

SKI PATROL

MAGAZINE

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Cover photo by: Jade Federlin
Cover photo: Jimmy Sides, Copper Mountain Patrol
Photo right: Charlie Bernicke, Grand Targhee Ski Patrol



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MYRON B. ALLEN

Myron volunteers for Medicine Bow Nordic and Snowy Range Ski Patrols in Wyoming. He serves as an instructor in several NSP disciplines, including Outdoor Emergency Care. From 2014-2021, he was National Program Director for Mountain Travel and Rescue. Since 2022, he has been a member of NSP's National Board of Directors and chair of the board's Education Committee. He is Nordic Master #12.



SAMANTHA BRADEN

Samantha "Sam" Braden is a second-year Young Adult Patroller at Wintergreen Resort, Virginia, and an NSP athlete who races skis and bikes nationwide. Skiing since age three, she recently earned Outstanding Young Adult Patroller national runner-up and Southern Division winner. A high school senior, she plans to complete the Senior Program, gain PSIA certification, and keep patrolling with her family while inspiring more young women to join NSP.



TRACY BUCHANAN

Tracy Buchanan, a Stowe, Vermont native, is a Certified Patroller, National Appointment holder, and PSIA Alpine Level 3 instructor whose passion for skiing and teaching drives her work within National Ski Patrol. She has served as Assistant Patrol Director at Boston Mills, Brandywine, and Alpine Valley, Region and Division OET leader, Division Women's Program Supervisor, and National OET Assistant Program Director for NSP's Central Division Women's Program.



DR. DAVID CABANISS

Dr. David Cabaniss is an emergency medicine physician in Salt Lake City, Utah. A longtime lover of the outdoors, he has spent countless nights camping in the Appalachian Mountains in Virginia where he grew up, and he has travelled around the world doing the wilderness activities he loves. When not in the ER, you can find him scaling rock faces, carving through fresh powder on the slopes, or trekking through the backcountry. Now, Dr. Cabaniss is completing a wilderness medicine fellowship in Utah, combining his love for adventure with a passion for emergency care in austere environments.



SUE CARTER

Sue joined National Ski Patrol at Mt. Brighton in 1994. After twenty-five years, she took a "sabbatical" and went overseas where she served in France as clergy at an Episcopal church. On return, she re-joined the Mt. Brighton patrol and once again went through the complete OEC course. ("It was a lot more comprehensive this time!") In her work-a-day world, she was a professor of journalism at Michigan State University where she taught four-thousand students, including a couple of patrollers and a smattering of ski instructors. In 2001 she organized and co-led the first all-women's ski expedition to the North Pole.



BILL COTTON

Bill Cotton is National Ski Patrol's Mountain Travel and Rescue National Program Director and an NSP Avalanche Instructor Trainer. He patrols with Diamond Peaks Ski Patrol, a backcountry patrol, Snowy Range Ski Patrol, alpine, and Hoedown Hill, alpine. He has more than 35 years of search and rescue experience and volunteers year-round with Rocky Mountain National Park's Preventive Search and Rescue (PSAR) program. Cotton also serves with Larimer County Search and Rescue and has represented NSP at multiple ICAR Congresses.



TY DAMON

Ty's home mountain is Pine Knob, just north of Detroit Michigan. Ty has served as Patrol Director, Region Director and a National Board Member. Ty holds National Appointment #7880 and in 2022 he was inducted into the NSP Hall of Fame. Ty is also a PSIA Adaptive ski instructor, and co-authored the Adaptive Athlete chapter in the OEC 6 textbook. Ty is an OEC Instructor and an OET Instructor Trainer. He currently serves the Eastern Michigan Region as their Adaptive Advisor, and the Central Division as the MVP Supervisor and Medical Volunteer Registry Coordinator.



DR. LESLIE DESROSIERS

Dr. Leslie Desrosiers, PT, DPT, OCS, CSCS, is a sports injury prevention expert, Doctor of Physical Therapy, ski industry consultant, and the founder of ACL Strong. She helps athletes and active people of all ages recover from injury and become more resilient for doing what they love. She works extensively with ski industry professionals to build strong, healthy knees for enjoying outdoor adventures for as long as possible. Her mission is to help people feel and move better, avoid injury, and stay active longer.



CANDACE HORGAN

Candace Horgan has worked as a freelance journalist, editor, and photographer for 28 years. Her credits include the *Denver Post*, *Climbing*, *Rock and Ice*, *American Alpine News*, *Fretboard Journal*, *Mix*, *Radio*, *Fiddler*, *Acoustic Guitar*, and *Telemark Skier*. She served as the editor of *Ski Patrol Magazine* from 2010-25 and has been an NSP patroller since 2008. She works full-time as a paramedic managing patient care in an emergency department at a Denver hospital. She is currently pursuing a second bachelor's degree, this time in nursing, with a goal of being an ER nurse.



PAULA KNIGHT

Paula's home mountain is Mt. Southington Ski Area in Connecticut, where she has served as an OEC instructor since 1978. She has held OEC advisory roles at every level of NSP and serves as an Instructor, Instructor Trainer, and OEC Trainer-Evaluator. Since April 2025, Paula has been OEC National Program Director. She holds National Appointment #7249 and was inducted into the NSP Hall of Fame (#16) in 2017.



MEGAN MICHELSON

Megan Michelson is a freelance journalist based in Tahoe City, California. She is a contributing editor at *Outside Magazine*, an editor at large at *Backcountry Magazine*, and a contributor to publications like the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Ski Magazine*, *Powder Magazine*, and more.



KRISTEN RUSSO

Kristen joined National Ski Patrol as a Young Adult Patroller in 1996 and is a member of the Holiday Valley Ski Patrol of New York. She is currently the National Women's Program Advisor and an OET Trainer/Evaluator in Eastern Division as both a ski and snowboard patroller. She was awarded a National Appointment in 2008. When not patrolling, she is the Manager of Learning & Development at Alcott HR working in human resources.

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GEOFF SCOTTON

Geoff Scotton is a writer, editor, communications advisor, and journalist based in Calgary, Alberta, and a lifelong skier who joined the Canadian Ski Patrol in 2002. He has served as an instructor, patrol leader, Calgary Zone president, Mountain Division vice-president, and CSP national vice-president of communications, and patrols at Nakiska Ski Area. Geoff has worked major events including the Lake Louise World Cup and 2010 Whistler Olympics, and is a Canadian Ski Patrol National Life Member (No. 95).



LORI SPENCE

Lori Spence grew up in the Chicago area and moved west to attend Northern Arizona University, where she began ski patrolling at Arizona Snowbowl and working as a backcountry ranger in Grand Canyon National Park. She moved to Aspen in 1985 and joined the Aspen Highlands Ski Patrol, later patrolling at Squaw Valley while her husband completed his residency, before returning to the Roaring Fork Valley. Lori's favorite days are spent skiing powder and storm cycles with the strong, dedicated Aspen Highlands team.



CORINNE ST. JOHN

Based in San Diego, CA, Corinne St. John is an avid outdoor enthusiast whose love of travel and learning has taken her around the world. She serves as President of the Cody St. John Foundation, continuing her family's mission to support professional ski patrollers through granting scholarships for medical education. Corinne is passionate about adventure, community, and giving back to the mountains that shaped her.



TODD WENDLE

Todd Wendle is a husband, father, grandfather, and retired Hewlett-Packard engineer whose love of learning, teaching, and problem-solving extends from work to the mountains. A member of the Lookout Pass Ski Patrol since 2004, he has served as an OEC instructor, OET instructor, and Senior Patroller, and recently received his National Appointment. Todd volunteers with his local fire department and looks forward to teaching his three grandchildren to ski.



AMY WEST

A Durango, Colorado native, Amy grew up skiing before switching to snowboarding in 1988. She joined NSP in 2021, though she had experience working at ski areas years prior. Professionally, she is an ocean scientist and science communicator, making science accessible through audio and written storytelling. After decades by the sea, she returned to Durango, where she is a patroller at Hesperus. She enjoys mountain biking, surfing, and adventures with her dog, Skye.



DICK WOOLF

Dick Woolf has been involved in NSP's telecommunications program since 1973 and has served as National Telecom Advisor since 1986. A senior alpine patroller at Stratton Mountain, Vermont, he is an OEC instructor, CPR instructor, and EMT. Dick oversees NSP's hundreds of EMS radio licenses nationwide. Professionally, he owns a wireless systems integration firm, designing specialized radio systems to serve the emergency requirements of the New York City Fire Dept.



FROM THE CEO

BY STEPHANIE COX,
CEO, NATIONAL SKI PATROL

As we bring this issue of *Ski Patrol Magazine* to life, I've been thinking a lot about resilience—not as a slogan or a skill, but as something lived and shared.

This community understands resilience intimately. You practice it on slopes and trails and in the quiet moments in the aid room before anyone else arrives. You steady people after accidents — parents, children, brothers, and sisters — through uncertainty and fear with presence and heart.

I formed my understanding of resilience long before I stepped into this role. In 2004, I lived in Nepal during the height of the civil war—a time when uncertainty touched every part of daily life. Travel between towns was unpredictable with soldiers lining the streets. Curfews and blackouts came without warning. Entire valleys would go silent overnight, as if the landscape itself was holding its breath. Teargassing in the markets was common, and bombs on the way to work were a way of life.

And yet, amid all that tension, I witnessed some of the strongest expressions of community resilience I have ever seen. Even in those times of significant instability, people showed up for one another with quiet determination. They shared what dahl and rice they had, protected who they could, and held their community together through care, not fear.

That experience reshaped how I understand resilience today. It isn't rugged individualism, and it isn't endurance for endurance's sake. True resilience is communal. It's built through trust, shared purpose, family meals, and the knowledge that we are stronger when we move through uncertainty together.

And when I look at our patrol community, I see that same truth reflected back. Patrollers step into people's most vulnerable moments with skill, care, and courage. As first responders, you steady entire communities when things don't go as planned. You bring humanity to emergency situations that could otherwise feel isolating or overwhelming.

As we look ahead—across seasons, disciplines, and mountains—I see a community that isn't just ready for challenges but strengthened by shared purpose. This is what makes us resilient.

This edition highlights that truth from every angle.

We see resilience in operational transformation.

“A Streamlined Future” shows how the need to reduce complexity, eliminate administrative strain for patrol leaders, and align with industry standards drove OEC refresher reform. Simplification isn't just efficiency—it's resilience at the systems level.

In avalanche education, Steve Porcella's work modernizing NSP's program—aligning with A3 accreditation, expanding hybrid learning, and creating clearer instructor paths—shows resilience as evolution and relevance in a changing snow-science landscape.

In “Back on the Mountain,” patrollers confront devastating injuries with determination and ownership of their healing, returning stronger in body and spirit. Their stories remind us that while this work is demanding, our people do not break—they rebuild.

We see resilience across a lifetime of service.

Lori Spence's four-decade story at Aspen Highlands reflects how resilience matures into wisdom, leadership, and commitment to the next generation.

We see resilience in how we care for our own.

The Cody St. John Foundation—continuing Cody's legacy after nearly 20 years—is investing in patroller wellness, mental health, and resilience training through partnerships with NSP and Responder Alliance.

And we see resilience in those who work in two worlds.

This issue's profile of Grand Targhee patroller and Snake River Hotshot firefighter Charlie Bernicke illustrates the parallels between fighting fire and responding to emergencies in the mountains—teamwork under pressure, disciplined training, and the composure to face the unpredictable.

But perhaps one of the most powerful forms of resilience we see today is the resilience of young patrollers building the future of our organization.

“Next-Gen Resilience” tells the story of Wintergreen patroller and NSP Athlete Sam Braden, who faced rejection from her first OEC course, then survived a traumatic brain injury, relearned how to walk and speak with stability, and still fought her way to OEC certification at 16 years old.

Her story, and the stories of young adults around the country, capture the future of NSP: determined, capable, and unwilling to give up even when the obstacles feel overwhelming.

We are aligning ourselves with today's realities, building our communal resilience, and positioning NSP for the next 50 years.

At the center of all this work is you.

This edition honors your resilience.

It tells your stories.

And it reminds us why this organization matters—because of the people who carry the cross.

Warmest regards to you all,

Stephanie Cox

CEO

A STREAMLINED FUTURE: NEW OEC REFRESHER CHANGES AHEAD

BY PAULA KNIGHT, OEC NATIONAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR, AND
MYRON ALLEN, NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIR



NSP's Outdoor Emergency Care (OEC) course lies at the heart of ski patrolling, and the rigorous OEC refresher program is a source of enduring pride.

However, as currently configured, some aspects of the refresher program pose administrative challenges, especially for patrol leaders. During its November 2025 meeting, NSP's National Board of Directors approved changes to the OEC refresher program. Designed to make annual OEC refreshers more streamlined to administer while maintaining their rigor, these changes will take effect in the summer of 2026.

WHAT IS CHANGING

The most important changes to the OEC refresher address several significant administrative difficulties commonly encountered at the patrol level:

- Each year's OEC refresher will focus on a common set of core topics and skills. Beginning in 2027, there will no longer be a three-year refresher cycle. This change will make it easier for patrols to address the needs of patrolers who miss a refresher.
- Each year's OEC refresher will be available at the start of the calendar year. This change accommodates the needs of patrols, such as bike patrols, for which it may make more sense to deliver refreshers before summer begins.

Each OEC refresher will include a defined set of annual core competency units that all members must complete. Within these core units, there will be both required content and elective content in the online course. Individual members or patrols may choose which elective elements to complete in order to address local or individual needs, while still fulfilling the core competencies.

MANAGING DELINQUENCIES

The Board-approved changes have important implications for OEC delinquencies, which are burdensome for many patrol leaders. Unlike the current refresher system, which has five delinquency categories, the new system will have three: current, delinquent, and expired. NSP members whose status is delinquent or expired will be considered inactive OEC

Technicians and, therefore ineligible to patrol until their status is restored.

Under the new system, any patroller who has completed an OEC refresher during the current or previous calendar year is current. Failure to complete an OEC refresher during a calendar year puts a member in delinquent status. A delinquent patroller can regain current status by completing the refresher.

A patroller who misses two or more annual refreshers is in expired status. An administrative grace period facilitating a return to current status will be available for members who miss two refreshers because of extenuating circumstances, such as military service, college, religious mission, or other obligations. These members may regain current status by completing the OEC Modified Challenge, which requires completing a skill demonstration checklist. All other expired members, including any who missed more than two refreshers, must retake the full OEC course.

WHAT WILL NOT CHANGE.

It is important to understand which aspects of the OEC refresher will not change:

- Every NSP member must complete an OEC refresher every year to be an active patroller. A patroller who has not taken a refresher in the current or previous year is delinquent and must make up the refresher to be a patroller in good standing.
- The refresher will cover core competency units and core competency skills from the current edition of Outdoor Emergency Care.
- Content of OEC refresher, including the core competency units, skills, and electives, will be determined by the OEC Refresher Committee, in consultation with the OEC National Program Committee and NSP's National Medical Committee.
- The OEC refresher will retain approval for continuing medical education by the Commission on Accreditation of Pre-hospital Continuing Education. (CAPCE)

ADDITIONAL RATIONALES

Two additional considerations motivated the Board-approved changes.

The first is consistency with recertification standards in the emergency care field. The OEC National Program Committee, in consultation with the National Medical Committee, sought to design an OEC recertification process that conforms to the industry's best practices. Other emergency-care professionals (EMTs, physicians, etc.) do not require a review of the entire content of the underlying training program every cycle. An annual refresher cycle focused on core topics, with the ability of members to select elective topics relevant to their local needs, better aligns with industry standards.

The second consideration is simplicity of record-keeping. Current OEC records are incomplete, partly owing to the complexity of the current delinquency categories. Managing these records requires substantial time and effort from division and patrol leaders, not to mention expensive service tickets for NSP's IT support. A streamlined approach, with annual refreshers and three easy-to-understand status levels, will reduce unproductive costs and administrative burdens. It will be easier for members and patrol leaders to understand and implement. To launch the new refresher system in summer of 2026, each NSP member in good standing with an original OEC Certification will start with a clean OEC refresher slate, to simplify record-keeping and to ease burdens on patrol leaders and OEC Instructors.

CONCLUSION

In short, the new OEC refresher system, recently approved by the National Board of Directors, will retain the rigor that has made it so effective: annual delivery, expert-approved content, and consistent focus on the real needs of OEC Technicians. The new system will reduce the administrative challenges associated with the current system: complicated delinquency structure, a three-year refresher cycle, and a window of availability restricted to the second half of the calendar year. We all owe many thanks to the OEC National Program Committee and the National Medical Committee for addressing these challenges while keeping the OEC refresher program vibrant and strong. +

NEW AND CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HYPOTHERMIA MANAGEMENT IN THE FIELD

BY DR. DAVID CABANISS, MD

With record numbers of skiers, snowboarders, snowmobilers, and hikers venturing into backcountry terrain, patrollers and rescuers must be prepared to aid those unprepared for the elements or who find themselves spending an unexpected night outdoors. As such, ski patrollers and other medical providers in the backcountry should be ready to provide field aid to hypothermic patients and recognize the unique challenges of patient care in this environment.

Several scales are available to categorize hypothermia, though often they require the use of a thermometer. The Wilderness Medical Society guidelines categorize hypothermia into mild (32-35°C), moderate (28-32°C), and severe (< 28°C), while the Swiss model grades hypothermia into 5 stages. The first three stages of the Swiss scale are the same as the mild, moderate, and severe categories; however, stage 4 is included as apparent death (13.7-24°C) and stage 5 as irreversible death due to hypothermia (<13.7°C). Mild hypothermia is characterized by shivering, normal or only slight alteration in mental status, and mild to moderate decrease in the ability to perform necessary tasks. Another category, cold-stressed patients, will have temperatures greater than 35°C but exhibit the same symptoms as the mild hypothermia category and should be managed similarly. In moderate hypothermia, persons affected will have worsening confusion, may stop shivering, and will be unable to accomplish many basic tasks. Severe hypothermia poses a significant risk to life, and the patient will likely be completely unresponsive. Evacuation for these patients can prove difficult, and they will be in critical condition with the threat of sudden cardiac arrest. All efforts should be made to prevent heat loss to preserve life functions.

In the setting of ski patrol and/or backcountry rescue, categorization based on temperature may prove impractical, as few rescuers are able to take a true core temperature. The environment can greatly affect other measurements, such as temporal, oral, or axillary temperature. As such, in 2021, new guidelines were released using clinical criteria to grade the severity of hypothermia. Each stage correlates with the AVPU mnemonic used commonly by first responders. Stage 1 is an alert patient, stage 2 is a patient who responds to verbal stimuli, stage 3 is unresponsive or only responsive to pain, and stage 4 presents without detectable vital signs. As the stage of hypothermia increases, the likelihood of going into hypothermic cardiac arrest (aka stage 4) also increases. This is due to the cardiac irritability that comes with profound hypothermia, and great care in transport of patients is necessary, as excessive movement or jostling can precipitate a V-fib cardiac arrest.

When packaging a hypothermic patient for transport, emphasis should be placed on limiting further heat loss. Wet clothing should be removed as evaporation will continue to cool the

patient and can result in a significant worsening of condition. If rescuers can provide heat packs or a heated blanket, then it should be done. However, recognize that you are unlikely to reverse severe hypothermia in a wilderness setting, and expediting evacuation should take priority. Care should be taken not to apply these heating elements directly to the skin to limit the risk of thermal injury. A great way to facilitate patient packaging and minimize heat loss is through the use of a vacuum mattress. By removing as much air as possible from the vacuum mattress, conductive heat loss is minimized much in the same way a vacuum seal in a thermos functions. Combined with sufficient insulation, such as a sleeping bag or blankets, the vacuum mattress is an excellent option for hypothermic patients. A bivy or aluminum blanket can also add extra warmth by reflecting radiated heat back toward the patient. All of these devices can and should be used together to provide maximum warmth to the patient. The patient should then be moved out of the elements and taken to the nearest area shelter, where more efficient warming techniques, such as warm beverages and high ambient heat exposure, can be used.

Of special note, some protocols may suggest not attempting to rewarm a patient due to the protective neurologic effects of hypothermia in the setting of cardiac arrest. We disagree with these protocols, as, unlike in cases of mild or moderate hypothermia, no amount of care provided in the field will have significant rewarming in a patient cold enough to have a cardiac arrest. Any efforts to provide extra heat to the patient should be given as it will prevent worsening hypothermia, making it easier to resuscitate the patient once they have made it to definitive care. The main caveat is that these efforts to provide warmth should not be attempted if doing so will delay transport.

In the event of suspected hypothermic cardiac arrest, a pulse check should be conducted for at least 30-45 seconds and up to 60 seconds prior to the initiation of compressions. The reason for this is due to the significant slowing of heart rate in profound hypothermia, which can give the appearance of death despite having vital signs. This can be an uncomfortable amount of time to assess for a pulse, especially since normal ACLS protocol dictates that compressions should be started after no more than 10 seconds of a pulse check. However, if the patient truly is in hypothermic cardiac arrest, the slowing of cerebral metabolism in these patients means that an extra 50 seconds without compressions is unlikely to have a significant effect on outcomes. Alternatively, if compressions are started in a patient who actually does have a pulse but was missed from an inadequate check, the increased cardiac irritability can induce arrhythmia and transition a patient into a V-fib cardiac arrest, resulting in a significant increase in morbidity and mortality.

Elevating NSP's Value to EMT Patrollers



EMS Patroller Membership Expansion

NSP now allows EMTs to join Professional Division rosters as EMS Patrollers, expanding hiring capacity while honoring existing EMT credentials.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Broader pipeline

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Licensed EMTs can become OEC Technicians using the recently revised OEC Modified Challenge.

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CAPCE

CAPCE Accreditation

NSP has earned Organizational Accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Pre-Hospital Continuing Education (CAPCE). Patrollers who are licensed EMTs can receive continuing education credits for most NSP courses, including the OEC Refresher.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Recognized credit

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Download a certificate after course closure with all required details for your CE records.

