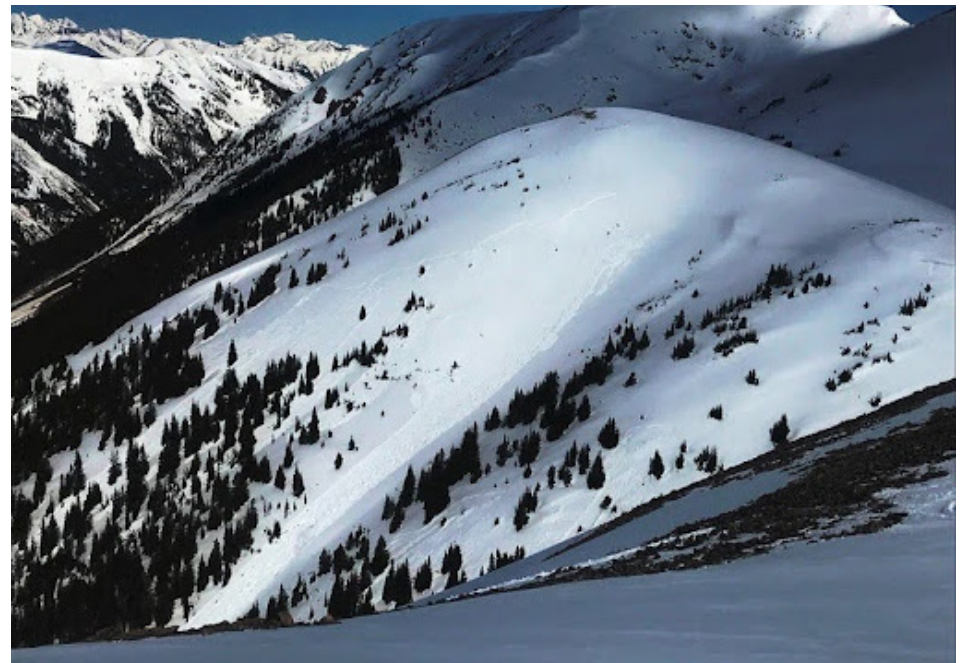


Image 2. Wet slab avalanche on an Open Slope (Brian Lazar, CAIC)

From the Field

Only 4% started on an open slope without rocks, cliffs, trees, or an overhanging cornice. Avalanche professionals observe that wet slabs frequently start around exposed rocks and cliff bands (Image 1), and our research supports what we commonly observe in the field.

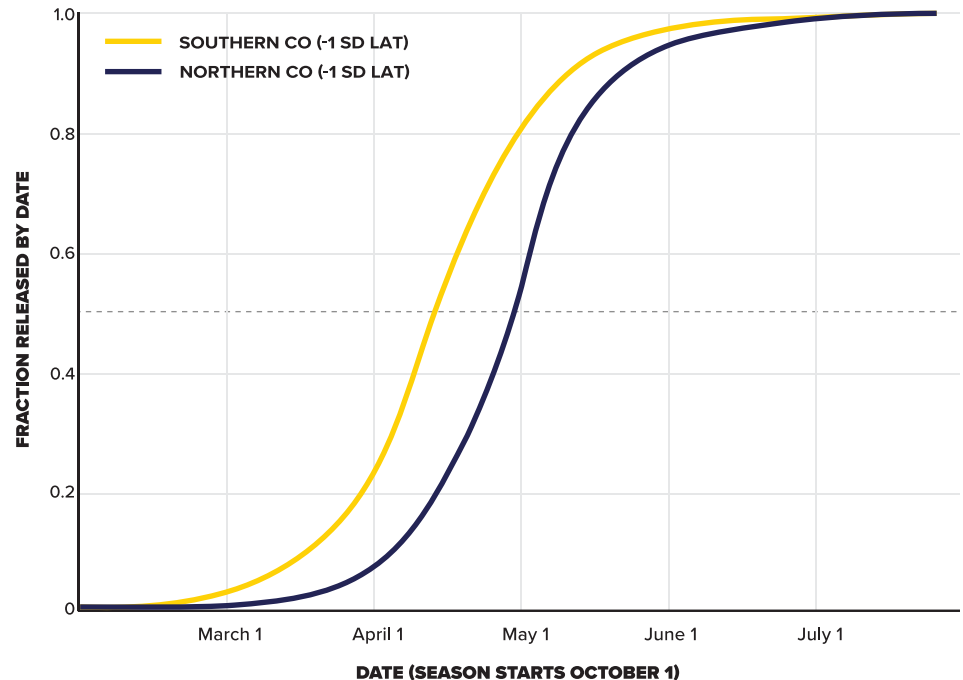
The finding also makes sense physically. Rocks and cliffs heat up in the sun (shortwave radiation) and subsequently heat and melt the adjacent snowpack. The meltwater moves through the snowpack and is more likely to reach and flood a weak layer. Rapid wetting of a weak layer increases the likelihood of a natural wet slab avalanche.

