

Eastern Division Avalanche Program Report

2016-2017 Season

Chuck Boyd - Division Avalanche Program Supervisor

This was a much better season than last, with a great early season start. It seemed like we had three seasons of snowpack, with two huge melt outs in January and February. I'm not a youngster, but I have never seen 70 degrees in February. If you wanted deep powder you needed to head out West, where storm after storm has helped them to have a second record season. But even with our up and down snow year, the importance of avalanche education has never been stronger. Backcountry skiing is the fastest growing segment of our sport and all the major alpine equipment manufacturers are now producing equipment that moves people away from the avalanche controlled resorts into the untamed wilds of snow. The numbers of incidents and fatalities has stayed about the same, but the usage has doubled. Just because you have the gear, and a group to travel with, does not make it safe. Know before you go, take an avalanche course. Don't guess or make assumptions when traveling on steep terrain.

We started the season in September at the annual AMN meeting at Valley Forge, PA. This event continues to provide CE credits not only for Avalanche instructors, but MTR and Nordic instructors as well. IT issues were a major topic as all three programs explained the process for registering and closing courses with the new NSP database. At a breakout session for the Avalanche instructors we all learned and practiced beacon teaching techniques for multiple burials and fine searches. The highlight of the meeting was the awarding of a Memorandum of Understanding between the National Parks Service and National Ski Patrol. This agreement, the first of its kind with NSP, opens up many opportunities for cross training between the two groups' programs, and access to NPS lands to create new patrols.

This past October, the Eastern Division Avalanche Scholarship award winner, Linda Helms, along with the Division Avalanche Program Director, attended the ISSW in Breckenridge, CO. This biannual event blends the merging of theory and practice, as it brings together the top educators and practitioners in the avalanche world to discuss the latest findings and studies.

On November 5th, The Eastern Snow Avalanche Workshop was held at the Leura Hill Eastman Performing Art Center at the Fryeburg Academy, ME. It was organized by the Mount Washington Volunteer Ski Patrol and the WMNF snow rangers. This is a great local event for all avalanche instructors to learn from the best as well as gaining CE credits to maintain your instructor certification. All proceeds from the event go to helping the White Mountain Avalanche Education Fund. Speakers included Christopher Joosen MW Avalanche Center emeritus, Simon Trainman, National Avalanche Center scientist, Helon Hoffer and Frank Carus WMNF snow rangers, Jamie Musnicki American Avalanche Association executive director, and Tyler Ray, Granite Backcountry Alliance.

Most of the early season beacon practice sessions and L1 AM1 courses went on as scheduled through out the Division. The Level 1 course held every year in the NVT region at Smugglers Notch, VT was a huge success as usual. We managed to have plenty of snow to dig in with interesting stability results, and successful avalanche rescue scenarios. Mike Stroski, who attended last season's interdivisional Level 2 avalanche course in Colorado, presented for his second time on his way to becoming a Level 1 instructor. Also the Level 1 course on Mt Washington was a huge success. Restructured with the help of Eric Zaharee and the NH regions webmaster Orest Ohar, the course was filled with a six person wait list. These courses had a combined season total of 107 students. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the Level 2 course in the Adirondacks due to low snow conditions. We just don't get the big snowpacks as in the past, which makes it difficult to hold the Level 2 course here in the east. We plan on rescheduling this course for next year, which should easily fill. Along with rescheduling the L2 course at Whiteface, we are going to try to add a level 1 course there next season too. Our goal is to get students who have taken the L1AM1 to finish up the field work in order to complete the full Level 1 course all modules.

We held a Nordic Master Avalanche evaluation in March at Mt Washington. Living up to its reputation, the mountain served up some of its most famous weather, but Mary MacQueen, David Childs, and Matt Karpinecz should skills and stamina to pass the evaluation. Mary has only one more segment left to complete, on her way to becoming a Nordic Master.

The avalanche scholarship is open for applications this coming season, and is on the website. Level 1 avalanche instructors wishing to become Level 2 instructors should apply and use it to attend the National Avalanche School. As I write this report on the plane, I am on my way to attend a face to face meeting with the National Avalanche Committee, (which I am a member). This is to make amendments to the AIM (Avalanche Instructor Manual) and discuss the proposed Pro/Recreational track that Avalanche Education is heading for and what role NSP plays in this development. The Eastern Division Avalanche program will also be providing support for the NSP at Powderfall. We will be providing equipment and instructors to help make this event a continued success. As we move forward, our goals are to make sure that all the regions in the eastern division who wish to teach avalanche courses, have the instructors and educational materials available to meet their needs. The AMN continuing education courses are considering some new locations to better serve the patrollers who need these credits over a three year cycle. We have steadily upgraded our rescue equipment to be current with American Avalanche Associations standards and we have three cases of equipment, which constantly ship to each course in the division which request it.

In closing, I would like to thank my team of IT's , avalanche instructors, and the Eastern Division's Board of Directors for helping me continue to make this program a success.

Submitted on behalf of the eastern Division Avalanche Program,

Chuck Boyd
Eastern Division Avalanche Program Supervisor