The length of a pulse check in suspected cardiac arrest from hypothermia is not the only way in which we vary from normal ACLS protocol. If defibrillation is feasible, current recommendations vary between providing 1 and 3 shocks total. This is because reversal of a V-fib arrest in a hypothermic patient is incredibly unlikely until the patient has a core temperature greater than 30°C. Furthermore, per WMS guidelines, ACLS medications such as epinephrine and amiodarone should be withheld until core temperature is greater than 30°C. After warming to this temperature, medication administration should be spaced out to every 6-8 minutes instead of 3-5. This is because severely hypothermic patients will have decreased circulation, and the codes can be run for upwards of several hours, resulting in the pooling of these medications in the vasculature under normal administration from ACLS guidelines. Once extrication is completed, the patient should be transferred to a center with extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) services whenever feasible, as initiation of ECMO on hypothermic cardiac arrest victims increases the likelihood of a good neurologic outcome. This device allows blood circulation through an external machine that warms and oxygenates the blood as it passes through, increasing core body temperature by 1.5-4°C per hour, much faster than any other warming technique.

When providing chest compressions in ski terrain, there are unique challenges. The Aleyska technique has been used, giving compressions while straddling the patient in the toboggan, but recent data raise concerns for excessive hazard to providers using this technique. Complex terrain in combination with a high-adrenaline environment could easily lead to the ejection of care providers. Nowadays, more commercially available products, such as the Lucas or the Autopulse, can provide continuous chest compressions and are becoming increasingly commonplace at ski resorts. If these devices are available, then we recommend their use over the Aleyska technique due to the lower risk of provider injury. A third option is also available, but should only be used in the setting of suspected hypothermic cardiac arrest. Intermittent CPR (iCPR) is a newer concept that initially resulted from data in surgeries involving the aortic arch. Since profound hypothermia slows the body's metabolism, CPR with a lower ratio of compression time may provide adequate perfusion to prevent irreversible injury. There is a recent case report from Poland that illustrates this concept in practice, where the automatic CPR device that rescuers had available ran out of battery due to prolonged rescue and low outdoor temperatures. The providers performed iCPR following this, and the patient lived with a good neurologic outcome. Current recommendations are that continuous CPR be provided whenever feasible, but if the patient has a core temperature <28°C, then an appropriate alternative is to provide 5 minutes of chest compressions followed by 5 minutes of evacuating the patient. If there is even more profound hypothermia recorded as <20°C, then the time without compressions can be

extended to 10 minutes. It should be noted that there is no strong clinical data at this time to fully support these exact timeframes for iCPR, and it should only be used as a guideline for rescue scenarios. Furthermore, keep in mind that iCPR is only for hypothermic cardiac arrest, and no matter the situation, continuous CPR is always preferred.

While the old adage “you are not dead until you’re warm in dead” is very much true in hypothermic cardiac arrest, there are some instances in which stopping resuscitative efforts is appropriate. The first is if the patient has frozen solid and become so cold that their chest is too rigid to provide adequate compressions. Persons at this point have become so cold that irreparable damage has been done and resuscitation is impossible. Next, if a core temperature can be ascertained and the patient is noted to be >30°C, it is highly unlikely that the cardiac arrest was due to hypothermia alone, and other causes should be evaluated. In this instance, rewarming plus normal ACLS protocols should be followed. Finally, while it is rare for first responders to be able to obtain laboratory values, iSTAT devices are becoming more common in pre-hospital care. In cases of hypothermic arrest, a potassium may be drawn to help aid in decision-making upon hospital arrival. This electrolyte can be used as a surrogate marker for cell death, and no patient with a potassium greater than 12 has ever been successfully resuscitated after hypothermic arrest. Furthermore, based on facility guidelines, different cutoff values are used in the decision to start ECMO. We do not recommend pre-hospital providers make their own decisions based upon potassium level, but it can be useful information for physicians on hospital arrival.

In summary, with the increase in outdoor recreationists and backcountry travelers, the number of hypothermic patients in wilderness scenarios is only expected to increase. Providers should be able to quickly recognize the signs and symptoms of hypothermia and implement measures to prevent further heat loss. In the event of suspected cardiac arrest due to hypothermia, pulse checks should be conducted for up to a minute to be certain of pulselessness before the initiation of chest compressions. Continuous compressions should be provided whenever feasible, and if toboggan rescue is anticipated, mechanical devices such as the Lucas or Autopulse may be preferable over manual compressions due to the risk of provider ejection with the Aleyska technique. Intermittent CPR can also be considered when continuous compressions are not feasible or hazardous to providers. ACLS medications may also be spaced out or withheld to prevent excessive medication use in these cases where CPR may be ongoing for multiple hours. Finally, there is still ongoing research into the best care for severely hypothermic patients, and when in doubt, you should follow your local protocols and discuss with your patrol, medical advisor, and area management for care of these complex patients. +



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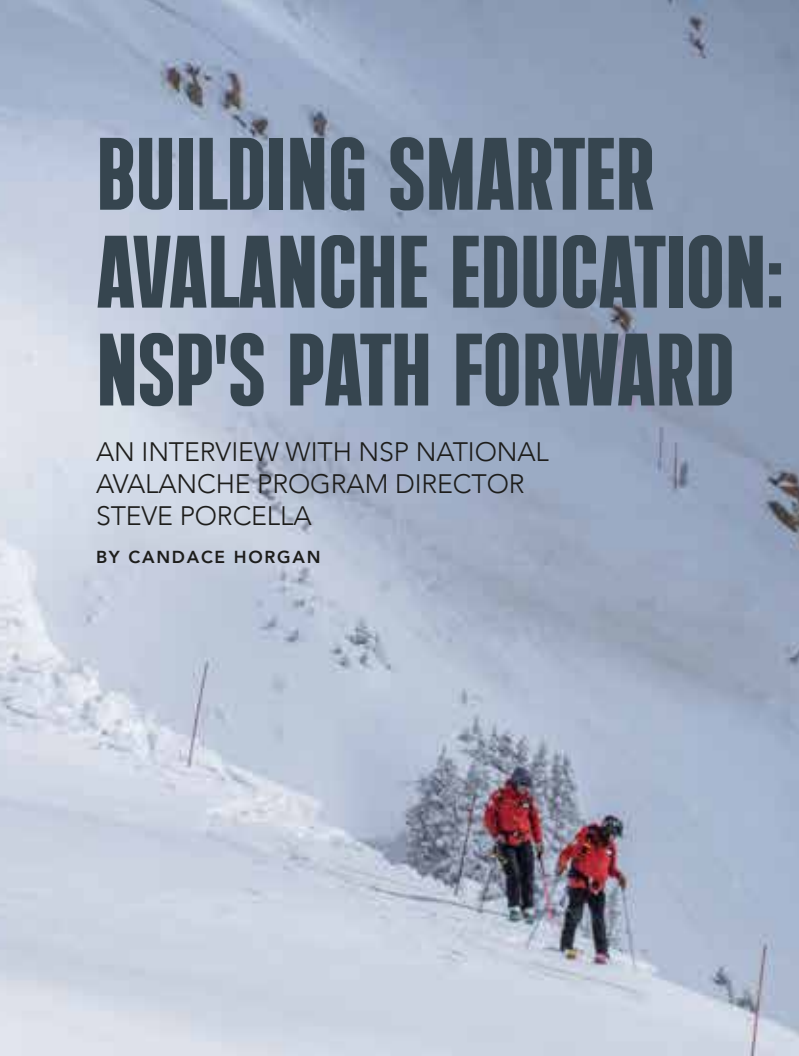
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BUILDING SMARTER AVALANCHE EDUCATION: NSP'S PATH FORWARD

AN INTERVIEW WITH NSP NATIONAL
AVALANCHE PROGRAM DIRECTOR
STEVE PORCELLA

BY CANDACE HORGAN

Avalanche education is entering a pivotal new era—one defined by higher standards, deeper collaboration, and a relentless push for relevance in a rapidly changing mountain environment. At the center of that evolution is Steve Porcella, NSP's National Avalanche Program Director, who brings more than two decades of patrolling, climbing, teaching, and program leadership to the task of modernizing how patrollers learn, teach, and respond in avalanche terrain. With NSP aligning to A3 accreditation, expanding hybrid learning, and retooling instructor pathways, the organization is positioning itself to deliver training that's sharper, more transferable, and more connected to the realities facing patrollers across every division.

In this conversation, Porcella reflects on his roots, outlines the program's transformation, and lays out a three-year roadmap that aims to strengthen instructor development, deepen industry credibility, and build a modern digital foundation for avalanche education. The takeaway is clear: NSP's Avalanche Program isn't just adapting to the future—it's engineering it.

Candace: *How long have you been with ski patrol, and how did you get involved?*

Steve: I've been in NSP for 26 years now. I grew up in an environment where my dad and family friends did a lot of climbing. Even at eight or 10 years old, I was doing self-arrest drills on snow in the High Sierra and spending nights in snow caves. I knew people in ski patrol then. There's an old saying that old climbers don't retire, they join ski patrol. I went to Montana for climbing, graduate school, and work, and Lost Trail Ski Area was just 45 minutes from my house. It's a fantastic area. I knew people

on the patrol, and they encouraged me to join mainly because of my climbing background, as they wanted to better align with OSHA [Occupational Health and Safety Administration] and ANSI [American National Standards Institute] standards for chair evacuation and high-angle rescue.

Do you still climb?

I climb as much as I can. Not as frequently or as hard or as big, but I still get out. My true passion is big wall first ascents. I've done a lot in Montana and the Sierra Nevada, and I've coauthored a climbing guidebook to 14,000-foot peaks in California called *Climbing California's Fourteeners: 183 Routes to the Fifteen Highest Peaks*. The ice climbing I've slowed down; because of climate change, it's not as stable as it used to be.

When did you get involved in avalanche work?

I started 20-plus years ago. Lost Trail patroller Chris Utzinger taught avalanche classes, and one day he said, "I got a new job in the state of Washington. Here are my PowerPoints; you're now in charge of avalanche classes here." And I was like, "holy moly, what does that involve?" That started my teaching classes to patrollers, and it's gradually expanded over the years. I was the division director for Avalanche for seven years, and now I'm the National Program Director (NPD). In the last seven years, we've been teaching division-wide level 1 and level 2 avalanche classes that usually average 20 students and 15 instructors.

Avalanche education has really changed in the last five years. What is NSP's relationship with AAA?

The thing to know is that AAA is the U.S. certifying body for avalanche education. If you want to teach an avalanche class, choose one backed by AAA so the industry recognizes it and students can transfer it easily. The way I've described it is that if you've ever attended two different colleges in your life, you have to make sure your classes from one college transfer to the second, so you don't have to retake them. That's what accreditation is all about: national recognition that classes taught by one provider are equivalent and transferable in the industry and to other providers for furthering education. The bottom line is that if you're going to be taken seriously in the avalanche industry, you need to be AAA recognized. NSP's Board of Directors voted to go that route. We've been doing our best to follow that decision.

The key for me is to make meeting A3 requirements as easy as possible for our avalanche instructors and leaders. In the Northern Division, I've developed tools and techniques to streamline instructor membership in A3. I help people apply, write letters of reference for their applications, and help resolve issues when the ball gets dropped. Any leader in the NSP Avalanche Program must help others understand and meet the requirements. You have to adapt and evolve to stay current, competitive, and relevant. I am optimistic that our relationship with A3 will grow and benefit both organizations as we continue to train our future patrollers and partner recreationalists. Finally, we are the only provider that teaches organized in-area rescue education in our level 1 and 2 classes.

How would you characterize the state of the Avalanche Program?

I think it's in a good place right now. We've got good people on board who know the industry, the A3 requirements, and what we

need to do to assert ourselves in the industry. Division avalanche directors met recently to focus on what we can accomplish together. I'll read you our new mission statement: "The NSP Avalanche Program's mission is to increase avalanche awareness by providing avalanche safety and rescue education." That's trimmed down from what it used to be; it's more specific. The key in any organization is to stay focused and avoid taking on too much. Our goals in the next year are to get an online version of the level 1 class, incentivize folks to become instructors, clarify Instructor Development, make continuing education requirements easier and standardized, and be a recognized leader in the avalanche education field.

Does the program want to create courses and content that align with avalanche mitigation work in-area, which is the primary concern of ski patrol west of the Mississippi?

Well, to clear up a misperception, our patrollers east of the "The Big Muddy" also deal with creep, glide, and avalanches following rain events, lake-effect snow dumps, or rapid warm-ups. As National Ski Patrol avalanche educators, we can't tell a hill how they should run their avalanche program, but we can offer our experience and training to help meet their needs. We primarily educate people on how to stay safe and aware in avalanche terrain. Every ski hill is unique in terms of terrain, aspect, snowfall, and managerial structure. Our goal with NSP avalanche education is to train ski patrollers in the science of avalanches so they will be knowledgeable, safe, and able to run an organized rescue should the need arise. If the hill needs more than that, many AAA-recognized providers offer advanced pro-level courses that avalanche team members can take to meet their position requirements.

What textbooks are you using? Is it Bruce Tremper's "Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain?"

Yes, that book is still relevant, and we use it. *Snow Sense* by Jill Fredston and Doug Fesler is a good course book. Our organized rescue education program uses *NSP Avalanche Rescue Fundamentals* by Lin Ballard and Dale Atkins; we hope to update and republish it. *The Starting Zone* by Karl Birkeland is also very good.

Do you talk about rescue from a burial, like the concurrent risk for hypothermic cardiac arrest?

We're partnering with OEC [Outdoor Emergency Care] on the medical side with organized rescue education. In classes I teach, we set up parallel rescue scenarios with multiple burials. Some are "live" rescues, because we're working with avalanche rescue dogs. Part of avalanche education is working with a dog when it's available. We use 150-pound fireman dummies so people can experience what it's like to pull that kind of weight out of a hole to safety. We have info-tags on the burials so that patrollers have to perform some aspect of OEC, including clearing the mouth and doing CPR, within the first minutes.

After everything is found, dug up, and reburied, we have them switch to the other scenario. It's like night and day. In the first scenario, people are a little bit confused and trying to organize, pick a leader and scribe, interact with a fake sheriff, call for hill resources, basically a controlled form of chaos. When they begin the second scenario, they find everything and complete the required work

in almost half the time. It's really striking when you use the first scenario as a "knock the rust off" attempt. When they go into the second scenario, they work way more efficiently because they know what they need to do.

How many avalanche instructors are there, and how many courses does NSP offer?

There might be 200-300 Avalanche instructors. It changes every year as new instructors register and others retire. We might teach 20-30 classes, but it varies. Population-dense divisions have more classes than divisions with small, rural populations. In my division, Northern, we only have about 500-600 patrollers total spread across four states, so we try to have 1-3 courses annually. The Far West Division has a much larger population, and they do more public classes. The East Coast has a lot more patrollers, as does Central. Things ebb and flow in NSP, and right now we're trying to build the program up, get more instructors, importantly, more women instructors, and build the program up over the next 1-3 years.

Is there anything else members should know about the evolving state of avalanche education and the NSP Avalanche Program?

I recently attended a face-to-face meeting where we did a lot of planning. In this first year, we're going to try to make the Avalanche Program more structured and improve the layout and process. We're going to reduce barriers for nonmembers and patrollers in terms of becoming a future Avalanche instructor, including instructors from other providers like AIARE [American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education]. We're trying to broaden our base and make ourselves accessible to people with different backgrounds who have the wherewithal and skills to become an Avalanche instructor. We're going to develop online courses for standardization, recordkeeping, and making the job of teaching the academic material easier for instructors. Our first effort will be to get our level 1 online so that students can take a hybrid where they do didactic online and their field days at a resort. Using the LMS [learning management system] will save a lot of effort for instructors and eliminate the need for people to meet in person or do Zoom lectures.

We want to get a lot of cross-collaboration done, including course parity with Mountain Travel and Rescue and OEC. We want to create a higher digital presence with the NSP Avalanche Program, too, and do an LMS-driven Instructor Development offering, which will make it easier for people to become instructors.

That's an ambitious list!

Yes, it is! But these goals are spread out over three years. I agree, it's a shoot for the sky list, but we have great help and support from the NSP National Office, NSP leadership, the Education Committee, and we will be looking for volunteers from our instructor base for content creation and subject matter expertise. We have centralized class material like PowerPoints and recorded Zoom lectures so that instructors in need can access or piggyback on already-developed materials to teach Avalanche Awareness, Level 1, or Level 2. Again, all of this is to make it easier for our Avalanche instructors to teach our courses while meeting A3 guidelines and curriculum. +

BEYOND BETTER GEAR

HOW ICAR 2025 REFRAMED RESCUER SAFETY

BY BILL COTTON, MOUNTAIN TRAVEL AND
RESCUE NATIONAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Looking back, the most urgent conversations at the International Commission on Alpine Rescue’s 2025 Congress weren’t about ropes, drones, or helicopters—despite the event’s “rescuer safety” theme. They centered on people. How we think, talk, decide, and care for one another when the mountains, the mission, and our own habits raise the stakes.

The Jackson, Wyoming, mountain community played host to this exceptional event from October 8 to 11.

I attended as National Ski Patrol’s Mountain Travel and Rescue National Program Director, focusing on the Terrestrial Rescue Commission. My colleagues, Avalanche Program Manager Josh Olsen and National Medical Advisor Lauren Altschuh, took part in the Avalanche and Medical commissions. Still, NSP’s presence went beyond official delegates. Many members, including professionals from the Pro Division, were visible throughout the week, sharing their experiences and perspectives with peers from around the world.

The Congress also featured a Practical Day staged high on Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. This day of hands-on demonstrations and clinics allowed rescuers to apply new techniques in rope work, helicopter safety, and medical scenarios in real alpine terrain. Attendees later tested concepts from the lecture hall in the snow, rock, and thin air. Many NSP members joined international colleagues in these field sessions.

One of the most memorable sessions was “Drones in Aviation SAR,” led by Will Smith of Teton County Search and Rescue and Renaud Guillermet of AirCom. They highlighted the expanding role of drones—hasty searches, cliff-line checks, supply drops, and overwatch for incident command. Smith’s most powerful lesson was personal. After a mission where a critically injured subject died despite flawless execution, he questioned whether he could continue serving. Later, a physician explained the outcome had been medically inevitable, and that his team’s rapid actions allowed organ donations that saved multiple lives. For Smith, that reframed grief into purpose. Success does not always mean resuscitation in the field—it can also mean closure for families or lives saved elsewhere.



Vacuum mattress methods for spinal motion restriction.

Several talks urged rescuers to put psychological safety on equal footing with avalanche and helicopter safety. Laura McGladrey of the University of Colorado walked through international recommendations for stress resilience in alpine rescue, arguing that stress monitoring should be as routine as weather observations. Scott Hammond and Deb Yokshas of Utah County SAR and the Mountain Rescue Association showed how those principles translate into practice: establish a unifying purpose, commit to clear communication, debrief consistently, and treat failures as learning opportunities. They noted that reliable After Action Reviews correlate with reduced stress and stronger retention, directly enhancing safety.

Culture—and all who feel safe within it—was another recurring theme. Janna Allen of Solitude Ski Patrol and coach Dana Kent tackled the legacy of “masculinity contest culture” in their session on competition versus collaboration. They argued that exclusion, harassment, and bias amplify risk for everyone. Trust and collaboration, they said, are not “soft” concepts but operational necessities. Similarly, McGladrey and Clayton Horney of the Colorado National Guard emphasized, in their session on near misses, that shared language and stress-continuum color codes help teams reduce ambiguity and therefore reduce errors.

Technical sessions were no less compelling. Robert Koester’s update on Lost Person Behavior included new subject categories and reinforced how cell-phone forensics shape modern search planning. Terrestrial Commission workgroups advanced final drafts on shared tension rope systems and wildfire operations to create consistent standards for diverse teams. Slovenia’s mountain rescue service presented its modernization of terrestrial techniques, spurring discussion about balancing standardization with local terrain realities.

Dave Weber of the Mountain Rescue Collective and Charley Shimanski of AirCom addressed helicopter operations. They emphasized that there is no single solution for tethering and cutaways—only what fits a team’s terrain, training, and mission profile. The underlying message was that equipment is only as effective as the human system that surrounds it.

International perspectives added depth. Tom Nash of Scotland’s Search and Rescue Aerial Association detailed the challenges of building a drone program in a volunteer environment, from regulation to training. Parks Canada shared lessons from wildfire backcountry evacuations and rock-slide rescues. A tri-national case study from France, Switzerland, and Italy demonstrated that cross-border cooperation can be systematic and reproducible.

Avalanche professionals found new data as well. Alison Sheets of the Mountain Rescue Association presented an update on causes of death in Colorado avalanche fatalities, noting that asphyxia remains the leading cause, but trauma—especially head injuries—is also significant. Giacomo Strapazzon of Italy’s CNSAS presented research on the Safeback device, showing its potential to delay



ICAR Congress Practical Day.



Showcase of avalanche tools.

hypoxemia and hypercapnia during simulated burials. Both sessions underscored that trauma and airway management must remain central in avalanche training, alongside evaluation of emerging technology.

Among all the sessions, one of the most directly relevant to ski patrollers may have been the Polish team's presentation on mountain-bike accidents in the Carpathians. With participation in mountain biking growing worldwide, their data showed a tenfold increase in incidents, often in forests and on single-track trails where vehicles cannot reach. Evacuations were manpower-intensive and sometimes required belayed stretchers on steep, wooded slopes. Injuries were more serious than in past years, frequently involving multiple body systems. Even the question of handling a patient's bicycle—often worth several months' salary—was a practical concern.