We recorded the dates wet slabs released and the aspects where they occurred. We performed a statistical analysis of this timing and aspect data and produced additional conclusions. We determined that wet slab avalanches generally began first in southern Colorado, for example, in the San Juan Mountains, before progressing north toward Loveland and Berthoud passes (Image 2). In fact, wet slab avalanches in the southern part of the state typically occur about a month earlier than in the northern ranges.

We found that wet slab avalanches released first on sunnier slopes and later on shadier slopes as the season progressed. Sunny aspects (slopes that face south, southwest, southeast, or east) released about 10 days before shady aspects (slopes that face north, northeast, northwest, or west). When we controlled and accounted for these timing fluctuations related to latitude and aspect, we were able to focus on the start zone characteristics. At that point, we found that rocky start zones generally produce wet slab avalanches five days earlier than Open Slopes.

As highway forecasters, Ron and I can apply these findings to forecast the timing of natural wet slab avalanches and our recommendations for mitigation with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). Remember, only 4% of natural wet slab avalanches in our dataset occurred on Open Slopes. This suggests that paths with rocky start zones are our “indicator paths.” In practical terms, within a given drainage or latitude

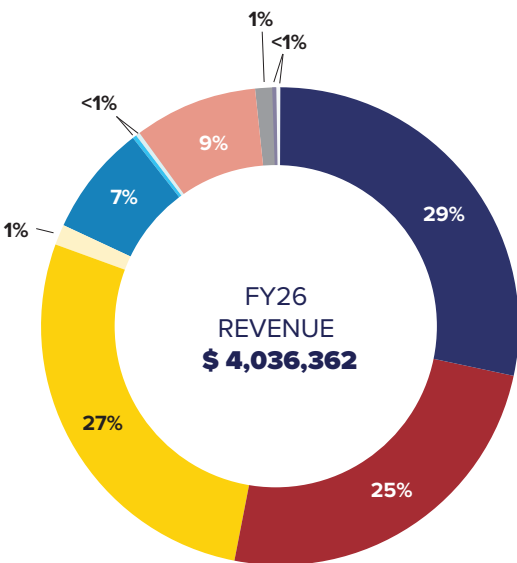
WET SLAB AVALANCHE RELEASE 2026



band, start-zone terrain has a real effect on release order; indeed, rock and cliff terrain tends to avalanche first. That means those slopes would be the first focus for mitigation and observation along the highway corridors during warm, sunny days in late winter and spring.

For backcountry travelers, the main takeaway is to be especially cautious around rocky start zones. Slopes that face south are more likely to produce the season’s first wet slab avalanches. Coupling classic aspect avoidance travel advice with the idea that wet slab avalanches occur first and foremost around rocks helps refine and define the riskier areas. Our research backs those terrain choices. However, these terrain clues should always be considered alongside the current avalanche forecast, recent weather, and signs of rapidly warming snow.

Financial Breakdown // CAIC



FY26 CAIC REVENUE

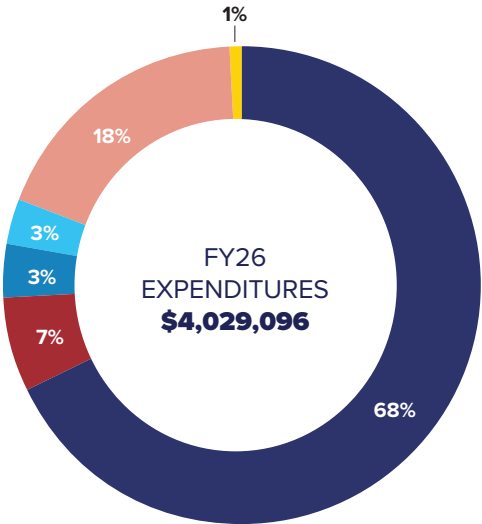
Colorado Severance Tax.....	\$1,152,209 (29%)
Keep Colorado Wild Pass (HB21-1326)	\$1,000,000 (25%)
Colorado Department of Transportation.....	\$1,110,431 (27%)
United States Forest Service.....	\$50,000 (1%)
Friends of CAIC.....	\$300,000 (7%)
Colorado Ski Country USA	\$10,000 (<1%)
Donations (non-FoCAIC).....	\$2,387 (<1%)
Centrally Appropriated Funds.....	\$355,007 (9%)
Interest Income	\$46,569 (1%)
Snowmobile Recreation Fund.....	\$2,000 (<1%)
Educational Activities	\$7,760 (<1%)