This was an invaluable case study for NSP's expanding Bike Patrol Program. The Polish rescuers described mapping access points to single-track systems, staging additional responders in high-use areas during peak weekends, and

Short-haul helicopter rescue demonstration.

creating access guides for every rescue station. They highlighted the need for patrollers to have strong mountain-bike handling skills themselves, both for rapid access and for their own safety on narrow trails crowded with oncoming riders. Their message was clear: bike patrol is not just “off-season ski patrol.” It requires specific planning, equipment, and training to protect patients and rescuers. The parallels to ski patrol practice on crowded slopes were striking, and their techniques and equipment solutions offer models we can learn from and adapt.

The Congress also confronted the difficult topic of when to stop a mission. Gregor Dolinar of Slovenia discussed risk management and the responsibility to halt rescue operations when conditions cross into unacceptable danger. His case studies underscored the importance of independent decision authority, pre-agreed stop criteria, and disciplined documentation to protect rescuers and the public mission. Leadership, he reminded us, means knowing when not to go.

Takeaways for ski patrollers

First, weave stress literacy into training and leadership. If we can color-code avalanche hazard, we can do the same with team stress. After Action Reviews should be standard

operating procedure.

Second, standardize language and procedures where it counts. Consistency in vocabulary and checklists frees rescuers to solve problems without hesitation.

Third, align culture with safety. Psychological safety is not a luxury but a leading indicator of performance and retention.

Fourth, keep the tech human. Drones and devices are powerful only when integrated into disciplined systems that reduce exposure and error.

Finally, learn from the bike patrol parallels. The Polish lessons show that cycling accidents bring unique challenges, and NSP’s program can adapt those practices to build safer, more effective teams.

The ICAR Congress convened us under the banner of rescuer safety, but its message was broader. Our soft skills, cultures, and systems are as life-saving as our ropes and radios. For ski patrollers, the challenge is to hold ourselves to the same standard in every conversation, debrief, and team we build—so that everyone goes home and everyone comes back. +

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RAISING THE STANDARD: ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE IN THE MOUNTAINS

AN INTERVIEW WITH NSP NATIONAL MEDICAL ADVISOR LAUREN ALTSCHUH

BY CANDACE HORGAN

This summer, emergency physician and patroller Lauren Altschuh of California was appointed NSP national medical advisor. She took over from Chuck Allen, who served six years in the role, for which NSP has great appreciation.

Candace: *Tell me about your medical background, how you got involved in medicine, and how long you've been practicing.*

Lauren: I am an emergency physician working at a community hospital in San Diego, and I finished my training in 2020, so I've been practicing for about five years. In addition to my emergency medicine training, I have a fellowship in wilderness medicine. After I did my primary training, I spent an additional year at UC San Diego on a fellowship in mountain and wilderness medicine, essentially ski patrol medicine. I am also on the faculty at UCSD and help teach medical students and residents about wilderness medicine.

How did you get involved in ski patrol?

I've been a patroller since I was 18 years old, so I got started fairly young. When I was a young skier, I got hurt a lot. When I got to college, I started patrolling to be the one on the other side of the scenario. I've been patrolling for 21 years now. I was a patroller full-time for a while at first, but it seemed that the folks pulling off the patrolling life and making a living in a mountain town were the medical professionals. After a few years, I did the premed thing and the long road through med school. But I love patrolling; it's where I got my start in medicine. I'm a line patroller (at Northstar in Tahoe). I've always been a line patroller first.

How did you get involved in the OEC committee?

I've been teaching OEC for a long time, since my second or third year as a patroller. I've been involved in teaching throughout my patrolling career and always wanted to get more involved at the regional level and beyond. I became an instructor trainer [IT] several years ago to help develop our young and upcoming instructors.

Have you been chatting with your predecessor, Chuck Allen, at all about the job?

I met Chuck at Powderfall a couple of years ago when I was trying to first get involved more at a national level. A lot of times, it's kind of in the right place at the right time. This is definitely one of those, with the support and guidance of several good mentors as well.

It sounds like OEC7 is in progress. What can you tell me about that, and what is planned?

Yes, it's a very big project, but it's going to be a great educational

product. Our big focus with OEC7 is trying to create something that really tries to streamline the text and the curriculum to really optimize it for learning and trim some of the prior content that was nice to know, but was really extraneous for our learners. We've also put a focus on reorganization and logical flow. Then, we're also trying to branch out to some of the other disciplines that NSP covers, so we're adding content on bike and Nordic/ Backcountry skills. We're also adding a chapter on patroller wellness, realizing that's a major focus area for NSP and for a lot of our patrols.

This is the first OEC book that is fully digitally integrated from the start of the development process. The LMS [learning management system], which has been built up for a lot of other courses, is foundational with the text, videos, and interactive modules, as well as all sorts of other digital content to really provide learners opportunities to learn in different ways. We've been working really closely with the OEC Committee as part of the development, because we want to have the folks who are actually teaching the course as part of the development process, as opposed to bringing them in later once the text is finished. So, the medical and OEC committees are truly building this together.

What changes do you think there might be? Medicine's always evolving. There's been quite a lot. I mean, there was a whole pandemic, really, since the last edition, I think. I think OEC6 came out before COVID.

OEC6 was rolled out in 2021, right in the middle of COVID. We were teaching the OEC class when the first rollout happened, and it was a wild time to teach an OEC class. So yes, there's been a couple of things. One of the biggest is C-collars. There is new literature and medical evidence that has come out that rigid C-collars and spinal immobilization have the potential to harm our patients. Due to this, there are certain prehospital and wilderness medicine communities that have started to de-emphasize these in their protocols. Currently, there are significant variations in practice from full to no immobilizations with state and local agencies being anywhere on that spectrum. One of the questions we're wrestling with is how to incorporate the latest medical evidence while still respecting that we work in a very unique environment where extrication is much more a part of our job than it is for many other prehospital providers.

How does this relate to using the spinal motion restriction (SMR) protocol?

SMR is how we figure out if we need to be concerned about a patient's potential for a spinal injury. That protocol has fairly well-established medical evidence. The key question we're answering now is, if you are concerned that your patient has a potential spinal injury, then what do you do?

You mentioned bike patrol and their unique injuries that you're seeing there. Obviously, there's probably a lot more road rash than there would be in a skiing environment.

There certainly is. That's part of just having the folks who actually do those skills write those chapters. We're getting patrollers that are bike patrollers and patrollers that are Nordic patrollers

and backcountry patrollers to really highlight the injuries that they see in their unique environments that alpine patrollers might not have much awareness of.

What about the importance of having a medical adviser for your patrol to set protocols? Is that something that you want to push forward at the national level?

If you don't have a medical adviser, NSP and OEC support you up to the level of OEC. If you want to do anything beyond the OEC standard of training, that's where a medical adviser can be really helpful in adapting your medical practices to the uniqueness of your local hill and your environment. In addition, medical advisers can be a great resource for education, quality assurance, and patient follow-up.

At the National Medical Committee, one of our other major focuses is supporting medical advisors and providing them with resources. Though all are medical professionals, many lack a background in emergency, wilderness, or prehospital medicine. By providing them with protocols, resources, and a supportive community, we can help them be more impactful in their roles.

Is there going to be any change in the assessment process? I know EMT and paramedic curriculums have moved to XABC as a trauma primary assessment and really are stressing the issue of exsanguinating bleeding and treating that first.

Yes, we are going to that exact model for this with OEC7. We are making some revisions to the assessment chapter just to kind of change some of the flow, but that's probably one of the bigger changes on the assessment front to bring massive hemorrhage control up first. Once you lose a large amount of blood, it's very hard to replace it in the field, so stopping bleeding becomes the first step in the primary assessment.

I know OEC7 is in progress, and you said you're writing the chapters now. When does the committee foresee the new edition coming out?

Our current timeline is to have the text completed by summer 2026, and that way it'll be ready for publication for the 2027 OEC courses. It takes about a year after we finish the words to get all the other components of the LMS, OEC refresher, and instructor guides ready for rollout, so that's our target time frame.

What are your goals as national medical advisor? I know you're still warming up to the role, but I imagine you have some long-term plans beyond OEC7.

OEC7 is certainly getting a lot of our time and attention at the moment, but it's certainly not my only task in this position. As the national medical advisor and leader of the NSP Medical Committee, I am a resource to the national board and to all of the other curriculum committees. For example, when Senior, Certified, or OEC committees develop new scenarios or exams, we review those and make sure that the medical content is up to date and accurate. We want to ensure that all our courses and products are representative of actual patient care so they can be the best possible learning and evaluation tools for our members. +





THE FOUR E'S

Keys to Teaching Adult Learners

BY TODD WENDLE,
LOOKOUT PASS SKI PATROL

I had a lightbulb moment not long ago: every patroller is both a student and a teacher.

We learn and teach every single day—on the hill, in the aid room, in life. Every rescue, every run, every conversation sharpens our instincts and deepens our understanding of what it means to serve.

For more than twenty years, I've taught OEC and OET at Lookout Pass, perched on the Idaho–Montana border. It's a place where storms roll in fast, lessons run deep, and laughter always finds its way into the debrief. In all that time, I've realized something humbling: while I've spent two decades teaching, I've never stopped being a student. Every season, every class, every new patroller has something to teach me.

Each year, a new team arrives—nervous, excited, and ready to dive in. They carve out precious time from busy lives, pay out of pocket, and show up fueled by what I call the **Four E's: Eagerness, Enthusiasm, Excitement, and Energy**. The dream of a lifetime is at their fingertips

Their expectations are sky-high for the class, the materials, and especially for the instructors. These students come from every walk of life, but they share a common thread: they're achievers. They don't do halfway. And because of that, we instructors have to bring our very best every single time.

At Lookout Pass, a small group of dedicated instructors meets after every season. We talk. We question. We take apart what worked, what didn't, and what our students taught us. Their feedback is our curriculum for the following year. We fold those lessons back into the next class because, truth be told, teaching in NSP is never a one-way street. It's a lifelong cycle of learning, sharing, and growing together.

And that's the beauty of this work. On any given day, we might be the teacher. On another, we're the student. But always, we're patrollers. We learn from the mountain, from each other, and from the experience of service itself.

Understanding is the overriding theme of transferring knowledge and skills from one person to the next. More specifically:

1. Instructors must understand the need for consistency in knowledge presentation, skill learning, and student learning measurement.
2. While developing, maintaining, and improving their own "style," instructors must understand the adult learner and all that entails.
3. Instructors must understand the need for exceptional observation, listening, and articulation skills. These do not come easily. It is a lifelong endeavor of constant improvement.

Understanding is just the beginning. Just as students do, instructors need a toolkit to make knowledge transfer successful. And like skiing or snowboarding, there is really no end, no stopping



point. Everything can be improved and improved yet again. One can always do "better" than before.

Here are the key "tools":

- Learn and articulate in-depth knowledge about the subject matter.
- Be able to take a task, any task, and break it down into smaller steps.
- Be able to do the task itself. Then demonstrate the task and the steps students need to learn the concepts and principles successfully.
- Have excellent observation and articulation skills to observe the students and determine, "What is going right?" and "What is not working like it should?" Even more importantly, being able to communicate with the students so they understand what needs improving, what they can do to improve, and, specifically, how they can make that improvement.
- Be consistent from class to class and instructor to instructor. Stay true to the book. Do not change up a skill or add some additional knowledge beyond the book.
- The students have many years ahead of them to practice their new skills and knowledge. The class is just a beginning point, not an end point. (Note: While this is "last" in the list of "tools", it just may be the most important concept that each instructor should fully understand. There should never be an expectation of proficient, let alone exceptional performance, when anyone is just beginning.)

Here are our Top 22 Adult Learner Instructor Tips, in no particular order:

1. Get to know and understand each student's learning style. (Chapter 2, ID NSP)
2. Get to know each student individually. Get to know them as people, including their strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.
3. Never, never say, "This is easy" to a student. Never. They more than likely have never done "this" in their life.
4. Avoid "war stories." The students have no frame of reference and no emotional attachment. The "war story" is a huge time sink.
5. Review all the subject materials beforehand (not just before class).
6. Plan the class the day before or sooner. Go over knowledge, materials, props/demos, class objective(s), and agenda with each of the students, fellow instructors, helpers, and patients.
7. Arrive 1-2 hours before class starts. Prepare everything before any student arrives.
8. Respect the students. Start on time. Finish on time. Always.
9. If a concept or a step is puzzling to one student, it is also puzzling to others. Take a minute to think, "What is missing?" Ask the students. Ask another instructor to explain. Take the time to work through the issue.
10. Every instructor has a "style." Have another instructor or student try it differently if things aren't clicking. A student can and will have the "light bulb" moment at any time. It could be the phrasing, the demo, the person, who knows—but the bulb will spark to life!
11. Use all available resources. Students make great patients. Use another instructor to explain a concept.
12. Never just "wing" a class. The students will know it immediately. If an instructor must substitute at the last minute, let the class know and have them help. They will love it.
13. Be loose, comfortable, and, most importantly, flexible. The class can move "into the weeds" in a second. Be ready and guide them back to the subject at hand.
14. Use the agenda as an advantage. It helps keep the class on track, focused, and timely. However, don't let the agenda bind you. Just because the instructor has planned 30 minutes for an activity or class does not mean students can successfully navigate it in 30 minutes. If it takes longer, it takes longer. Adjust and move forward.
15. Listen, listen, listen to the students. How they answer, what they question, what hits them, and what they do or don't like. Take some time to formulate an answer. The students are a great guide for the instructor.
16. Keep the class fun! Keep the class moving along literally and figuratively! Most adult students do not have a long attention span. Turn most anything into a game. Introduce a level of competitiveness. Engage them whenever possible. (This takes additional planning and thought. Working with other instructors is a great way to get creative.) Stop at the store before class for some candy prizes. It's amazing what fun can come from chocolate.
17. Be on the lookout for students who are always hanging back, hiding. Gently "pull" them out and include them.
18. Know the student's performance on quizzes. The results tell the instructor a great deal about how well the student is doing with knowledge retention and involvement.
19. Provide critique individually and positively. Be specific. If "everyone" is not getting something, pull out the mirror, take a look, and start asking questions.
20. OEC/OET is about decision-making. Let the student make decisions as often as possible.
21. Students do not learn skills and knowledge in a single pass. It takes practice. Lots of it. Plan for it. Make it happen.
22. Maintain a constant level of positivity. Observe, listen, and then communicate. Take a planning moment before responding.

In the end, no one's good at anything the first time around. Every skill takes repetition, and if we don't use it, it fades. Skills get rusty, confidence slips. But when that little internal alarm rings—when you catch yourself thinking, "I'm not as sharp at that as I used to be"—that's your cue. It's time to get back out there. Learn. Take a class. Practice, practice, practice.

Being a great instructor, volunteer, or professional demands a deep well of time, focus, and energy. It's not just about knowing the material; it's about being an exceptional observer, listener, and communicator. It means translating thought into action, even when students struggle or the weather turns sideways. Instructors don't get to have "off days." We have to stay patient, positive, and adaptable.

Most of all, it means being passionate about the people in front of you. Every lesson adds knowledge and skill that students will carry for a lifetime. And as they learn, they'll go on to teach others. Their Eagerness, Enthusiasm, Excitement, and Energy, the Four E's, spread outward like ripples on a still lake, touching everyone they meet.

That's the real reward of this work: learning to teach and teaching to learn. It's the never-ending cycle that keeps our patrol strong, our skills sharp, and our purpose alive. +

THE HEAT IS ON



WARMER TEMPERATURES AND SHORTER SKI SEASONS ARE ALREADY HAVING A MAJOR IMPACT ON SKI RESORT OPERATIONS.

BY MEGAN MICHELSON

Breckenridge Resort. Photo by Katie Young.

When Weston Shirey began working as a ski patroller at Utah's Park City Mountain Resort 15 years ago, starting the season in December was the norm. But now, winter seems to come later. So, newer or part-time patrollers often don't get called in until mid-January, which makes for reduced income and less time in the field.

"Everything feels more unpredictable," Shirey says. "We'll have warm spells and droughts mixed with super intense atmospheric rivers and snow squalls. The term 'weather weirding' certainly applies."

Shirey, who also works as a backcountry ski guide, says he became a patroller for the perks of the job—but even those can be harder to find these days.

"When we have low-snow years or warm years, it changes the morale on patrol," she said. "We have a tight-knit crew and we're all there to be together and ski pow and have fun, but when the skiing is bad, morale gets low."

BEYOND THE PATROL: OPERATIONS UNDER PRESSURE

Winters have warmed across the U.S. by about 4 degrees on average between 1970 and 2024, according to a 2024 report by Climate Central, a policy-neutral nonprofit organization that reports on climate data. Cold streaks have gotten shorter—they're now six days shorter, on average, across the U.S. since 1970—and in the northeast, 18 more winter days on average are warmer than normal.

This impacts ski patrol teams in many ways: shorter seasons impact pay, benefits, and job stability for patrollers. Warm, sticky snow or sheets of ice caused by rain-on-snow events can lead to more on-hill injuries, and sudden warming

during the day can impact snow stability and avalanche mitigation.

"The worst recipe for disaster is the sunny, cold days after a rain and thaw event, because people ski faster when they can see," said David Tepper, a ski patroller at Jay Peak, Vermont, for the past 17 years. "Several of the fatalities we've seen have been clear days after it's rained. As a result, we're consciously more careful and conservative about trail closures on days like that."

These issues are not just impacting ski patrol. Everything from snowmaking to grooming to lift operations will need to adapt to prepare for shorter seasons, warmer temperatures, rapidly changing snow conditions, and erratic storms. The good news is that ski resorts are resilient, and they're embracing solutions. Ski industry leaders from brands to ski resorts are advocating for policy changes, and they're approaching sustainability efforts with a new urgency.

WHEN WINTER FEELS LIKE SPRING

Dr. Elizabeth Burakowski is a splitboarder from New Hampshire, and she remembers a day in February 2024 when she showed up at the Mount Washington Backcountry Ski Fest and conditions weren't what she had hoped.

"It was a balmy 50 degrees and more like spring skiing than a mid-winter pow fest," she recalls.

That winter was a particularly dismal ski season on the East Coast. A week before the December holiday season, a warm, wet storm brought torrential rains and flooding across the Eastern Seaboard. States from Maine to Virginia saw upwards of 7 inches of rain with warm temperatures that broke

December records. It hit 60 degrees in Boston, more than 20 degrees above the December average.

That weather washed away whatever snowmaking had been underway to prepare for the holiday crowds. Some ski areas had to close for what is typically one of the busiest weeks of the year. By January 2024, storms veered hot and southward, rendering temperatures too warm for significant snowmaking. After a cold snap or natural snowfall, an unusually warm stretch or more rain melted snow surfaces back to dirt.

The ski areas improvised—closed, then reopened, farmed snow, and offered discounted rates. But, still, businesses suffered. The northeast saw 12.4 million skier visits that winter, a 6 percent decline from the previous year, according to data from the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA).

Burakowski is also a research professor in the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of New Hampshire, where she studies winter climate change in the northeast. In her models, the winter of 2024 could become the norm by the end of this century.

“In a high emissions scenario, we’ll see more rain, less snow, and a shorter winter season,” she says. “Instead of having a deep snowpack, we’ll have intermittent melts in the middle of the season. We may have cold nights, but fewer of them will be below freezing, which means greater challenges for making snow.”

WHAT THE SCIENCE TELLS US

In 2022, Burakowski co-authored a study in *Northeastern Naturalist*, a peer-reviewed science journal, that predicted that, in a high emissions scenario, the northeast region could average just over three weeks of so-called “ice days”—where the max daily temperature is below freezing—by the end of this century. That’s less than half of the historical baseline. The study projects that ski areas will experience a 45 to 83 percent reduction in the number of early-season snowmaking days, if we continue a high-emissions scenario, and upwards of 50 percent reductions in snowmaking days through the end of February.

Experts project that deep snowpack—which supports a healthy forest and water supply—will decline by three weeks to one month across the region by the end of this century.

“It’s a tough conversation to have. We’re talking about people’s livelihoods here,” Burakowski says. “But this is very much real. This is happening, we are seeing warmer trends.”

Brendan Gibbons, the director of snow surfaces at California’s Palisades Tahoe, has been working in the ski industry for 40 years.

“I’d be lying if I said I haven’t seen changes in the overall climate,” he said. “I don’t see nearly as many windows where we can make snow in the early season now.”

In years past, Gibbons says cold temperatures typically

Keystone Resort. Photo by Katie Young.





Keystone Resort. Photo by Katie Young

allowed for snowmaking in October that would stick around through the fall, but now, making snow in the early season has become unreliable. In some cases, they end up needing to make snow well into January or February.

Even with advanced snowmaking technology, snow still melts when it's too warm. By the end of this century, nearly all of the northeastern U.S. will experience above-freezing average maximum temperatures under a higher emissions scenario.

"We rarely get a cold enough October now to make snow," Gibbons says. "We do have additives and snow inducers that allow us to make snow when it's warmer, but making snow at marginal temperatures doesn't allow us to make enough to build a base."

THE ECONOMIC TOLL OF SHORTER SEASONS

The impact of shorter ski seasons will hit hard financially—it already is.

A 2024 study by researchers at the University of Waterloo and the University of Innsbruck found that the U.S. ski industry has lost more than \$5 billion over the past 20 years due to changes in climate. Ski seasons have gotten shorter by around five to seven days, on average, since 2000. Lost skier visits, plus an increase in snowmaking costs, have caused an estimated \$252 million in annual reductions nationwide. By 2050, experts project that ski seasons will shorten by 14 to 33 days in a low-emissions scenario. In a high-emissions one, between 27 and 62 days. That would trigger an economic loss estimated between \$657 million and \$1.4 billion a year.

Studies show that for a ski area to be economically viable, ski facilities must operate for at least 100 days a season, including over the Christmas holiday. Burakowski's 2022 report found that only 29 of the 197 ski areas across Quebec and the northeastern U.S. would remain economically viable over the next 75 years.

Lee Parton, an environmental economist at Boise State



Breckenridge Resort. Photo by Katie Young.

University and an avid skier at Idaho's Bogus Basin, says that the economic impact of shorter ski seasons will mean fewer jobs, from patrol teams to ski instructors.

"Ski resorts have been adept so far at applying innovative technology to keep their season as long as possible. But looking ahead, that's going to be harder to do. There will be winners and losers. Smaller resorts in temperately moderate zones will see seasons get even shorter. With [fewer] visitors, you'll see a decrease in revenue, and that'll affect jobs."

ADAPTING—AND FINDING HOPE IN CLIMATE ACTION

Resilience and adaptation will be key. Loon Mountain, in New Hampshire, has one of the East Coast's most robust snowmaking systems. Last year, the ski area installed more than 100 new semi-automated snowmaking hydrants to capitalize on smaller weather windows for snowmaking. Loon also has what they call a Snow Guarantee. If you show up at the mountain and buy a lift ticket, but the snow or weather conditions aren't for you, you can go to guest services within an hour of your ticket being scanned and ask for a voucher to return another day that season.

"We're used to variable weather patterns, but it's about

adapting to the weather as much as we can to make sure the guest experience is still enjoyable," said Taylor Siewierski, the communications manager of Loon. "We try to be straightforward about our conditions in our mountain report, so our guests know exactly what to expect when they arrive."

Last year, Loon Mountain was one of 37 ski areas across the U.S. that signed the NSAA's Climate Challenge, the highest number of participants in the program's 14 years in existence. The program holds ski areas accountable for reducing their impact and emissions and raising their level of climate advocacy. Last winter, those resorts reported an 11 percent reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions compared to the 14-year average, and they participated in over 200 climate advocacy actions, from meetings with elected officials in Washington, D.C., to community engagement efforts on climate in their own areas.

This, Burakowski says, is where we can find hope. After all, the worst-case scenario predictions are only likely if we continue down a path of high greenhouse gas emissions. "The reductions in cold, snowy conditions are mitigated if we slow greenhouse gas emissions," Burakowski says. "So, we can still preserve winter with climate action."

Learn more at protectourwinters.org/join-team-pow +

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TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AVALANCHE PROFESSIONALS:

LESSONS FROM THE 28TH NATIONAL AVALANCHE SCHOOL

BY JOSH OLSEN,
AVALANCHE PROGRAM MANAGER

Flannel, Blundstones, and backpacks — the unofficial uniform of the 2025 National Avalanche School. This year, 142 students from 56 patrols came together to deepen their knowledge and sharpen their skills in snow science and mountain safety. Among them were 116 NSP members and at least 32 tattoos dedicated to snow, patrol life, and the mountains we call home.

On October 12, students descended on South Jordan, Utah, just outside Salt Lake City, to gain unparalleled knowledge and timeless connections at the 28th National Avalanche School.

This year, National Ski Patrol awarded nine patrollers with scholarships to help cover the cost of travel and attendance, thanks to the support of NSP partners Mammut and North American Rescue Dogs (NARD).

The National Avalanche School is a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service, National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) and NSP. It provides comprehensive professional training tailored for ski patrollers and other avalanche workers. The event connects students with prominent experts in the avalanche industry, providing in-depth information and real-world applications for working with avalanche problems.

National Ski Patrol was this year's presenting sponsor, solidifying our continued commitment to patroller-focused avalanche education and building on our strong history of collaboration and leadership.

The NAS recently updated its curriculum and follows American Avalanche Association (A3) guidelines, emphasizing ski area avalanche hazard management. It also delivers essential knowledge and skills for avalanche mitigation and hazard reduction.

Graduates earn the Pro 1-NAS designation, which exceeds A3's basic Pro 1 requirements, ensuring top-tier avalanche education and training. The retooled courses incorporate more content on wet loose snow avalanches, wet slab avalanches, and avalanche problems for a changing climate. In addition, there was a special focus on avalanche worker safety, with impactful discussions around psychological safety and resilience for the avalanche worker. Instructors focused on stress-injury prevention, highlighting the importance of an after-action review, and fostering a culture of safety, which experts recognize as critical to rescue performance and well-being.

The avalanche worker safety lecture provided by Scott Savage,

the director of the Sawtooth Avalanche Center, investigated how and why avalanche workers make mistakes. Drawing on his previous research with Ron Simenhois in 2010, Savage explained that incidents and near misses are not often due to complex snow or avalanche conditions. However, communication issues often play a significant role in the case of near misses. He provided a mantra to communicate in high-risk environments: "See it, say it, fix it, speak up."

Learning from the leaders in the avalanche industry is an experience unique to NAS.

"Attending NAS was four intense, packed days of avalanche education led by the people who literally wrote the books on avalanche safety," said Ian Bolliger, a student from Tahoe Backcountry Ski Patrol. "There's nowhere else you can ask a question and get an answer straight from the source—if these instructors don't know, the answer probably doesn't exist. Complex topics like avalanche mechanics and snowpack-weather interactions were presented with clarity and precision."

Moreover, students find truly unique mentorship opportunities at NAS, according to Whitefish Mountain NSP patroller Linden Wyatt.

"Being able to make connections with some of the leaders in snow science and avalanche research was incredible, and the presentations that were given were content-rich and impactful," said Wyatt, who also won an NSP scholarship to the school. "I particularly learned a lot from the weather forecasting and avalanche formation and release presentations."

No other avalanche education experience offers this level of interaction with nationally-recognized experts. In addition to hearing from and talking with industry experts, the patroller-to-patroller sharing is exceptionally rich at NAS.

"NAS was a great opportunity to meet patrollers from other ski areas, to learn about the different challenges they face, and to understand the different techniques they use to mitigate risk—it gave me several ideas that I will bring back to my patrol," Wyatt said.

These practical learning and mentorship opportunities at NAS can bridge the gap between education and experience. It helps armor patrollers with knowledge, reduces their risk, and prolongs their patrolling career. Students were exposed to the most current best

“NO OTHER AVALANCHE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE OFFERS THIS LEVEL OF INTERACTION WITH NATIONALLY-RECOGNIZED EXPERTS.”

practices and provided with tools they can take home and apply to their patrol's daily operations. This rigorous education is the cornerstone to advancing the avalanche industry and taking us closer to our goal of reducing avalanche incidents resulting in injury or death.

“Attending this school early in my career was incredibly important to me,” said Sara Bonipart, a patroller at Park City. “It will allow me to go back to my patrol as a stronger team member, decision maker, and with critical building blocks to ask meaningful questions as I work with mentors throughout the beginning of my career. The scholarship I received from NSP is what allowed me to attend this school so early on, taking a critical step towards a career and life of working outside and on snow.”

World Renowned Presenters included:

Wendolyn Antibus- Snow safety Mount Rose

Karl Birkeland- Avalanche Specialist

Ethan Davis- Forecaster Sawtooth

Ryan Evanczyk- A-Basin Patrol Director

Mike Ferrari- NAS Program Director

Dallas Glass- Forecaster NWAC

Ethan Greene- Director CIAC

Rebecca Hodgetts- Avalanche Specialist NAC

Chris Lundy- Avalanche Specialist NAC

Alex Marienthal- Forecaster GNFAAC

Erich Peitsch- USGS Research Scientist

Mike Rheam- JHMR Snow Safety- Forecaster

David Richards- Former Snow Safety Alta

Scott Savage- Director Sawtooth AC

John Stumberis- Forecaster WDOT

Simon Trautman- Director NAC

Bruce Tremper- Author and Retired Forecaster

The next opportunity to attend the National Avalanche School will be in 2027. Check out avalancheschool.org for more information. Applicants for the school need to have at least 2 years of patrol experience prior to participating in the school. +

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MODERNIZING PATROL COMMUNICATIONS: WHAT'S COMING NEXT FOR NSP

TWO PROGRAMS BENEFITTING PATROLS & PATROLLERS

BY DICK WOOLF, NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR

Ski patrol work is changing fast, and our communications systems need to keep pace. Whether you're managing incidents miles from a ski area radio network, coordinating a bike patrol in summer, or working deep in Nordic terrain, reliable communication is now mission-critical—not just convenient. That's why NSP is advancing two major technologies that expand how patrollers stay connected in the field: the growing NSP Zello program and FirstNet's new low-Earth-orbit satellite network.

Both initiatives strengthen safety, improve coordination, and give patrols more flexibility across all seasons. Here's a look at where we are now—and what's coming next.

ZELLO

The NSP Zello program lets patrollers use smartphones like portable radios. By downloading the app on the phone, the user can speak with all other patrollers who have also downloaded. The app identifies who is speaking and can record and transcribe the conversation for later review. Communications are available worldwide, wherever Internet access is available, either direct from a service provider or via Wi-Fi. There can be any number of patrollers on the network at one time. Each patrol has its own channel, or talkgroup.

Bike patrols used this service during the past summer and found it very helpful for communications away from a ski area where a radio network is in place. Audio accessories, such as speaker mics and headsets, can plug into the smartphone (or connect via Bluetooth), so you don't need to hold the phone in your hand. There is even a handlebar-mounted push-to-talk button that connects to the phone via Bluetooth. You press the button with your thumb and speak into your headset – no need to take your

hands off the handlebars.

During the upcoming season, Nordic patrols will find this program useful when operating in parks and forests without an installed radio system.

For Alpine patrols, the Zello network is able to connect to your patrol's radio system, linking the patrol's radios to patroller smartphones by using an external adapter connected to a computer.

There is no cost for member patrols and patrollers to participate in the NSP Zello program. Contact telecom@nsp.org for more information.

FIRSTNET—AST SATELLITES

As part of the FirstNet mandate to provide communications to first responders throughout the United States, including in rural and wilderness areas, FirstNet is partnering with a satellite provider to maximize coverage.

The AST “Bluebird” satellite program, just getting underway, will enable FirstNet subscribers to use their smartphones for

voice calling, text messaging, and data connectivity when they are out of range of terrestrial cell towers. AST, a satellite company, is launching a constellation of “Bluebird” satellites. What makes these low-Earth-orbit satellites different from existing satellite networks is that they carry “normal” cell-tower radio payloads. In effect, they are a “cell tower in the sky.”

The first 5 of these satellites are in orbit and undergoing testing. A sixth satellite is scheduled to launch at the end of 2025. When the initial deployment is complete, FirstNet smartphones will first attempt to connect to a regular land-based (terrestrial) cell tower. If terrestrial coverage is unavailable outdoors in a rural or wilderness area, the smartphone will seek connectivity from a Bluebird satellite. No special phone model is required. The Bluebird satellite's radios will communicate with the FirstNet phone just as a terrestrial cell tower would.

NSP will be a beta tester for this program in some areas of the country, and the program plans testing to begin during the first half of 2026. More information on this program will be available as FirstNet releases it. +



A dramatic photograph of two firefighters in full protective gear, including helmets and jackets, viewed from behind. They are looking towards a massive fire that is consuming a line of trees at night. The fire is intense, with bright orange and yellow flames and thick, dark smoke billowing into the dark sky. The scene is backlit by the fire, creating a high-contrast, heroic atmosphere.

FIRE AND

A skier in a red jacket, blue bib with the number 260, and black pants is captured mid-air during a jump. The skier is holding ski poles and has snow spray trailing behind them. The background is a clear blue sky. Below the skier, the snowy, textured surface of a mountain slope is visible.

SNOW:

THE DUAL WORLDS OF A PATROLLER AND HOTSHOT FIREFIGHTER

BY JOSH MCCORMACK



The Snake River Hotshots station is in Pocatello, Idaho

CHARLIE BERNICKE IS A MEMBER OF THE GRAND TARGHEE SKI PATROL. HE IS ALSO A SKI COACH, AN NSP ATHLETE, AND A WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER FOR THE SNAKE RIVER HOTSHOTS.

FROM THE FIRELINE TO SKI SLOPES, HE EMBODIES THE RESILIENCE, ADAPTABILITY, AND PASSION THAT DEFINE TODAY'S SKI PATROLLERS. BETWEEN FIRE AND SNOW, CHARLIE HAS FOUND A RHYTHM THAT PUSHES HIM PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY, WHILE TYING HIM DEEPLY TO TWO COMMUNITIES BUILT ON TEAMWORK AND TRUST.

FIRE ON THE LINE

Hotshot crews are the elite of wildland firefighting, specializing in fighting large, high-intensity wildfires in rugged, remote terrain. Think “special forces” of wildfire suppression. Their mission is to build firelines, remove fuels, and control the spread of fire, often in the most dangerous and inaccessible parts of a wildfire zone. They’re self-sufficient, highly trained, and deployed wherever the situation is most critical.

They operate as a cohesive, disciplined team capable of working long shifts (often 16+ hours) for days on end. Hotshots travel across the country, sometimes internationally, for weeks or months during fire season. They live in temporary camps, eat MREs, and carry everything they need (tools, food, water,

gear) on their backs

Charlie joined Snake River Hotshots at 26 years old in the summer of 2025. For him, it was the culmination of years of interest in natural resources and public land management. Still, it was ski patrolling that gave him the final push.

“Quite a few patrollers at Targhee are firefighters in the summer, so I had the right connections and support to get me into the field,” he said. “I’ve found that the two career paths line up pretty well as far as the people, mentality, and physical fitness involved.”

Training, known as “criticals,” begins with two weeks of fitness tests, classroom instruction, and field drills. But even the best preparation can’t erase the stress of unpredictable conditions.

Hotshots undergo intensive training in:

- Fire behavior and suppression tactics
- Chainsaw and hand-tool operations
- Navigation, first aid, and survival
- Physical fitness (the bar is extremely high)

Many are qualified for incident command, helicopter operations, or emergency medical support.

Charlie describes the work as both exhausting and deeply rewarding. The crew hikes miles of steep terrain daily, carrying heavy





Charlie skiing with Grand Targhee Patrol.

saws and tools to cut firelines that can stop a blaze in its tracks. They also carry out complex burnouts and backfires to slow advancing flames. Beyond physical grit, Hotshots are risk-management experts, making quick, sound decisions in volatile environments where conditions change by the minute.

“Being on a Hotshot crew is definitely a challenge both mentally and physically,” Charlie said. “That said, the most meaningful part of the job so far has been being a part of a crew of great people while helping protect the communities we live in and around.”

THE SPARK

The path to fire began with snow. Charlie first strapped into skis at the age of three on a family trip to Lenk, Switzerland.

“I guess that my dad was trying to teach me how to make a pizza turn, but I french-fried instead and pointed my skis downhill without having any plans of stopping,” he recalls. “I felt pretty free in that moment, and I’ve chased that feeling ever since.”

Growing up in Vermont, that freedom grew into a lifelong passion. His parents instilled an appreciation for the outdoors, and by college, Charlie was ready to put that passion into action. He volunteered as a ski patroller at Sugarbush Resort during his senior year of college, discovering not only a love for the work but

“IT WAS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE TO BE IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT TOGETHER, BUT DOING ESSENTIALLY THE SAME WORK WE DO IN THE WINTER.”

also an aptitude for emergency response. After earning his EMT certification, he headed west to the Tetons, landing at Grand Targhee Resort, where he has now patrolled for three years.

“I really enjoyed my time at Sugarbush, and it further sparked an interest in patrolling and becoming a first responder,” Charlie said. “Patrolling seemed like the perfect avenue to finding a job, and I’ve never looked back.”

PARALLELS BETWEEN FIRE AND SNOW

Charlie’s two worlds might seem opposite, one battling flames, the other providing first-aid care on frigid slopes, but he sees deep connections between being a Hotshot and a patroller. Both demand constant vigilance, the ability to adapt quickly, and the calm to face unpredictable dangers. These challenges share one truth: the outcome often depends on the first responder’s training and composure.

His EMT certification and three years of patrol experience helped him earn a spot on a hotshot crew. Still, he also had to obtain his red card, complete several online wildfire courses and pre-season “criticals,” and finish the Bureau of Land Management’s Operational Medical Support Program to become an Operational Medical Support Technician qualified to respond to medical incidents on fires.

“You really have no idea what situations you will face on a daily basis in both lines of work,” Charlie explains. “Fires, avalanches, and medical calls can all be unpredictable, so being prepared and able to adapt to any incident is key. Staying calm, while under pressure, in high-stress environments is also crucial.”

That composure was tested during a fire in Utah this summer, when his crew responded to a medical incident. Leading the response was another hotshot and fellow Grand Targhee patroller serving as an EMT.

“It was cool to see how their experience as a patroller helped prepare and dial them in while being a first responder on a fire incident,” Charlie said. “It was a unique experience to be in a



Charlie on the fireline.



Charlie has competed in many events, including the IFSA Freeride World Qualifier.

completely different environment together, but doing essentially the same work we do in the winter.”

ATHLETE AND MENTOR

In addition to his roles on the fireline and the mountain, Charlie is an NSP Athlete Ambassador. This program supports patrollers competing in events while showcasing the role of patrol to broader audiences. He has competed in IFSA Freeride World Qualifier events at Grand Targhee, with ambitions to expand into more competitions around the country.

“I wanted to start pushing myself further as an athlete and enter more IFSA competitions,” he said. “The NSP athlete ambassador program seemed like a good way to get the extra support I needed to make that possible.”

Balancing full-time patrol work, firefighting, coaching young skiers, and training as an athlete hasn’t been easy. More than anything, Charlie notes he has found meaning in using the athlete platform to inspire others.

“Being an NSP athlete was a good avenue to spread the word

about ski patrolling to the kids I coach, and the next generation of young patrollers,” Charlie said.

LOOKING FORWARD

For Charlie, the future is about consistency and making a lasting impact. He wants to keep patrolling for as long as possible, continue firefighting in the summers, and grow as an athlete. But perhaps his most significant influence is as a coach, helping young skiers set goals and pursue them with passion.

“I think three words to describe how these roles connect for me are passion, consistency, and fun,” he said. “The biggest thing I can think of as far as leaving an impact on the NSP community is getting more young skiers stoked on ski patrolling.”

Charlie’s worlds may seem like they’re opposites, fire and snow, heat and cold, smoke and storms. But in both, the essence is the same: resilience, readiness, and a commitment to protect and inspire. Whether swinging a saw on a fireline or skiing in treacherous areas to reach an injured skier, Charlie is living proof of what it means to serve with passion. +



NSP ONLINE STORE CATALOGUE

This feature highlights a selection of products available in the National Ski Patrol Online Store, with many more options to explore online. For complete product details and specifications, we encourage you to visit the store's website. (store.nsp.org). Whether you're shopping for yourself or looking for gifts for family, friends, or even your pets, the NSP Store has something for everyone.

MAMMUT



Albula IN Jacket

The Albula is among Mammut's most sustainable insulated jackets. It is made almost entirely of recycled materials. It boasts excellent fill power as well as a high thermal rating, even in damp conditions. The Albula is both comfortable and versatile. On cold days, the loose cut makes it easy to combine with other garments and wear over a thick midlayer.

Price: \$149

SKU: M425 Men's; M426 Women's



Rime IN Flex Hooded Jacket

When temperatures drop, the Rime Flex Jacket with a helmet-compatible hood is the right option in cold and wet conditions. The Rime Flex is the warmest synthetic fiber insulated jacket in our collection. Stretch fibers and a slightly lower insulation density on the arms ensure you can move freely. The Pertex® Quantum Air lining makes the jacket particularly breathable, extremely light, and compressible. You can wear the jacket as an outer layer in cold conditions or carry it in your backpack, ready to warm you up during rest stops.

Price: \$217

SKU M427 Men's M428 Women's



Madris Light ML Hooded Jacket

Hiking, climbing, skiing, or mountaineering: this versatile midlayer knows no limits. Lightweight, breathable and wind-repellent, its waffle fleece and flat seams offer high comfort while added stretch provides excellent freedom of movement. This eco-conscious style is full of thoughtful details, like a hood that fits comfortably under your helmet and a quick-access sleeve pocket for small essentials.

Price: \$132

SKU: M435 Men's (black) M436 Women's (marine)



Rime Light IN Hybrid Vest

Delivering the warmth and comfort you need for a wide range of mountain sports, this lightweight hybrid vest combines all the right fabrics with all the right features. Thermal insulation meets stretchy fleece for optimal temperature regulation and freedom of movement. Wind and abrasion resistant, it also packs down small and can be stowed in its own pocket.

Price: \$132

SKU: M437 Men's M438 Women's



Men's Innominata ML Jacket

The classic fleece jacket always keeps you warm during the winter months or those in-between seasons when hiking, trekking or simply going about your daily business. The loose fit makes it extra comfortable. It can be worn on its own, or as a thermal layer on really cold days.

Price: \$117

SKU: S151-Claystone/Black



Trovat Longsleeve Shirt

Keep cozy and comfortable in a lightweight flannel, perfect for laid-back days and relaxed outdoor adventures. Made of 100% organic cotton, this super-soft longsleeve features a classic design with a button-up front and single chest pocket.

Price: \$75

**SKU: S149 Men's-Black/Mammut Red S150
Women's-Alpine Calamint/Strata**

LEKI



HELICON LITE

The HELICON LITE is the backcountry workhorse that's easy on the wallet. The HELICON LITE is infinitely adjustable from 110-145 cm and comes with an extended foam grip proving multiple locations to grasp when climbing or skinning steeper terrain. The HELICON LITE comes with the backcountry Binding Basket with a straight, hard edge perfect for adjusting climbing aids or cleaning ice buildup from skins. The Carbide tip penetrates even the firmest snow and ice. Several other adjustable ski poles also available online.

Price: \$79

SKU: 20228

HESTRA



Leather Fall Line Glove - Cork

Short freeride glove made of soft, supple cowhide aniline. Outseams for increased comfort and superior pole grip. This windproof glove now has a removable/replaceable 5-finger lining.

Price: \$124

SKU: 20237 5-Finger, 20236 3-Finger, 20235 Mitt



Army Leather Extreme Mitt - Black

One of Hestra's absolute warmest mittens for those really cold days. Sewed from durable, proofed Army Leather and flexible softshell material. Removable liner with heavy G-loft insulation. Can be combined with other liners.