Total \$4,036,363

FY26 CAIC EXPENDITURES

Personnel Services	\$2,734,929 (68%)
Total Admin Costs	\$261,305 (7%)
Rentals.....	\$140,140 (3%)
Utilities.....	\$124,822 (3%)
Cost of Goods and Services.....	\$737,142 (18%)
Travel Expenses.....	\$30,758 (1%)

Total Expenditures..... \$4,029,096



Financial Breakdown // Friends of CAIC

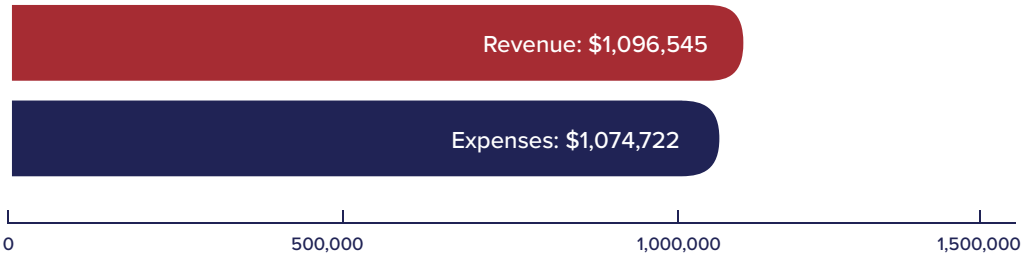


EXPENSE BREAKDOWN BY CLASS



- Administrative: \$127,683 (12%)
- Development: \$388,400 (36%)
- Programs: \$429,446 (40%)
- Trailhead Program: \$129,193 (12%)

REVENUE & EXPENSES



COST BREAKDOWN

The Friends of CAIC invested **\$558,639** into avalanche forecasting and education in Colorado during the 2025-26 season.



CAIC Forecasting
Operations
\$304,272



Trailhead Outreach
Program
\$129,193



Other Program & Program
Management Costs
\$125,173

2025–26 Staff & Board

CAIC STAFF

Ethan Greene
Director

Brian Lazar
Deputy Director & Central
Mountains Regional Manager

Mike Cooperstein
Northern Mountains
Regional Manager

Matt Huber
Southern Mountains
Regional Manager

Will Barrett
Avalanche Forecaster

Krista Beyer
Avalanche Forecaster

Kelsy Been
Internal Communications
Specialist

Jess Chencinski
Program Assistant

Dylan Craaybeek
Avalanche Forecaster

Jeff Davis
Senior Avalanche Forecaster

Steve Delaney
Field Technician

Chris Dickson
Avalanche Forecaster

Austin DiVesta
Avalanche Forecaster

Valerie Foley
Geospatial Data Specialist

Ian Fowler
Avalanche Forecaster

Theresa Graven
Public Information Officer

Alex Haddad
Avalanche Forecaster

Jason Konigsberg
Senior Avalanche Forecaster

Brandon Levy
Avalanche Forecaster

Spencer Logan
Science and
Operations Officer

Andrew McWilliams
Avalanche Forecaster

Troy Nordquist
Avalanche Forecaster

Jordan Osterman
Field Technician

Ben Pritchett
Senior Avalanche Forecaster

John Rizza
Field Technician

Luke Robinson
Field Technician

Kreston Rohrig
Avalanche Forecaster

Ron Simenhois
Avalanche Forecaster
and Data Scientist

John Snook
Numerical Prediction Specialist

Max Strotbeck
Field Technician

Carly Valerious
Field Technician

Julia Vorsteveld
Field Technician

Jeremy Yanko
Avalanche Forecaster

Ryan Zarter
Avalanche Forecaster

FRIENDS OF CAIC STAFF

Aaron Carlson
Executive Director

Katie Thibideau
Development Director

Kia Soden
Development Officer

Todd Gillman
Strategic Partnerships Officer

Eli Davis
Marketing and
Communications Officer

Taylor Nelson
Development
and Events Coordinator

Annie Nikolaus
Trailhead Outreach
Coordinator

Sean Tiffany
Trailhead Outreach
Coordinator

Emerson Lamansky
Trailhead Outreach
Coordinator

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Bill Mueller
Board Vice Chair

Nathaniel Pearson
Board Treasurer

Allison Donovan
Board Secretary

Markian Feduschak
Board Member

Shirley Kung
Board Member

Jonathan Lantz
Board Member

Donny O'Neill
Board Member

Rusty Perry
Board Member

Meg Twohig
Board Member

Ethan Greene
Non Voting CAIC Liaison

Aaron Carlson
Ex-Officio



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Evergreen, CO 80437



**Colorado Avalanche
Information Center**



colorado.gov/avalanche