Price: \$137

SKU: 19502



HestraJob – Titan Flex – Black/Tan

A short, flexible and reinforced winter work glove suitable for a wide variety of cold weather tasks. Durable goat leather combined with the Wolf Paw construction in the fingertips add to the durability, along with the added leather patch on the palm. The index finger and thumb are touchscreen compatible. Waterproof backhand material add to the weather protection of the Titan and the fleece lining provides all day comfort and warmth.

Price: \$36

SKU: 20244

DEUTER



NSP Patrol 30 Snow Pack

When it comes to safety, the NSP Patrol pack has it all worked out. It features a separate, easy-to-access compartment for your probe and shovel, making your avalanche equipment easily accessible in an emergency. It also includes two detachable internal pouches to organize your first-aid gear.

Price: \$159 (\$153 — 24L)

SKU: 20378 (20379 24L model)

HYDRO FLASK



21oz Standard Mouth w/ Flex Lid

Stainless steel, cup holder compatible, and fits right in your pack—our reusable, refillable 21-oz Standard Mouth insulated water bottle keeps cold drinks cold for 24 hours, hot drinks hot for up to 12 hours, and holds enough hydration for hours of fun. Six color options: Black(B), Indigo(I), Mesa(M), Pacific(P), Stone(S), White(W). 16-oz coffee flasks, 20-oz tumblers, 32-oz wide-mouth bottles, and accessories are available online.

Price: \$28

SKU 20381

TRANSPACK



TRV Ballistic Pro Ski Boot Carry Bag

Isosceles Storage System™ carries boots, helmet and gear. Constructed with super tough, water resistant coated 1680 ballistic nylon. Adjustable waist belt and sternum strap for comfort, weight distribution and stability. Comfort grip rubber top handle and padded foam front grip handle. Side boot pockets with air/water drainage grommets. NSP shield logo on left side.

Price: \$151

SKU: 20246-Blue w/ Charcoal Electric, 19836-Black w/ Silver Reflect, 20369-Black w/ Red Electric



Heated Boot Bag – Black/Ocean

Warm and dry your ski or snowboard boots with three different heat settings. Three different ways to carry: shoulder carry, back pack carry, stowed away single carry handle. 110v and 12v plugs allow you to power at home as well as your vehicle.

Price: \$212

SKU: 20373

NIKWAX



TX Direct Spray-On Waterproofing

The easy to use, safe, high performance spray on waterproofing for wet weather clothing. Adds Durable Water Repellency, revives breathability and maintains internal wicking properties. 10 oz

Price: \$13.50

SKU: 19989



Softshell Proof

High performance waterproofer designed to enhance performance and revitalize breathability of softshell garments. Easy to use in your washing machine, non flammable and PFC free. 10 oz. These and many more great Nikwax products are available online.

Price: \$11.50

SKU: 20392

GEAR GUIDE



GEAR GUIDE



GEAR GUIDE



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GEAR GUIDE



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NEXT—GEN RESILIENCE

Meeting the Challenge of Ski Patrolling as a Young Adult

BY SAM BRADEN,
WINTERGREEN SKI PATROL AND NSP
ATHLETE

I thought my dream of being a ski patroller was over before it even started.

When I first applied to Wintergreen Mountain's OEC course, just outside of Charlottesville, Virginia, I was rejected. My schedule was too busy, and some people believed that I wouldn't be able to juggle that challenge while maintaining my high school 4.0 GPA. I was crushed. I didn't know if I would even apply again. But, thanks to my patrol family's continued belief in me and NSP's National Office, which later awarded me a Powderfall scholarship in 2024, I was able to make my dream, a reality.

That conference reminded me why so many other Young Adult Patrollers want to join in the first place. The family vibe

that whole weekend honestly made me want to go after my OEC certification again. One of the best parts was when all the young adults got together to run scenarios. It felt so good to just be around people my age—no pressure, no judgment. We just worked through everything together, and if someone messed up, the rest of us were right there to build them back up.

I learned so much running those scenarios—not just the actual skills, but also from meeting other young patrollers from all over the country. It was cool hearing how their programs worked and what they'd picked up along the way. At the end of the day, they handed out awards, and even though my group didn't win, we got second place. The instructors were shocked when they found out I wasn't even OEC-certified yet. That was the



Sam completes a 45-mile national championship race in Roanoke.



Sam raced hard all of summer 2025, with two third-place finishes.

moment I realized ski patrol wasn't just something I liked—it felt like a calling. I knew I had to try again.

Just eight days after I made that decision at Powderfall, I sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in a bike crash. My life was flipped upside down. Suddenly, it was July—and three months of recovery had already gone by. During that time, I relearned how to talk and walk with fewer balance issues. I also had to rethink the way I learn. When it was time to take the OEC again, I tried my hardest to be resilient and act like my injury didn't affect me that much, but it was difficult.

TAKING ON OEC

Taking the OEC exam at the age of 16 came with challenges. I had to strategize, so I came up with study plans. I was very fortunate—thanks to growing up around the patrol, I had some previous knowledge. Plus, I had taken Outdoor First Care (OFC) for the first time in 2024.

One of the most helpful things for me was using the quizzes in the back of the textbook. I'd take a quiz, check my score, then go back and reread the chapter—focusing on the areas that needed improvement. Learning to prioritize the content and really dig into what I didn't grasp the first time was essential for staying as time-efficient as possible.

Something that many of us [young adults] feel is that what makes OEC so challenging isn't just the content—it's learning to balance school, life, work, and OEC.

While many of my OEC classmates have full-time jobs, I find that it doesn't compare to being a high school or college student,

with hours of academic homework every night. Many young patrollers also hold part-time jobs and do other extracurricular activities, which makes OEC that much harder.

In my situation, I was (and still am) a competitive mountain biker working at a local bike shop. Doing all these things means for many young adults that sacrifices have to be made, the decision to miss practices, games, and for me, the regional tournament, because it fell on test day.

These decisions can feel so big at the moment. They almost made me turn away from OEC again, but I knew if I stuck it out, the reward would be significant. There were many instances during the class that I felt like I was drowning and that I wasn't going to pass.

I had to advocate for myself and ask for help. Asking for help was hard. I felt that, as a young adult, I had to perform because people expected more from me as a young person in the organization. Still, so many people believed in me and wanted me there. If you are a young adult currently in OEC, don't give up—don't think you are weak for asking for help, you will get through it, and it will be the best feeling when you do.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAMARADERIE

Wintergreen ski patrol is very supportive of young patrollers. We have back-to-back Southern Division Outstanding Young Adult Patroller awards, the 2024 National Young Adult Patroller award, and the 2025 national runner-up.

My OEC class had five young adults going through at the same time. Being able to take the course with other people my age



Sam was the National Runner-Up for the 2025 Outstanding Young Adult Patroller Award.

“SOMETHING THAT MANY OF US (YOUNG ADULTS) FEEL IS THAT WHAT MAKES OEC SO CHALLENGING ISN'T JUST THE CONTENT—IT'S LEARNING TO BALANCE SCHOOL, LIFE, WORK, AND OEC.”



Sam was named the 2025 Southern Division Outstanding Young Patroller of the Year.



who felt the struggle I was going through was very validating. My classmates helped me through the tough moments, and we became like a family. We knew we needed to be resilient and push through the hardship, and that we could do that together.

Nothing can replace the camaraderie that becomes such a huge part of the whole process. Working shifts with other younger patrollers is something really special, and I hope every patroller gets to experience it at least once. When one of my classmates was testing to become an alpine-certified patroller, he was convinced he wasn't going to pass. I kept telling him, "You've got this." We were standing at the bottom after his final run, and when our instructor said his name over the radio, it was honestly one of the best moments of the whole season. We were so excited we literally started jumping up and down. That's the kind of camaraderie you get—when one of us wins, we all win.

One of my favorite times on patrol was a Saturday night closing shift. I was working one side of the mountain with another younger patroller, and one of my classmates was over on the central side with another teammate. After we shut down our side, we had to meet up with the central crew so we could all ride the chair together and call close. That night, the other patroller was taking forever to come down, and boredom definitely kicked in. It was a warm night toward the end of the season, and my friends suddenly decided we should make snow angels. It was such a light,

goofy moment, and it reminded me how much fun we can have together even when we're working.

Our patrol also has a lot of medical professionals on it. One of them is a second-year med student (he's been on patrol since high school), and he brought his suture kit one night. A bunch of us young adults were just hanging around the mountain, so we stuck around—and it turned into a whole lesson on different types of sutures. We even got to practice on fake skin. It was this really cool bonding moment that showed us how much we still have to learn, and that learning can actually be fun when you're doing it with the right people.

PATROLLING AS A YOUNG ADULT

As a young person, getting to interact with the general public is definitely one of my favorite parts of the job. I get to share NSP's core values that stick out to me: service, skill, and heart with others outside of the organization. Getting to witness other girls' reactions when they see a girl not that much older than them wearing the cross never gets old.

I get to see young kids' eyes light up, knowing that they, too, can become ski patrollers and live out their dreams as teens. Being a young patroller has shaped my life in so many ways. It has shown me that when you are resilient and work hard, things will work out. I still have moments when it is hard trying to find time

to patrol and do all the things I want to do with my senior year.

This year, my "patrol grandpa," one of my inspirations, received his 50-year pin. Seeing the joy that ski patrol has brought to his entire life makes me so excited for my future in patrol. I've come to see NSP as the mountain we call home—an essential part of an ecosystem that is ever evolving. The Young Adult Patroller program allows for that mountain to grow taller and stand for hundreds of years more.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

This past year, I had the privilege not only of being the Outstanding Young Adult Patroller national runner-up but also of being one of six NSP athletes representing NSP at sporting events across the country. I am the youngest person on the team by about a decade (the only young adult). But getting to go to the events that I care about so much to talk about ski patrol is a privilege.

I have helped the public see ski patrol in a new light and even recruited some of my competitors into this awesome organization. Planting that seed of wonder in the next generation of patrollers, allowing them to see resilience in real time and letting them know they can do it too, is something I love to do. I can't wait to see what happens next. :) +



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RESILIENCY OVER A CAREER

Q&A with
Aspen Highlands
Patrol Director
Lori Spence

BY JOSH MCCORMACK





Lori with her patrol dog, Meka.

Josh: How did your journey in skiing begin, and what ultimately led you to ski patrolling as a career?

Lori: I started skiing on hills in Illinois and Wisconsin when I was five years old, one of which sat on an old garbage dump.

Luckily, my parents introduced my sister and me to all kinds of outdoor sports. We took family trips out west to Colorado. I started with straight long metal skis, leather boots, and Cubco bindings—I loved skiing right away.

I attended Northern Arizona University, and I would build my winter class schedule around skiing at the Arizona Snow Bowl. I had a great group of friends, and we would lap bump runs all day. I met my husband at the Arizona Snowbowl, where we were both on Ski Patrol together. When he got into medical school, I moved to Aspen to be closer to family and to continue my Ski Patrol career at Aspen Highlands.

I tried out for the Aspen Highlands Ski Patrol in 1985. The director, Mac Smith, had some reservations about hiring me based on my size. One of the tests was to take him down the Wall in a toboggan. He had a smooth ride, which helped

me get hired. At the time, there were two other women on the patrol, and we became instantly close. One is still a BFF. Often, we skinned up to patrol headquarters before work, which is where my ‘uphill habit’ began.

When my husband began his residency in Reno, I spent two seasons patrolling at Squaw Valley, now Palisades Tahoe. In 1992, we moved back to the Roaring Fork Valley where he began a 34-year career as a family physician, and we raised two boys in the Valley. They grew up skiing, ski racing, park skiers and often tagging along with their mom to work when they were young.

It’s crazy to think it’s been over 40 years and I still love every aspect of the job. I feel incredibly lucky to live and work here.

I enjoyed the people, camaraderie, being outside, the laughs, the physical aspect, and engaging with guests. At the end of the day, I always felt satisfied, and I was happy to wake up and do it again the next. It’s wild to think it’s been over 40 years, and I still love every aspect of the job. I feel incredibly lucky to live and work here.



Lori's motto: a body in motion stays in motion.

Over your years, how has your understanding of resilience evolved — for the body, the mind, and the spirit?

In many ways, I miss the early days. When I joined, we had six radios for the whole patrol, including the dispatcher, director, etc. Before we got on a chairlift to go up, we would call top patrol by way of a magneto phone, a manually hand-cranked telephone that used a built-in generator. We would let dispatch know our location, when we were getting on the chairlift, or check in to see if there were any accidents; usually, that would be someone to bring the toboggan to someone who responded first from patrol headquarters.

After 40 years on the Aspen Highlands patrol, people often ask where my resilience comes from. I love the physical part of the job, but it is also about balance of mind, body, and spirit. It keeps me grounded, focused, and passionate.

The variety of work nourishes me, the medical calls, avalanche work, dog training, raising tower pads, and skiing the Highland Bowl, as do my many longtime relationships. Every day is so different, I never get bored. Conditions are constantly changing, the weather, jobs, and people. When you love what you do, engaging in work is easy.

What have been some of the most challenging moments in your patrolling career, and how did you work through them?

Challenges come in many forms. Physically, I thrive in cold, windy conditions— some of the best days are working on stormy days—and exhausting, long work.

While balancing family life and raising two boys presented challenges, I was able to juggle them all. I breastfed both my kids and was often pumping in the bathroom or office during those early years.

On the hill, some of the most challenging moments are caring for seriously injured guests. We want them to feel safe and supported while we take care of them. Some incidents can take a mental toll; we debrief and check in afterwards. We even created resiliency teams on all four mountains at the Aspen Skiing Company to support one another and continue to train on the latest updates.

Early in my career, I faced my own injuries, an early ACL tear, and decades later, bilateral knee replacements. Injuries change your perspective, but they also deepen your empathy. Often people say, “It’s only an ACL injury.” However, it is a life-changing event that needs recognition. There will be lots

“
IT'S WILD TO
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THE JOB.
”



of hard work to return to full strength in mind and body. My approach is telling myself, “I will be stronger on the other side.”

Ski patrolling is physically demanding work. How do you maintain strength and recovery after decades on the mountain?

That is a big part of why I still love the job. At age 64, I try to get out almost daily to exercise all year. It makes me feel good physically and mentally younger. I eat well and get good sleep when I can. My motto is Newton’s law of physics, “a body in motion stays in motion.” And I keep my fingers crossed for continued good health.

My times uphill have perhaps slowed down, but not my motivation.

How do you approach mental and emotional resilience — both for yourself and in leading your team?

I love the job because I am in the mountains with teammates, mentors, and friends. Building and having trust in fellow workers.

Sometimes I need to slow down and give them time and listen. The days get hectic. We need one another. Emotional resilience grows when people know it is okay to talk. We all try to handle stress with composure.

Keeping morale high is always a priority.

What have you learned about supporting others through tough seasons — whether that’s injury, burnout, or personal hardship?

Checking in with individuals and taking the time to listen and protect their privacy. Expressing that family comes first making time and accommodations to make that happen.

If a patroller is injured, recognize that this is life-changing, even if it is a short recovery. A common trait in ski patrollers is that we all want to be active and able to patrol. It is a team sport. No one wants to put more work on others; we want to help each other and be part of the team.

I think it helps mentally to come back and do dispatch, which is helpful for them to feel part of the team. But I recognize that I should not burn them out and have them take a walk on the ridge or bring them lunch. Have them work a half-day. We do offer wellness days and personal days. We do offer EAP

(Employee Assistance Programs) with free visits.

Recognize that it is tough not to be out and about on the hill. Keep the long view and recovery goals in mind and at the forefront.

What does resilience look like on your team today — in everyday work, crises, and the quieter moments of the job?

Unfortunately, at times, the ski patrol director's job seems to be a lot more time spent checking and responding to emails and many other administrative tasks. All the technology is supposed to make our lives easier with computers, phones, radios, and constant communication. However, sometimes it seems more complicated because we respond to everything instantly.

It is important to focus on the present. Everyone has a story, and some days people just need space. I try to notice when someone seems off and check in when the time is right, maybe with a ski run to chat. Our team's resilience shows up in how we show up for one another, in big moments and small ones.

When you think about your legacy in patrolling, what do you hope others take away from how you've approached this career?

Show up to work early, be present with a positive attitude, and forge a happy, supportive culture. I choose my conversations carefully as the best way to move forward. Work hard, play hard, and enjoy coming to work.

Lead by example. Keeping the ski in ski patrol, getting out on the hill, and doing hard and sometimes repetitive work. We sell webbing straps at our top Patrol. They are used to carry skis up the Highland Bowl. The motto on the strap is "HAVE FUN SKI SAFELY."

I enjoy doing my job. I put a lot of heart and soul into my position and caring for the ski patrol. To make the best ski patrol team. I like the part about being a role model for women and girls in terms of what they can accomplish in a male-dominated career. It is always good energy to work with strong, driven women. To sum it up, I do not consider myself a legend; I just love and enjoy my job, and I suppose that is how I end up with a legacy. +



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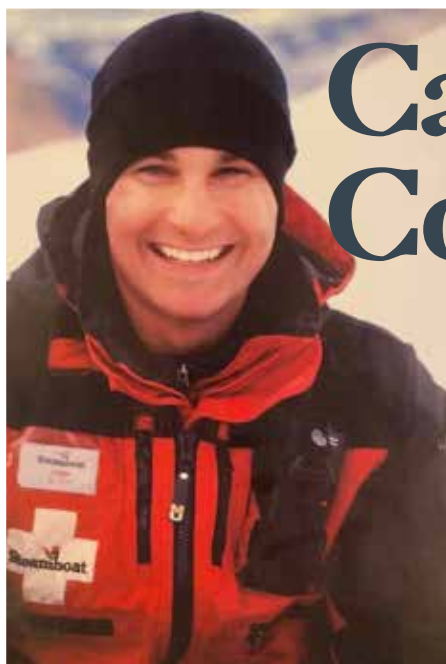
EMPOWERING PATROLLERS TO LEAD WITH PURPOSE

Leadership on the mountain is about more than skill—it's about character, clarity, and the ability to bring others along with you. The new **Leadership Development Course** is a comprehensive, online program designed to help National Ski Patrol members at every level strengthen their leadership abilities, enhance teamwork, and lead with confidence both on and off the hill.

The track-based course takes patrollers through every dimension of leadership, from self-awareness and communication to strategic thinking and ethical decision making. Whether you're a new patroller interested in understanding the fundamentals of leadership or an experienced leader refining advanced skills, the course provides the framework to grow, reflect, and lead with authenticity.

ELEVATE YOUR SKILLS. LEAD THE WAY. ENROLL TODAY.





Carrying Cody's Legacy

TWO DECADES OF HEART, HEALING, AND RESILIENCE

BY CORINNE ST. JOHN, PRESIDENT,
THE CODY ST. JOHN FOUNDATION

It's been nearly two decades since the day everything changed, when my brother Cody never made it to his nursing school orientation at the University of Wyoming.

I remember it vividly. It was a brisk spring morning in New York City, and I had just arrived at work. A call came through on my cell phone. I dismissed it. Then another. It was 2007, before we were constantly on our phones. A third call came through. Then a fourth. I stepped into the hallway and heard the words I never imagined: "Cody was in an accident. Get to Colorado as soon as possible."

Years earlier, the Rocky Mountains had called Cody. Not long after, a chance to join ski patrol solidified his love for the mountains and gave him his purpose. He became a professional patroller at Steamboat Springs.

He left our home in Pasadena, Maryland in search of something bigger within himself—and he was well on his way to finding it. His time as a patroller sparked a deeper purpose, ultimately inspiring him to pursue a career in medical care and enroll in nursing school.

CODY'S LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Cody patrolled at Steamboat Springs Resort for five years. His former Ski Patrol Director, John Kohnke, tells a story about a young man who handed in a wrinkled resume—but after a brief conversation, he hired Cody on the spot.

In his first year, Cody was named Steamboat Ski Patrol's Rookie of the Year. He went on to earn the Ski Country USA Ski Patroller of the Year award for the State of Colorado in 2005–2006. As we understand it, Cody was the first snowboarder to receive the honor at that time.

Cody found his purpose on ski patrol. The camaraderie and built-in family felt instantly familiar to him. In those early years, he likely felt his medical skills weren't up to snuff, yet, but he more than made up for it with sheer drive and determination. Cody was known for never taking his jacket off at lunch and always eating by the door, ready to be the first on scene when a call came in. He was fiercely competitive and relentlessly driven by a commitment to excellence.

If the average patroller has 30 first "on-scenes" during the season, Cody had 80. He outworked everyone. Even the

self-proclaimed salty dogs, who likely thought he wasn't up for the job on a snowboard, came to admire and love him.

Being a ski patroller pushed him to want to help others off the slopes, too. In addition to OEC, Cody obtained his EMT certification and completed prerequisites for nursing school.

Nursing school offered Cody a way to be better prepared as an emergency medical first responder. He wanted to have the skills to handle any situation that might arise on the mountain. A career in nursing also offered a sustainable path — one that would allow him to make a living in the mountains while continuing to serve on ski patrol part-time.

Cody passed away on Easter Sunday of 2007 at the age of 29, and like so many others who've faced unimaginable loss, I just wanted time to stop. Everything felt wildly chaotic. We faced decisions we never thought we would have to consider, let alone make. But Cody's desire to help others was present even after his passing. He was an organ donor and his gift forever impacted several people's lives.

But amid that heartbreak, something powerful took shape. We realized Cody's spirit and drive to care for others could continue through his fellow ski patrollers.

THE BIRTH OF THE FOUNDATION AND TWO DECADES OF IMPACT

Within days of losing Cody, we gathered in his Colorado home — numb and exhausted, surrounded by friends. Yet, one thing was certain: we had to do something.

And that's how The Cody St. John Foundation (TCSJF) began, not as an organization born of loss, but as a living extension of Cody's heart and his dedication to supporting those who selflessly serve others. He was also incredibly driven, funny, and kind. He had the best laugh.

From the start, TCSJF became the only nonprofit in the country dedicated to financially helping professional ski patrollers further their medical education. We grant annual scholarships for approved training programs, including CNA, EMT, LPN, RN, and Paramedic school.

Each scholarship carries Cody's name — a symbol of excellence, dedication, and compassion.

Ski patrollers work in some of the harshest, most unpredictable conditions imaginable, far from the controlled environment of a hospital. Yet we found there were few, if any, resources available to them. We wanted to change that and quickly realized our mission could fill a unique need.

It's been a family affair since, with our dearest friends still at our side. The early days were filled with letters, phone calls, persistent follow-ups, grassroots fundraising, even cookbook sales — all fueled by determination. We grew Cody's Challenge, a Skimo race in Steamboat Springs, into one of the region's most recognized events, with the support of Steamboat Ski Patrol — a meaningful achievement. Skimo is a competitive endurance sport that combines mountain climbing and downhill skiing, requiring



Volunteers at Cody's Challenge in Steamboat Springs.

athletes to ascend peaks on skis using climbing skins and then ski back down.

Nearly 20 years later, we've awarded more than 100 scholarships to professional ski patrollers across the country — from the smallest hills to the tallest peaks, from Maine to Alaska, and throughout the Rockies and Wasatch regions. A remarkable chapter in our story that reflects both our persistence and purpose.

Each scholarship tells a story of triumph. Over the years, we've heard from dozens of patrollers who said they might not have taken the next step in their training without this support. For many, receiving a scholarship wasn't just financial; it was the confidence they needed to grow and serve their teams and mountains with greater skill and heart.

A NEW KIND OF SUPPORT: RESILIENCE TRAINING

Recently, we recognized that supporting ski patrollers meant more than funding medical education alone. Some people join ski patrol dreaming of fresh powder and bluebird skies while getting paid to ski all day, not the reality of pulling someone from a tree well or responding to life-threatening injuries. Over time, those experiences quietly erode even the strongest spirits.

We began asking: Who is caring for the caregivers? Who ensures they have the tools to cope with the mental and emotional demands of their calling? That question marked a turning point, one that has expanded our mission. Sustaining this community required more than technical skill; it required resilience.

Resilience isn't innate; it's a skill we can teach, nurture, and strengthen, just like any medical procedure. Our goal is to equip ski patrollers with tools to recognize early signs of stress and trauma, cultivate awareness, and support one another through critical moments, which are coincidentally on the rise. It's about empowering our first responders so they can continue to serve their communities with confidence and care, as well as themselves.

Resources remain limited, and not every resort fully recognizes the importance of emotional wellness within the ski patrol workforce. Yet we know the health and balance of every mountain depends on the well-being of the men and women who show up every day, in every kind of weather, ready to protect and care for others. By



providing resilience training, we help ensure they can continue this vital work — and that they know they are never alone.

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

None of this work happens in a silo. Our Foundation relies on partnerships built on shared values and a deep respect for the ski patrol community.

Our collaborations with National Ski Patrol and Responder Alliance are cornerstones of our current efforts, allowing us to bring resilience training to more patrol groups than we could on our own.

National Ski Patrol is a natural ally. With decades of mountain safety and education leadership, NSP has driven this initiative forward. Responder Alliance brings unmatched expertise in stress injury prevention and organizational wellness. Together, these partnerships prove that organizations with big hearts can join forces to create real change — not only in skills and training, but in culture and perception.

Already, the impact is tangible. We launched by awarding 10 scholarships to patrol groups seeking resilience training during refresher season. Now, more patrollers are entering this winter are better prepared, and we hope to see the ripple effect for years to come. Communities across the country will benefit because the people entrusted with their safety are healthier, stronger, and more supported than ever before.

LOOKING FORWARD

Reflecting on nearly two decades of work with Cody's Foundation, I'm struck by how far we've come and energized by what lies ahead. Our partnerships with NSP and Responder Alliance will help us carry a torch forward that can sometimes feel heavy but always burns bright with purpose.

We are no longer just awarding medical scholarships. We are shaping a future where ski patrollers are highly trained, resilient, and

supported — where emotional health is part of the safety culture on every mountain. Our goal is to normalize the conversation around mental wellness in the mountain rescue community, ensuring that no patroller feels alone in the challenges they face.

I am deeply grateful to the resorts and organizations that have embraced this mission alongside us. Together, we're building resilient communities. Cody's legacy lives on in the mountains, in the patrollers who wear red jackets with pride, and in the quiet understanding that when one of us stumbles, someone will always be there to help.

Though the work is far from finished, I look ahead with quiet confidence that the same heart and courage that defined my brother will continue to inspire generations of ski patrollers to come — strong, skilled, and resilient, ready to meet whatever challenges the mountain may bring. +

NSP'S PATROLLER WELLNESS PROGRAM

National Ski Patrol has made patroller wellness and psychological safety a core priority. In 2023, NSP's Patroller Wellness task force released *The Safety Culture for All Guide (SC4A)*—a practical resource to help local patrols build and sustain peer-support programs.

The guide is available at nsp.org, and the task force continues to expand its impact through webinars and close collaboration with industry partners on stress awareness and resilience training.

Today, the task force is working alongside the OEC and Medical Committees to develop a new "Patroller Wellness" chapter for the upcoming OEC 7th Edition—an important step in integrating wellbeing into NSP's foundational education.

This is only the beginning. NSP is committed to reducing mental-health stigma, strengthening support systems, and embedding a culture of wellness and wellbeing across the entire organization.

Velcro is for Amateurs!

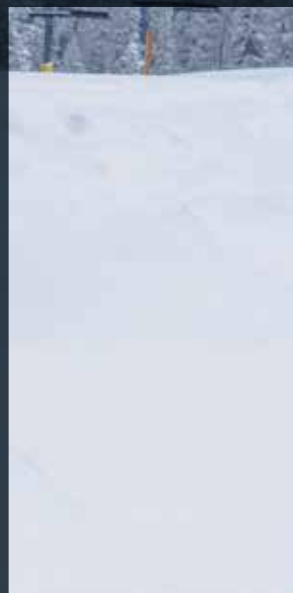


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BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN



THE POWER OF RESILIENCE AFTER INJURY

BY DR. LESLIE DESROSIERS, PT, DPT, OCS, CSCS

Day after day, patrollers endure long hours in freezing conditions, navigating rugged terrain, unpredictable weather, and the relentless physical challenges of mountain work. It's a job built on service, toughness, and heart, but also one that comes with real risk.

Injuries can be a part of the job when you spend your days on patrol. From knee and shoulder injuries to hip, neck, and back pain—pushing the body to its limits can break even the strongest, most experienced athlete.

I've witnessed incredible feats of determination and recovery as a Doctor of Physical Therapy with two decades of experience working with athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. From professional football players to elite skiers, I've seen what it takes to overcome devastating injuries, and ski patrollers have shown some of the most inspiring resilience of all.

While injuries come in many forms, the power to heal and

return to the mountain is a testament to human resilience. Injuries may test you, but they do not define you. Often, they become an opportunity to rise to a new challenge and become a better version of yourself.

THE BODY CAN HEAL

No matter how devastating an injury feels in the moment, the body has an incredible capacity to heal. A fractured bone, a blown-out knee, or a reconstructive surgery might leave you wondering if you'll ever ski again. But with the right healing environment, smart progression, and a positive mindset, recovery isn't just about getting back to baseline—it's about coming back stronger.

Realizing you'll be hanging up your skis for a year can feel like a punch in the gut. Your stomach tightens, and the world feels heavier. Then fear and doubt rush in. But an injury is

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not the end of your story, it's just a chapter. The real story is how you respond to it, and what your comeback means for you and your future.

I often tell my patients: “The body knows what to do, it just needs an opportunity to do it. Your job is to create the best possible healing environment. Apply the right stimulus at the right time, and then get out of your own way, so your body can do what it does best: heal and rebuild.”

Post-injury rehabilitation is a complex multi-step process that balances tissue healing, mobility, strength, and a safe return to activity. For ski patrollers, having a good rehab team, including a physical therapist, is essential for rebuilding resilience and returning safely to the mountain.

Healing takes time — a variable no one can control, no matter who you are. You can optimize the healing environment by improving circulation, managing load and stress, and

fueling your body properly, but biology has its own timeline. Respect that process, or you risk slowing it down.

- Minor muscle strains generally heal in four to six weeks.
- ACL reconstruction surgery requires 9 to 12 months (more realistically, one to two years) before returning to full performance.
- A frozen shoulder, also known as adhesive capsulitis, can take two to five years to feel “normal” again.

REAL OUTDOOR PROFESSIONALS. REAL COMEBACKS.

Recovering stronger after injury is possible. Getting back to the mountain is possible. When you trust the process and show up for yourself, it's possible for you too.

When it comes to rehab, there are a couple of essential characteristics: ownership, consistency, and grit.

A 19-year-old patroller and product tester, just beginning her dream career in the ski industry, sustained a dislocated shoulder and fractured pelvis. Devastated and uncertain, she feared it was over before it began. She struggled through rehab, both mentally and physically, but once she decided to take ownership of her recovery, everything changed.

“I realized nobody else could do this for me,” she said. “It was up to me. I stopped being a victim and finally owned it.”

She made her way back to the slopes stronger, wiser, and more confident.

Taking ownership means taking charge of your recovery—not relying on someone else to fix you or blaming anyone else. Healing begins the moment you take responsibility for your path forward.

A 57-year-old highly experienced skier took a sudden twisting fall that left his knee completely unstable. A torn ACL, MCL, meniscus, and posterolateral corner meant major reconstructive surgery and a long road ahead, with canceled ski trips, time off work, no patrolling, and months of rehab. Yet he handled it with grace and determination.

“If you tell me to do it, I will do it,” he said at his first PT appointment. And he meant it.

He never missed a session or skipped an exercise, becoming a model of consistency. Commitment gets you started, but consistency delivers results. Showing up every day, even when it's hard or inconvenient, is what transforms a setback into a comeback.

Then there's a 50-year-old extreme ski instructor and avalanche professional who fractured his leg during a high-risk rescue training and had to be saved by his own team in brutal nighttime conditions. His road back was long, but he leaned into the challenge with courage and grit. He attacked rehab with determination, making his recovery inevitable. In time, he returned to the mountain stronger in both body and mind, with a renewed appreciation for the power of the body

to heal and get stronger.

Risks on the mountain are real. Accidents and injuries happen. But the human body is remarkably resilient. Patrollers are resilient. With ownership of your story, consistency in your rehab, and grit to weather both the physical and mental storms, you can come back stronger.

LONGEVITY ON THE MOUNTAIN

Staying healthy for a lifetime on the mountain requires a comprehensive strategy. Beyond strength alone, it takes balance, body control, and the ability to react quickly to the unexpected. It's about being physically prepared so you can reduce risk, limit wear and tear, and continue doing what you love for decades to come.

Knee injuries are the most common injury in the ski industry. From torn ligaments to fractures to osteoarthritis, chronic knee pain and stiffness can gradually reduce confidence and maneuverability on the hill, forcing people to give up their on-snow careers.

I created ACL Strong to help skiers, mountain professionals, and outdoor enthusiasts of all ages protect their knees and bodies through smarter movements and preventive exercises, whether they've been through injury or surgery or are aiming to stay ahead of it.

Many people think “getting fit for snow” is just about doing more squats and lunges to target the muscles on the front of the thigh. While the quadriceps are important, true durability comes from training the entire chain—from the feet to the core—with a strong focus on the hips, the often-forgotten link.

Because snow and mountain terrain are uneven and unpredictable, your training must prepare you for multi-directional movement, balance, and agility. You need to react quickly when you hit ice, bumps, or when an unexpected skier cuts close by. The good news is you can improve your stability and agility at any age. It simply requires intentional movement and the right kind of exercise—and that's exactly what ACL Strong provides.

ACL Strong features exercises that sharpen balance, coordination, and control, helping your brain and muscles communicate faster—that way you can turn with precision, stay steadier on variable terrain, and last longer before fatigue sets in.

We have been proud partners of National Ski Patrol since 2020, supporting patrollers in building strong, healthy, injury-resistant bodies for a lifetime of mountain service.

Remember, working as a ski patroller comes with risks. Take the right steps now to prevent injuries and improve resilience, so you can stay on the mountain doing what you love for years to come. +



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WORLD'S SKI PATROLLERS CONVERGE ON BIG WHITE IN 2026

CANADIAN SKI PATROL TO HOST THE FÉDÉRATION
INTERNATIONALE DES PATROUILLES
DE SKI IN MARCH 2026

BY GEOFF SCOTTON,
CANADIAN SKI PATROL

More than 100 ski patrollers, alpine rescue specialists, and ski safety professionals from around the globe will gather in late March 2026 at British Columbia's Big White Ski Resort to share expertise, focus on professional development, and strengthen the international ski patrolling family.

The Fédération Internationale des Patrouilles de Ski (FIPS), the international organization representing ski patrol and associated ski safety organizations, will hold its 25th biennial world conference between March 27 and April 2 at the popular all ski-in, ski-out resort in the British Columbia interior, near Kelowna, hosted by the Canadian Ski Patrol. The conference program will include presentations and materials on avalanche safety, persons with disabilities, FIS best practices and resources, medical issues, rescue dogs, technology, and risk management, among other topics.

The conference will focus on professional development, learning, and the sharing of ski patrol-related ideas and best practices at the global level, and on building international relationships among ski patrol, mountain rescue, and winter medical expertise.

And, of course, there will be a vibrant social agenda and lots

of skiing at the 2,550-foot vertical resort that receives about 25 feet of snowfall each year. The 7,800-acre Big White is renowned for what it calls its Okanagan champagne powder.

The FIPS congress will have attendees from around the globe, reflecting the many nations and patrol organizations that are part of FIPS. These include National Ski Patrol, the U.K.'s British Association of Ski Patrollers (BASP), Serbia's Mountain Rescue Service Serbia, Italy's Federazione Italiana Sicurezza Piste Sci, Australia's Australian Ski Patrol Association, Chile's Patrullas de Ski De Chile, Sweden's Swedish Lift Areas Association, Japan's Ski Association of Japan, and the Canadian Ski Patrol. There are many more, and in total, 18 national members of FIPS and eight associate members.

FIPS' roots go back to the late '70s, when the first FIPS Congress was in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. FIPS came about as the world forum for ski patrollers to meet, exchange ideas, and compare the latest in patrol techniques on a regular basis. FIPS is supported by national patrol organizations, both large and small, to provide the necessary input and to offer potential solutions to patrolling issues.



The first FIPS congress included representatives of patrol organizations in Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Leaders from National Ski Patrol and the Canadian Ski Patrol jointly chaired. FIPS, known in English as the International Ski Patrol Federation, was formed for the safety and benefit of the skiing public, with organizational goals around maintaining standards, disseminating information, and providing a forum for discussion and exchange of information.

Since its formation, FIPS has also become an active member of the International Commission for Alpine Rescue and has a memorandum of understanding with the Federation International de Ski (FIS) and the International Paralympic Committee.

For the 25th world congress at Big White, a broad range of topics will be available, including planned sessions related to the aging skier or rider and injuries (including how medications may impact assessments) and associated spinal injuries; rescue dogs; the science of toboggan driving; medical records and privacy; liability waivers; assisting persons with disabilities; tree well rescue; using avalanche control explosives in ski areas; drone use in avalanche search and mitigation; Sit-Ski extraction and lift evacuations; managing on hill safety risks; avalanche best practices; dealing with concussions; and more.

The program includes indoor presentations and workshops, as well as components that will take place on the slopes. The latter may include a patroller toboggan challenge. The program also includes almost all meals, including a gala banquet on Thursday evening. Breakfast will be available each day, providing a venue to set out the activities for each day.

Part of the FIPS agenda will include an opportunity to watch the Canada Ski Patrol's skills competition, which includes a scenario-based first-aid portion and a timed toboggan skills component.

Along with its biennial world congress starting in 2012, FIPS developed special interest groups (SIGs) of like-minded patrollers as well as rescue and medical personnel from around the world, focusing on sharing and improving practices in areas that include medical, avalanche, persons with disabilities, risk management, technology, FIS liaison, and rescue dogs.

These groups, with leaders currently from the U.S., Canada, Sweden, Britain, and Argentina, act as a conduit for the collection, assessment, and distribution of world best practice information for FIPS members. FIPS and its members understand and acknowledge that different countries have different laws and regulations that govern what a ski patroller can do and potentially how they do it. Nonetheless, they believe we can all learn from one another to improve and better serve the skiing public.

You can find more about FIPS and registration details for the 2026 XXV FIPS World Congress here: fips-skipatrol.org +



Mechanical resuscitation demonstration. Photo by Brian Low.



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF WOMEN PATROLLERS

BY KRISTEN RUSSO, NATIONAL WOMEN'S PROGRAM ADVISOR

As bike patrol, backcountry rescue, modern risk-mitigation practices, and advanced avalanche operations become core to mountain safety, the demands on today's patrollers are rising. The role now requires a broader, more sophisticated skillset—reflecting the evolving needs of the outdoor community and the expanding terrain we serve.

Though that knowledge is transferable, it's unique and takes time to build. While volunteerism in the U.S. has rebounded since COVID, it remains below pre-pandemic levels, and the average hours served per volunteer have declined.¹

Additionally, National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) has reported a decrease in skier/rider visits for those aged 17 and under from 31% just 10 years ago to 27% for the 2023-2024 ski season.² That age group is still the majority of visitors to resorts; however, NSAA commented that the decline in this age bracket “reinforces the importance of attracting and retaining younger guests to ensure a healthy future for downhill snowsports.”

These trends highlight the need to focus on both recruiting new patrollers and retaining existing ones.

WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN

Women have been part of National Ski Patrol since its early days, with pioneers like Dorothy McClung, Elizabeth “Schatzi” Woods, and Jerry Colburn Nunn paving the way. However, as of March 2025, women make up only 21% of our membership, a figure that has remained stagnant since



the 1990s. In contrast, women account for 38% of skier visits and 62% of beginner skier visits, according to NSAA.² Women also volunteer at higher rates than men.³

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Progress and Opportunities

For the 2024-2025 season, women comprised 29% of registered NSP candidates, up from 21% of overall membership. This is progress, but there are more opportunities to attract women to patrolling.

PROACTIVE RECRUITMENT

Rather than relying on passive methods like signs at the lift and hoping for the best, patrols should adopt formal strategies to recruit new patrollers. Successful approaches used to recruit women, though can be applied for all genders and gender identities, include:

Open Houses and Shadowing

Advertise opportunities for potential candidates to ski or ride with a patroller, observe their work, and learn about patrolling commitments. This opportunity helps potential candidates understand the role before committing to an Outdoor Emergency Care (OEC) class.

Diva Days

Diva Days provide women and girls of all ski/ride abilities to shadow women patrollers. Events may include riding in a toboggan for the first time, skiing/riding with other women,

and other educational areas such as tuning equipment, working with avalanche beacons, or learning low-angle rescue techniques in a supportive environment. Diva Days help build a pipeline of future women patrollers.

Engaging Parents

Parents with children under 18 years old typically volunteer at a higher rate by almost 12%.³ Many parents are already on the slopes while their children are in race, freestyle, and other ski/ride programs. Patrols can provide information to these programs, hold open houses during practices, and be visible at events to attract parents who are already on the mountain.

Social Media and Visibility

With 73% of Americans using social media daily, patrols can highlight women patrollers and their role to reach a broader audience. Seeing someone who “looks like them” can inspire women to pursue patrolling. Collaborate with women-specific snowsports groups like Women Who Ski, Ski Moms, and Women of Winter. Moreover, work with your resort to amplify your recruitment messages.

Host Girl and Women-Specific Events

These can be single or multi-day instructional clinics, group trips, or outdoor educational camps. If you’re already hosting an event, coordinate with the organizers to have women from your team speak to the participants about the benefits of patrolling. If you’re interested in hosting your own event, organizations like SheJumps offer a Junior Ski Patrol program where girls learn mountain safety and first aid



2025 Central Division Women's Event at Giant's Ridge, MN. Photo by Kristen Russo.

alongside women patrollers. Patrols can partner with other similar organizations to reach new audiences.

Pathways for Mountain Hosts and EMS

Patrols often work with Mountain Hosts and local EMS. Create pathways for those in these groups to transition into patrolling. Mountain Hosts will already have Outdoor First Care (OFC) and, in some cases, the OEC course. For EMTs and Paramedics, an OEC Modified Challenge is available. Partnering with these groups' leaders can also support mutual recruitment efforts.

ADDITIONAL RECRUITMENT SOURCES

Other effective recruitment sources include:

- Local schools, colleges, and ski clubs
- Referral program and family member referrals
- Young Adult Program
- Doctor partnership programs
- Patrol exchange program
- Recruitment tents at fundraisers or events

RETENTION STRATEGIES

Understanding Challenges

The average years of service for an NSP patroller is 14, yet nearly half have fewer than 10. Among women, 48% have less than 10 years of service. This makes retention critical to maintaining experience and knowledge within patrols.

According to the 2025 NSP Member Survey, some of the top challenges to meeting patrol commitments were family, primary

employment, travel distance to the mountain, and cost. Other challenges, such as time conflicts, lack of support, and outdated patrol cultures, also contribute.

IDENTIFYING RETENTION OPPORTUNITIES

Engagement Surveys

Patrols should understand the specific challenges their patrollers may face. It is also critical to know what motivates their patrollers to return each year. You can accomplish this through surveys. Patrol leadership should use that feedback to address patroller concerns and develop creative solutions to improve retention.

Exit Surveys

Surveying departing patrollers can reveal critical insights, such as commitment levels, desire to patrol elsewhere, or barriers to participation. It can also highlight any areas of concern that leadership needs to address. Understanding these factors — and whether they differ by gender — can help patrols address controllable attrition and enhance culture.

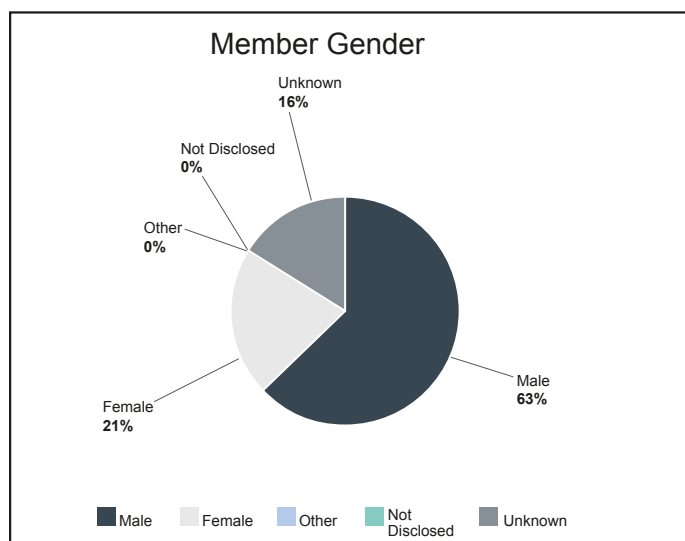
Communication and Culture

Positive patrol cultures and clear communication channels are essential. Toxic environments and poor leadership are leading reasons for exiting an organization, according to iHire's 2024 Talent Retention Report.⁴ Patrols should foster inclusion, address concerns promptly, and encourage suggestions for improvement. Visible action on feedback is key to retaining members.

Training and Enrichment Opportunities

Patrollers, especially women, may leave if they feel stalled

“WOMEN MAKE UP ONLY 21% OF OUR MEMBERSHIP, A FIGURE THAT HAS REMAINED STAGNANT SINCE THE 1990S.”



Breakdown of NSP Membership by Gender, based on data from March 2025.

or lack opportunities for further training. Patrollers should explore the Senior and Certified/Nordic Master Programs for additional training and enrichment. In addition, the Women’s Program hosts nearly 40 events annually covering skills in Outdoor Emergency Transportation (OET), Mountain and Travel Rescue, Avalanche, Biking, OEC, and other activities. These events, often led by women-only teams, provide a supportive environment for learning and mentorship. Local patrols are encouraged to hold their own women’s events, and a Women’s Program Toolkit is available for guidance.

Mentoring and Leadership Opportunities

Attending events connect women with leaders and mentors, helping them explore opportunities within or outside their local patrol. Patrols should communicate leadership openings, provide clear leadership pathways, and offer mentorship opportunities. Moreover, they should encourage women to pursue open roles. Women in leadership positions within the ski industry can serve as role models and mentors for those who are up and coming.

Flexible Pathways

Life changes—such as starting a family, changing jobs, relocation, or going back to school—can affect patrollers’ ability to continue their commitments. Patrols can offer flexible pathways between paid and volunteer positions, allowing members to adjust their involvement as needed. The Alumni Program enables patrollers to maintain their OEC credentials until they can transition back to being an active patroller, supporting retention during life transitions.

Creative Solutions

Retention efforts require some creative thinking and flexibility. Within the framework of the resort, patrols can learn from other resort departments and implement solutions such as:

- Access to daycare services
- Split shifts between spouses
- Mid-week or part-time positions
- Familial and leave of absence policies

Each patrol’s situation is unique, and they should explore new ideas to address specific challenges.

CONCLUSION

Recruitment and retention of women patrollers are essential for the future of NSP and the ski industry. By adopting proactive recruitment strategies, understanding and addressing retention challenges, fostering a positive culture, and providing training and mentorship, patrols can attract and keep more women in patrolling. Flexibility and creativity are key to evolving with the industry and supporting the patrollers who make the organization strong.

HOW THE WOMEN'S PROGRAM HELP

The Women’s Program is committed to creating an inclusive, collaborative, and innovative environment. Our mission includes recruiting and retaining women in NSP and the broader industry. Many of the successful ideas included have come from members of the Women’s Program Committee, which is available as a resource for patrol leadership and other patrollers. Additional resources that will be available on the NSP website in the future, and those interested in connecting or sharing ideas can reach out to womens@nspserver.org.

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AT THE

EN HELM

REDEFINING SNOWSPORTS
ON AUSTRIA'S
KITZSTEINHORN GLACIER

SKIING LEADERS AND PROFESSIONALS JOIN
TOGETHER AT KITZSTEINHORN FOR PIONEERING
SNOWSPORTS EVENT

STORY BY TRACY BUCHANAN AND CANDACE HORGAN
PHOTOS BY CANDACE HORGAN





More than 50 women gathered to learn, connect, and lift one another higher.

“SEEING ACCOMPLISHED WOMEN LEADING EVERY CLINIC — MANY OF WHOM HAD BROKEN BARRIERS IN THEIR HOME COUNTRIES — WAS BOTH HUMBLING AND INSPIRING. IT REMINDED ME HOW VITAL IT IS FOR YOUNG PATROLLERS AND INSTRUCTORS TO SEE THEMSELVES REFLECTED IN THOSE WHO TEACH AND LEAD.”

When I stepped onto the Kitzsteinhorn Glacier in Kaprun, Austria, this past April, the morning air was crisp and still, and the peaks stretched endlessly into the clouds. Around me stood more than 50 women from across the globe — ski instructors, snowboard coaches, and patrollers — all gathered for a shared purpose: to learn, to connect, and to lift one another higher.

The World Women's Snowsports Summit wasn't just another training week. It was a celebration of skill, mentorship, and the growing movement of women leaders in snowsports. For me as both a ski patroller and PSIA instructor, it offered something deeply personal: a chance to step back from the routine of teaching and patrolling and instead become the student again.

LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS

Throughout the week, I skied alongside women representing national teams and organizations from the United States, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and several European nations. Each day began high on the glacier, where the snow stayed firm and the energy was contagious.

Our on-snow clinics were led by an extraordinary roster of coaches — many current or former national demo team members. They brought different teaching methods, languages, and experiences, yet the message was universal: skiing is both art and communication.

The sessions focused on intentional movement and technical awareness — understanding how efficiency, balance, and flow translate into confidence and control. Whether carving on hardpack or managing variable terrain, every turn became an exercise in why we move the way we do.

The format encouraged collaboration, rather than hierarchy. One day, I offered feedback to a coach from Hungary; the next, she helped me refine my edge transitions. The learning was mutual, and the respect palpable.

LESSONS BEYOND TECHNIQUE

While the skiing was exceptional, the conversations between runs were equally powerful. Topics ranged from leadership and mentorship to the challenges women face in technical and instructional roles.

In one afternoon session, we discussed the importance of representation in snowsports leadership. Seeing accomplished women leading every clinic — many of whom had broken barriers in their home countries — was both humbling and inspiring. It reminded me how vital it is for young patrollers and instructors to see themselves reflected in those who teach and lead.

Another highlight was a workshop on coaching through confidence — how to give feedback that empowers rather than intimidates. As patrollers, we often train peers and candidates under high-pressure conditions. Learning to communicate with clarity and encouragement, without diluting standards, struck a chord with me and has already influenced my approach during Outdoor Emergency Transportation clinics back home.



On-snow clinics led by an international roster of coaches.



Collaboration was a key factor, with shared feedback across borders.



Crisp air on the Kitzsteinhorn Glacier in Kaprun, Austria.



Coaching through confidence: clear feedback without lowering standards.

FINDING COMMUNITY AND PURPOSE

Evenings in Kaprun were filled with laughter, storytelling, and cultural exchange. Around shared tables, we compared notes on snow conditions, equipment setups, and teaching philosophies. I was struck by how similar our challenges were, regardless of geography or discipline.

By the end of the week, what started as professional development had become something more — a community of women who believe in progress through shared experience.

When we gathered on the final morning for one last group run, the glacier glistened under blue skies, and the sense of unity was palpable. We weren't just skiing — we were representing the growing voice of women in our industry.

BRINGING IT HOME

Returning from Austria, I brought back more than improved technique. I returned with renewed purpose — to help foster opportunities for women in patrol and instruction, to share what I learned with others, and to keep creating spaces where women feel supported to grow.

The spirit of the World Women's Snowsports Summit aligns perfectly with National Ski Patrol's mission of education, leadership, and service. It reminds us that technical growth and personal empowerment go hand in hand.

And there's more good news: NSP members who attend future World Women's Snowsports Summits will be eligible to receive credit for a Snowsports Enhancement Seminar (SES). It's a meaningful way to combine professional development, international networking, and skill progression — all while earning credit toward continuing education within NSP.

“AS ONE COACH
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LOOKING AHEAD

The 2025 summit in Kaprun was just the beginning. Plans are already underway for future events, with an expanded focus on mentorship, global collaboration, and continued excellence in women's snowsports education.

For those inspired to take part, registration is now open for the 2026 World Women's Snowsports Summit — another opportunity to learn from top international clinicians, connect with peers from around the world, and bring that knowledge home to your patrol or ski school community.

As one coach reminded us during a clinic, “Every turn we make here is a ripple that inspires someone else.”

I left Kaprun with tired legs, a full heart, and a renewed commitment to keep that ripple moving — through every clinic I teach, every patroller I mentor, and every woman who finds her stride on snow.

The World Women's Snowsports Summit was held at Kitzsteinhorn Glacier ski resort in the High Tauern Range of the Austrian Alps near Kaprun, Austria. The event was held from April 20-25, 2025, and brought together an incredible collection of women from throughout the snowsports industry. Among the numbers were:

- 52 attendees representing 12 countries, plus coaches
- Eight national alpine team members
- Six international organizations
- Broad age range for participants, from late-20s up to mid-80s
- Over 150 people attended “The Future for Women in Snowsports” panel discussion virtually, which was streamed live and recorded.





“THE WORLD WOMEN'S SNOWSPORTS SUMMIT, FOUNDED AND LED BY BRENN KELLEHER, REPRESENTS AN EXCITING NEW ERA OF GLOBAL COLLABORATION FOR WOMEN IN OUR INDUSTRY. BRENN'S VISION AND LEADERSHIP HAVE CONNECTED AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SNOWSPORTS WITH PURPOSE AND POSSIBILITY.”

The World Women's Snowsports Organization (WWSO), founded by CEO Brenna Kelleher, is uniting women leaders, instructors, and patrollers from around the world to share expertise, elevate performance, and build connections that strengthen every corner of the mountain community.

Brenna's vision finally became reality in spring 2025, with assistance from an incredible team of leaders and coaches who made the inaugural World Women's Snowsports Summit one for the ages.

This global gathering builds upon the foundation of national efforts like the Professional Ski Instructors of America-American Association of Snowboard Instructors (PSIA-AASI) Women's Summit founded by Heidi Ettlinger, which for more than a decade has empowered women to grow their technical, leadership, and coaching skills within the U.S. snowsports industry.

Now a co-founding member of the WWSO, Ettlinger sees the World Women's Snowsports Summit as an ideal opportunity for women in National Ski Patrol to expand their impact — both on the hill and in their professional journeys.



A group of attendees under blue skies, with a strong sense of unity.

“The World Women's Snowsports Summit, founded and led by Brenna Kelleher, represents an exciting new era of global collaboration for women in our industry. Brenna's vision and leadership have connected an international network of professionals who are shaping the future of snowsports with purpose and possibility.

“As the founder of the PSIA-AASI Women's Summit, I've witnessed how creating dedicated spaces for women to grow their technical, leadership, and coaching skills can transform careers and entire organizations. Supporting Brenna and the World Women's Snowsports Organization in expanding that opportunity worldwide is a natural next step — and an incredible chance for women in National Ski Patrol to connect, learn, and lead at the highest level.”

Read on for recollections from two ski patrollers who attended the event. If you are interested in signing up for the second annual World Women's Snowsports Summit at Kitzsteinhorn, visit [pro/world-womens-snowsport-summit-2026](https://www.pro/world-womens-snowsport-summit-2026). Registration is open. The second Summit will be held April 12-17, 2026. +



WHEN DISASTER
RESPONSE
TURNS ARCTIC,

CALL SKI PATROLLERS

MICHIGAN NSP MEMBERS SUPPORT GROUNDBREAKING
COLD-WEATHER DISASTER EXERCISE

BY SUE CARTER, MT. BRIGHTON SKI PATROL,
AND TY DAMON II, PINE KNOB SKI PATROL

An unusual email landed in the inboxes of Michigan patrollers listed with the Michigan Volunteer Registry. Ty Damon II, Central Division representative to the registry, sent the message. It was direct and unusual: The state was looking for National Ski Patrol members to support “a full-scale cold-weather field exercise... meant to test mortuary operations in severe conditions.”



From left: Howard Haselhuhn, Mt. Brighton; John Doyle, Caberfae Peaks; Brian Wyckoff, Bittersweet; Sue Carter, Mt. Brighton; Kevin Mulherin, Bittersweet; Ty Damon, Pine Knob;

The partners involved underscored the seriousness of the request. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) for the region, and the FBI would all participate. Of approximately 220 patrollers who received the email, six raised their hands to serve.

The exercise designers had three key requirements:

- Cold. March in Marquette, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, would easily provide it.
- Snow. Preferably heavy. A road-closing blizzard off Lake Superior gladly obliged, dropping more than 22 inches.
- People who know how to work in both. That is where National Ski Patrol came in.

Patrollers were assigned two primary roles: acting as on-site safety officers and helping to set up and tear down five field-grade medical tents—heavy, complex structures more akin to circus big tops than pop-up shelters.

To prepare, NSP volunteers completed three full days of training in late January and February. Their participation demonstrated how patrollers' skills extend far beyond the ski hill and into the broader world of emergency preparedness.

The Cold Weather Deployment Full Scale Exercise, held March 7–9, 2025, was designed to test whether disaster mortuary operations could function effectively outdoors in the heart of winter. No exercise of this scope had been

attempted before. Representatives from 20 agencies came to Marquette to learn, collaborate, and assess capabilities in a truly demanding environment.

Marquette offered unique advantages. Northern Michigan University's campus provided space and infrastructure while students were away on spring break. The university's Center for Forensic Science, led by Dr. Jane Harris, contributed specialized expertise, including access to an outdoor research station and body donation program.

The NSP team arrived early on March 5 to help move tents and equipment into place. The blizzard that swept through on March 5 and 6 delivered exactly the conditions the organizers wanted—cold, snow, and wind that pushed every system to its limits. Once plows cleared the parking lot of the University's Jacobetti Center, the operation took shape. The tents housed stations for fingerprinting, DNA sampling, dental record tracing, and X-ray imaging, replicating the complex workflow of a real-world mass-fatality response. Patrollers then shifted into their operational roles, staffing first aid and helping maintain safety and security around the tent complex.

Federal and state Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORT) are highly trained and experienced, but each incident is unique. David Hunt, commander of DMORT Region V, told local reporter Jessica Goska of MyUPNow that one of the ongoing challenges is

“THEIR PARTICIPATION DEMONSTRATED HOW **PATROLLERS' SKILLS EXTEND FAR BEYOND THE SKI HILL** AND INTO THE BROADER WORLD OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS.”

“THROUGH THIS PARTNERSHIP,
**MICHIGAN PATROLLERS HAVE SUPPORTED
DISASTER DRILLS, VACCINATION CLINICS DURING THE H1N1
AND COVID-19 RESPONSES, AND OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES.**”

coordinating across agencies and jurisdictions that “have different ways of doing things.” Exercises like this one allow teams to build shared protocols before a real disaster occurs.

Cold-weather operations are not typical for most mortuary response teams. For them, the Marquette exercise was an opportunity to learn how equipment, personnel, and processes perform under sustained winter conditions.

By the end of the event, more than 250 participants—from local agencies to federal partners—reported overwhelmingly positive feedback. The professionalism, adaptability, and work ethic of the NSP contingent stood out. Schramm was impressed enough to invite all six patrollers to join MI-MORT as ongoing volunteers.

The exercise also highlighted a broader opportunity for patrollers in Michigan and beyond. The Michigan Volunteer Registry is an internet-based system designed primarily for health professionals of all backgrounds who are willing to assist in public health and medical events. Ski patrollers have been part of the registry since its inception, steadily expanding NSP’s role in community preparedness.

Through this partnership, Michigan patrollers have supported disaster drills, vaccination clinics during the H1N1 and COVID-19 responses, and other public health initiatives. Registered volunteers gain access to advanced disaster-response training that enhances their ability to care for their families, patrols, and communities. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proven value of NSP members in this system helped secure expedited vaccinations for many patrollers.

For those interested in serving beyond Michigan, additional opportunities exist through the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians and the federal Medical Reserve Corps, a national volunteer network that supports communities “during disasters and every day.” These pathways reflect NSP’s

growing presence in the broader emergency response community and reinforce its reputation as a trusted partner in complex operations.

As for the six Michigan patrollers who answered the call to Marquette—Ty Damon (Pine Knob), John Doyle (Caberfae Peaks), Kevin Mulherin and Brian Wyckoff (Bittersweet), and Sue Carter and Howard Haselhuhn (Mt. Brighton)—they returned to their home patrols tired, tested, and proud. Tents down, gear packed, and lessons learned, they demonstrated how NSP’s skills, mindset, and commitment continue to open new doors for service and leadership well beyond the slopes. +



CRISP | CLASSIC | HEROIC



MAN'S BEST FRIENDS



PATROL DOG PALE + RESCUE DOGS!

Avalanche Rescue Dogs play a vital role in search-and-rescue teams. In their honor, we created this Pale Ale in partnership with the National Ski Patrol to support rescue dog programs.

Patrol Dog Pale Ale, for the heroes with tails.

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A person in winter gear, including a red helmet and dark jacket, stands on a snowy mountain slope. They are carrying skis over their shoulder. The background is a vast, hazy, and snowy mountain landscape.

PASSING THE TORCH AT WHITEFACE

GUIDING A NEW GENERATION OF PATROLLERS

BY AMY WEST, HESPERUS SKI PATROL



Bob Zande

WE'VE ALL HEARD THE SAYING, "YOU AREN'T GETTING ANY YOUNGER," BUT AT WHITEFACE MOUNTAIN, THEY ARE. THE PATROLLERS WHO HAVE PUT IN DECADES OF THEIR TIME ARE SLOWLY EBBING, AND THE YOUNGER CROWD IS BEGINNING TO FLOOD IN.

And this changing of the guard has been a positive transformation.

Not all the patrol veterans are hanging up their ski poles, though. While volunteer patrol representative Bob Zande—who has served Whiteface Mountain for nearly a quarter of a century—is looking to pass the reins, he's not leaving patrol, and filling his ski boots won't be easy.

Whiteface Mountain near Lake Placid, New York, boasts the most vertical drop in the East. It has a rich history of hosting winter sport champions and games, having hosted the 1980 Olympics, so Whiteface patrollers keep watch on a legacy mountain, which is now part of the Mountain Collective pass. My favorite fun fact about the ski hill is their snowmaking: it's powered largely by solar, "allowing the mountain to turn sunlight into snow."

Amy: *I would love to hear how you and Whiteface Mountain came together.*

Bob: I was a patroller at a place called Big Tupper in Tupper Lake, New York. I patrolled there in the early 90s. It was a town-operated mountain, and the town sold it. They had some horrible winters, and Tupper closed in the 98-99 season. I had some friends who patrolled at Whiteface, and they said, "We'll take you on." So, eight of us left Big Tupper to go to Whiteface to patrol. Of the original eight, it's now just me and Barry Brogan left.

The conditions—when it's good—there's nothing better. The way it faces, it gets a lot of wind. With the snowmaking capabilities and the grooming, the days of "Iceface" are over, as far as I'm concerned. We live in the northeast, so it could rain on Thursday and be 10 degrees on Friday. But the guys that do the grooming and snowmaking they're really good, and we thank them all the time.

Have you had other jobs on the mountain?

I've always volunteered. Whenever possible, I used my PTO from work to be at the mountain because of my enthusiasm for patrolling. A few years into patrolling, my senior peers asked me to serve as the patrol representative. I said, "No, all I want to do



“IT’S PHENOMENAL HOW
GOOD AND PASSIONATE
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AND THEY’RE STICKING
AROUND.”



Early day setting trail-marking poles.

is get out on the hill and not have administrative duties.” Randy Rock, a longtime patroller, said, “Delegate.” So, I said, “Okay, I’ll take it!” I’m starting to phase out of it now, but I’ve been the patrol rep at Whiteface for close to 25 years.

When I first took over, we had, like, two instructors. Now we have a dozen. So, we couldn’t even have our own refresher 20-some years ago. But now, with all the help, we have our own refresher. We help at other refreshers. I’ve got somebody taking over for me for the training, and I’ve got a couple people in mind to phase into taking my job in the next few years.

You first led the OET trainings and OEC... you did it all?

I became an instructor so I could have refreshers. Once you’re an instructor, you choose your discipline. I chose OEC, and I’m also a toboggan instructor (OET). It just makes my job as a patrol rep that much easier, especially with 126 patrollers.

National Headquarters in Colorado is great, or as I like to call it, “the mothership.” Any help you need, education, member records, registration, they are on top of things. If there’s a

glitch, I contact them.

How do you guys work with the pro/paid side?

We work very well. I always joke that they’re going to call me the “old day” guy. I always say, “in the old days...” because I’ve kind of been there a while, but the dynamics have changed. We come in the morning, the pros are in their positions, and we put a volunteer wherever we can. We currently have four watch stations on the mountain, each requiring a minimum of four patrollers. On average, we try to staff eight to 10 patrollers per station. In addition to the four mountain watch sites, we also provide race coverage, which typically requires six to eight patrollers. We will also divert coverage to our first aid patrol room as needed.

Any difference in responsibilities?

Regarding coordination between volunteer and pro patrol, both groups are accustomed to performing the same duties, including morning trail and lift checks, as well as end-of-day sweeps. Volunteers and pro patrols work alongside each other on



Whiteface patroller Don Uhler.

watches and can cover any tasks that require additional support. Pretty much the only difference is that they get paid, and we get paid at another job.

The volunteers at Whiteface are probably different than a lot of places. We have to do 20 days a year, but there is no schedule. So, if you show up, you sign in, and you get credit for that day. But we will ask people to let us know if they're coming to certain events, like race watches.

It used to be 25 pros up until 10 years ago. Then it went to 30. We've put 40 new people on this hill in the last 4 to 5 years, pros and volunteers. If I look at my roster, there are 40 pros, but from #18 down, they have probably 5 years of [patrol experience]. We used to joke that our average age was 65- 67. I think we're 30 now, and it's worked out very well. With volunteer patrol, it's the same thing. Half the people have got 5 years or less on average.

What about turnover?

A lot of the pros will go back to the volunteer if they do something else. We switch off so much. Some people have to leave. They can't support a family, you know? But some people stay. Management is recognizing they've got good help; let's do something about it.

In the past two years, I've given out awards for time patrolling, and we've got 45 years, two 35s, three 30s, a 25, a couple of 20s, and then there are 17 people with 5 years.

It's phenomenal how good and passionate these young people are. They love it, and they're sticking around.

Everyone always asks, "You ski so much, why don't you want to

be a pro?" I never was a paid patroller. I am on the hill between 100-120 days a season, simply because I love it. If it's a miserable day or I want to go home, I can. They can, too, but they just won't get paid. There really is no difference. I love what I do as a volunteer.

Management makes it easy on the old timers because they can do three, four, or five days. The pros have to designate their two days off. They put in Hoyt's High, which is named after a legendary patroller, Jim Hoyt Sr. He was a patroller at Whiteface for 60 years, and his son was a patrol director for close to 30. He retired a couple of years ago. Jim Sr. was there when Whiteface opened in 1958, and then died on the hill.

Have you done a lot of hiring and recruiting patrollers?

There are 11 in the [OEC] class now. We do have one or two who go to Mt. Van Hoevenberg (the bobsled and cross-country ski area). But we work together. The past few years, it's been phenomenal how many young people we've put on and how they have worked out.

I'll get a patrol director who will email me, "Hey, this guy is really good. He's coming to your area. Would you take him on?" And those are the ones I recommend we take. I hate to turn anybody away, especially if they get a good recommendation because they drop in your lap. You don't have to train them.

You have to be an expert skier. We have some tough territory when we open the slides, etc. That's a wide term, "expert". Everybody's an expert when they call me, but taking the OEC course does not make you a member of the Whiteface ski patrol. You have to be able to ski. And we have turned a few people away. We have a Ski-with-a-Patroller day where you



Patrollers in sled training.

come in the spring. They ski around and see what we do.

On the meet and greet day, I said, “if you're here because you think you ski for free, think again.”

What do you all do to keep people's spirits high or keep them going to the end (if snow is bad)?

We do a lot of cooking! Chris Gallagher, he's always got something going. I call him Cookie because he cooks and he's good at it. Hey, I'm cooking this or cooking that. He's a seasoned pro and just got his 40 years last year. There are breakfast or steaks or burgers, or people bring in wild game. For years, we've been having a turkey fest. We buy 10-15 turkeys, deep fry them, and everybody brings in a dish. The Butler building on top of the gondola has seven or eight fryers. That's usually the first week in March. We opened it to the public for donations. We pay too; it's five bucks a family, but you can eat a lot of food.

Anything else you want to tell me about this patrol or about yourself?

We have put a lot of women on, it's good to see. It's not just unique to us; and it's a good thing.

We do have the Young Adult Patroller program. When I was basically alone years ago, I kind of made an unwritten rule that if you're going to be a young patroller, you have to have a parent at least connected to the patrol. It's easier to just have a connection with somebody on the patrol who can bring you and help you. We have a patroller with 30 years in. I can remember his daughter sweeping with us when she was five years old. And now she's on our patrol, and her younger sister is a candidate this year. We've got Mark Donahue, who's been there for ~ 40 years. He's got three generations. He's got two



Whiteface Mountain team honoring the 10th Mountain Division.

grandchildren on the patrol that started last year as Young Adult Patrollers.

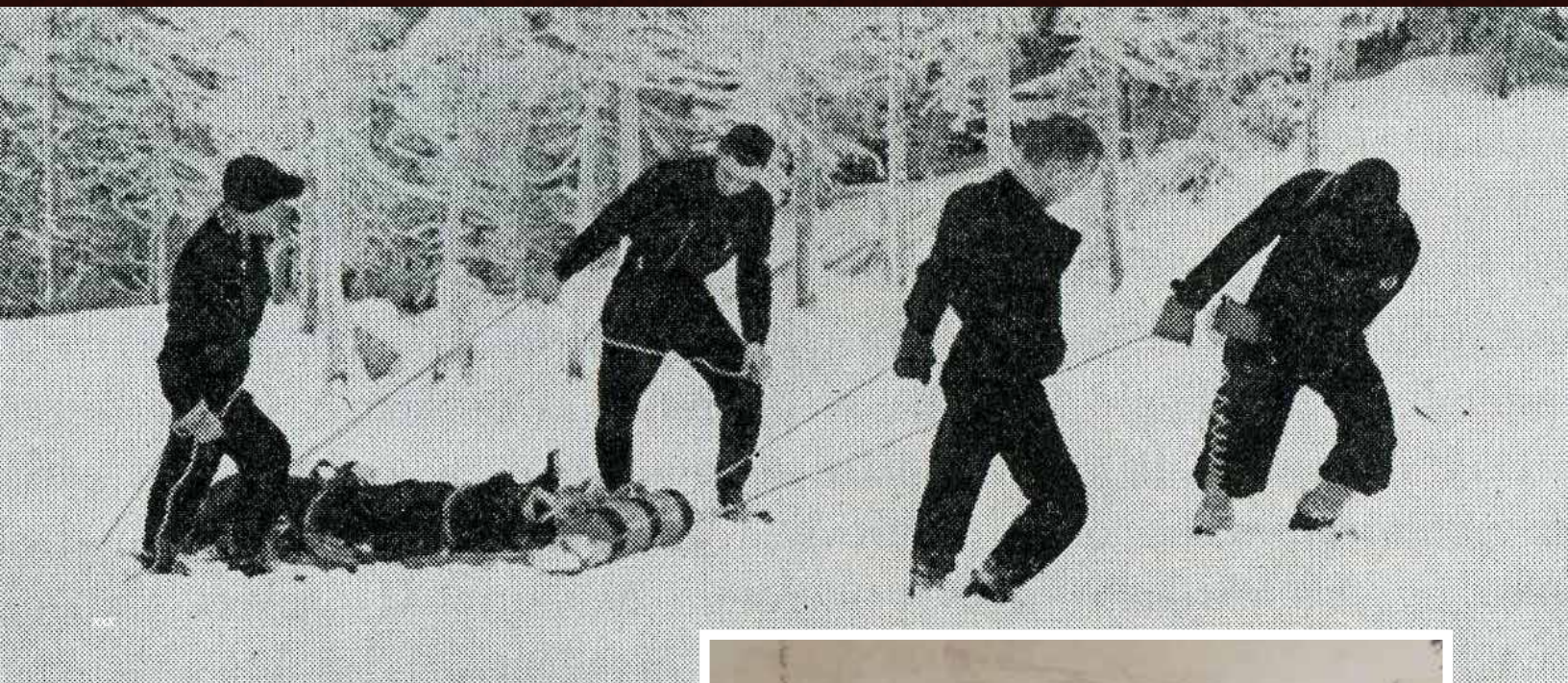
Can you name what you really like best about your job?

Helping people through all the little stuff. I notice it now with the two guys we're trying to get to take over for me. People will ask you, “Hey, I can't seem to do this,” and it's like, “Oh, just do this.” I'm not a tech person. I'm 69 years old. I had to learn. When I first started, we gave a check to our treasurer, and he sent the check to National. Everything was done by paper. I can remember when they started going electronic. I mentioned it to the RD, and he said, “Don't whine. This is the way it is.”

“It's not all about skiing, or walking with your skis over your shoulder out to the lift. There's a lot of stuff to do first. And being able to help 126 other people do what I've learned over the years, that's what I like.” +

FROM WOOL SWEATERS TO RED JACKETS: THE EVOLUTION OF SKI PATROL UNIFORMS

BY JOSH MCCORMACK



On a snowy morning, you can spot skiers in bright red and bold white moving with purpose across the slopes.

Ski patrol uniforms have become one of the most recognizable symbols on the mountain. But it wasn't always this way. The story of patrol uniforms is one of innovation, adaptation, and partnership.

From the early days of improvised wool layers to today's purpose-built Mammut collection, a patroller's gear has always been about one thing: keeping people safe in the alpine environment.



Wool, Loden, and Armbands: The Early Days

In skiing's earliest decades, there was no such thing as a "patrol uniform." Skiers bundled up in whatever kept them warm: heavy wool sweaters, knickerbockers, long socks, and dense loden coats that shed snow and wind. The style owed much to Arctic traditions—the anorak, a hooded shell first created by Inuit hunters, became a blueprint for the weather-resistant parkas that would follow.

For patrollers, the first distinguishing mark wasn't a jacket at all, but a white armband stamped with a red cross. It was simple, portable, and effective. Alongside those armbands, patrollers carried first-aid kits in knapsacks, ready to respond to injuries on the growing network of ski trails. Identification was secondary to survival; warmth and function came first.

Fabrics Meet Function: 1930s–1940s

As recreational skiing took hold in Europe and North America, clothing evolved. Skiers turned to gabardine and other tightly woven fabrics that resisted melting snow, while boiled-wool mittens became a favorite for their near-imperviousness to wind and wet.

World War II pushed innovation even further. Fabrics like Ventile, created for Royal Air Force pilots, showcased how tightly woven cotton could block water.

At the same time, U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division helped shape the future of alpine equipment. The division's uniforms and gear, designed for combat in snowy terrain, influenced postwar ski fashion and the practical design of patrol outerwear.

The Postwar Boom: 1950s–1970s

The bright red jacket with a white cross gradually emerged as the universal patrol symbol, ensuring patrollers could be seen instantly on the slopes. While this style echoes the humanitarian Red Cross, the reversed color scheme set patrols apart and ensured



“UNIFORMS TELL THE STORY OF AN INDUSTRY’S PROGRESS.”



visibility against the snow.

Then, the postwar ski boom brought rapid change to the mountains and to patrol uniforms. Innovators introduced nylon windshirts and down parkas to skiers, offering warmth without the bulk of wool. In Europe, Maria Bogner pioneered stretch ski pants, which in-turn gave patrollers greater mobility.

Rescue work defined early patrol life, and uniforms began to adapt over time—jackets and coats needed to withstand the strain of hauling sleds, climbing ridges, and braving long hours in storms.

Technology wasn’t just in fabrics. Goggles became more sophisticated, radios improved communication, and avalanche transceivers entered patrol use in the 1970s. These advances helped patrollers respond faster, stay warmer, and remain connected in dangerous conditions. By this era, the red jacket was firmly entrenched as the identity of ski patrol.

Professional Gear for Professional Patrollers

By the late 20th century, patrol uniforms had moved beyond adapted ski clothing. Jackets and pants were reinforced for durability, radios were standard, and packs carried everything from splints to shovels. Avalanche beacons became part of the toolkit, reflecting the growing role of patrollers in backcountry safety.

Uniforms were no longer just a symbol. They were professional-grade gear, built for the job of mountain rescue.

Built for the Job: Mammüt and the Mountain Pro Collection

That tradition continues today through NSP’s partnership with Mammüt. For over 160 years, Mammüt has been designing technical gear for the alpine environment.

“Uniforms tell the story of an industry’s progress,” said Matt Kaplan, the managing director of Mammüt North America. “As NSP has evolved from its early wool coats to today’s technical systems, Mammüt has undergone a similar

journey—moving from mountaineering rope maker to a global leader in keeping people warm, safe and dry, in even the harshest winter conditions.

“Our shared history reflects one truth: when the mountains change, we innovate. And patrol uniforms today are more than clothing—they’re equipment, built for a new generation of safety professionals.”

Patrol uniform technology has come far, and the results are clear:

- **Durability & Repairability:** Field-replaceable zippers and full-panel stitching make repairs possible in-house, extending the life of every garment.
- **Environmental Responsibility:** Solution-dyed fabrics reduce water use, while PFC-free coatings (phased in by 2026) limit chemical impact.
- **Performance Layers:** From rugged GORE-TEX shells to lightweight down and stretch insulation, patrollers can adapt to any condition.
- **Purpose-Built Features:** The Patrol Vest includes seven front pockets, three back pockets, a radio harness, and even a shovel pocket—designed for the realities of the job.

What sets this generation of gear apart is the way it’s shaped by experience on the hill. Annual feedback from patrol teams, including those in Europe, has influenced everything from zipper placement to reinforcement in high-wear areas. Jackets and pants balance durability with repairability, vests are built with radios and rescue tools in mind, and insulation layers keep warmth without sacrificing mobility.

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

From wool sweaters and white armbands to red jackets and rescue packs, ski patrol uniforms have always evolved to meet the demands of the mountain. The partnership with Mammüt takes that story forward, ensuring that patrollers have the tools, protection, and visibility they need to keep others safe.

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CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

NSP'S HALL OF FAME AND MINNIE DOLE HONOREES

BY DICK JACQUES,
NATIONAL AWARDS ADVISOR



Elizabeth Dodge



Janice Waits



R. Morgan Armstrong



Sal Mascareñas

THIS FALL, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND THE SOUTHERN DIVISION AND CENTRAL DIVISION PATROLLER CONFERENCES. AT THESE EVENTS, I DISCUSSED NATIONAL SKI PATROL'S RECOGNITION AND AWARDS PROGRAM WITH MANY ATTENDEES.

The summer 2025 edition of this magazine featured the National Outstanding Award winners for the 2023-24 season, along with snippets of their activities or contributions; an upcoming edition will feature the 2024-25 winners. These annual awards are a small part of the Recognitions and Awards Program. NSP brought attention to over 800 members with various recognitions, from merit stars to the Minnie Dole Award, in the 2024-25 season.

The NSP Hall of Fame began in 2012, and the first members were inducted at the NSP 75th Anniversary gala. Since that inaugural class, there have been 109 inductees into the Hall of Fame. Nominees for the Hall of Fame must have served NSP for at least 25 years, receive sponsorship from 10 members with National Appointments, and earn approval through an affirmative vote of the Hall of Fame Review Committee. The committee inducted four members in 2024-25:

HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2024-25

SAL MASCAREÑAS

Sal Mascareñas III joined National Ski Patrol in the 1982-83 season and has over 35 years of NSP leadership and instructor experience at multiple levels and in multiple programs. He assisted in the development of the Ski Trainer's Workshop and the Ski Enhancement Seminar programs, led the modernization of the stagnant Certified Program in the Intermountain Division, and later became the Certified National Program Director. He was also appointed to NSP's National Safety Team, where he contributed significantly to developing the "Lead by Example" program and the new the Outdoor Risk Management curriculum for the NSP's Center for Learning.

ELIZABETH DODGE

Elizabeth N. Dodge (Liz) joined National Ski Patrol in the 1970-71 season. She has served in various leadership positions for over 35 years, including as a patrol director, the Northwest Region director, the Pacific Northwest Division director, and five years as a national board member. She has 139 years of combined experience as an Instructor Development instructor, instructor trainer, and Outdoor Emergency Care instructor trainer, Region and Division OEC Supervisor. She has led multiple projects to keep *National Ski Patrol Policies and Procedures* manual up to date and has chaired numerous national committees.

MARLEN GUELL

Marlen Guell joined National Ski Patrol in the 1956-57 season. He served in multiple leadership positions, including patrol director, region director, division director, national board member, and board chair for a combined total of 20 years. He was a first aid, Avalanche, and Mountain Travel and Rescue instructor. During his years on the national board, he helped develop the first Joint Statement of Understanding between the National Ski Areas Association and NSP, defining NSP's role in credentialing patrollers and area management's responsibility for hill operations.

JANICE WAITS

Janice Waits joined National Ski Patrol in the 1975-76 season. She served 40 years as division secretary under multiple division directors. She was an OEC instructor for over 36 years and an OEC instructor trainer for most of that time. During the turbulent era in the early 2000s, Janice was a stabilizing force in her division, preventing the unauthorized replacement of elected officials and the misuse of division funds.

MINNIE DOLE AWARD

The highest honor members can receive is the Charles Minot "Minnie" Dole Award. This extremely rare award recognizes those exceptional few patrollers who, over the years, have closely exemplified the long-term dedication, devotion, and self-sacrifice of the founder of NSP, Minnie Dole. Nominees must have at least 30

years of active patrolling service with NSP, have provided continuous leadership for over 15 years in a variety of offices/adviserships from patrol representative through division and/or national levels, and have implemented a program, project, and/or procedure that has had an overall positive impact on the entire National Ski Patrol. With those lofty criteria, it's no wonder that only 33 members have received this award.

R. Morgan Armstrong joined National Ski Patrol in the 1980-81 season as a member of the Wintergreen Ski Patrol in Virginia. He served as a patrol representative, region director, division director, and national board member. He is an Instructor Development and OEC instructor and instructor trainer in both disciplines. During the mid-2000s, Morgan joined a small group of patrollers who fought a legal suit brought by some division directors. The settlement of this suit established a new set of NSP bylaws, which Morgan drafted.

As a division director, Morgan led the division directors in developing a communication protocol with the national board that continues to provide division input and provide a check and balance to the national board.

Armstrong is the 33rd member to be honored with the Minnie Dole Award.

For a complete list of Hall of Fame and Minnie Dole Award recipients, visit the Awards page of the document library on the NSP website. +

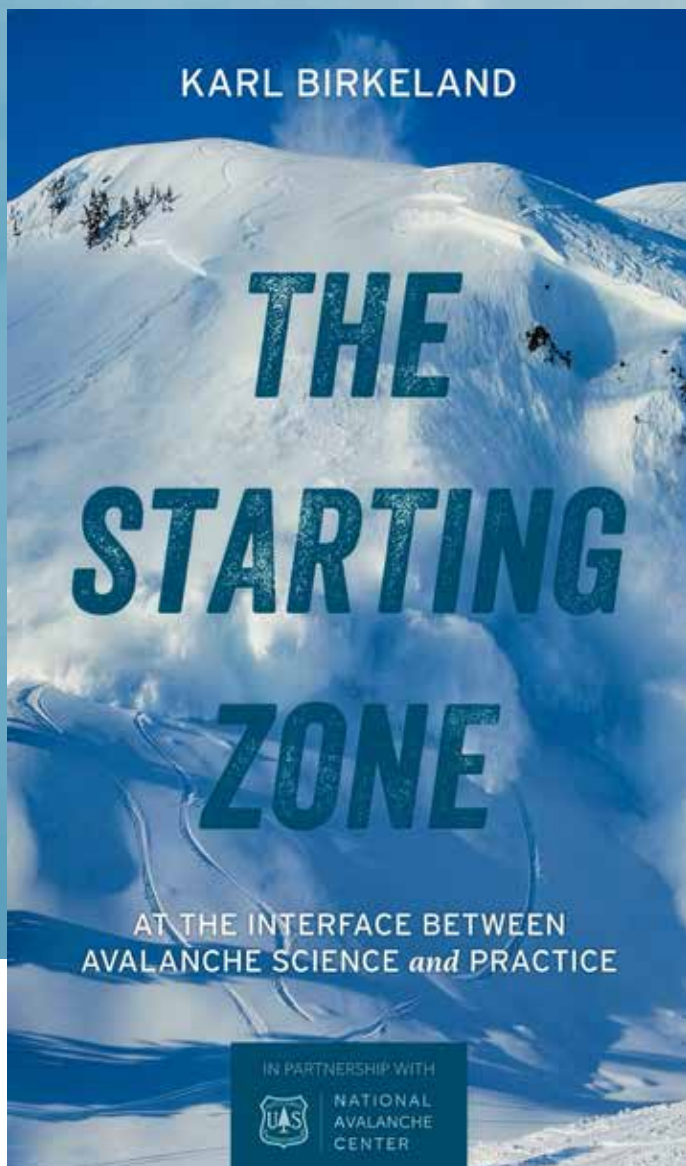


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THE STARTING ZONE

ADVANCING AVALANCHE SCIENCE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF EDUCATORS

BY MYRON ALLEN, NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIR



Karl Birkeland



A new e-book is available to avalanche educators: Dr. Karl Birkeland's *The Starting Zone: At the Interface Between Avalanche Science and Practice*. While the book is currently on the market, it is a work in progress, with several chapters awaiting publication. People who buy the book now will have access to future chapters. As of late 2025, the e-book already has enough material to be useful as a textbook in second-level avalanche courses for patrollers and other practitioners.

A former ski patroller, Birkeland has a long career of letting applications drive snow science. He recently retired from the U.S. Forest Service National Avalanche Center, having served as the center's director for many years. He is also an adjunct faculty member at Montana State University. His research has profoundly impacted the work of patrollers, mountain guides, and other avalanche practitioners. As just one example, he helped develop the extended column test, now the most widely used snow-column test. More broadly, his use of rigorous principles of solid mechanics in the study of slab avalanche initiation, crack propagation, and slab release has led to many practical advances in avalanche mitigation. He regularly teaches in the National Avalanche School, the nation's premier educational forum for avalanche practitioners.



The Starting Zone is not a first-level avalanche textbook. The most appropriate audience includes avalanche workers who have taken level-1 avalanche and rescue courses and have spent significant time in the field. This means extensive route planning and travel in avalanche terrain, many snow-pits with documentation, and frequent, painstaking scrutiny of snow grains through a magnifier.

The book's organization reflects a snow scientist's perspective. There are three introductory chapters, including one devoted to the anticipated effects of climate change on future avalanche hazards.

The book, as planned, covers four major topics:

- Section II: The Mountain Snowpack (snow stratigraphy and snow-grain metamorphosis)
- Section III: Avalanche Release (slab and loose-snow mechanics)
- Section IV: Avalanche Mitigation (using ski cuts, explosives, and other techniques)
- Section V: Avalanche Forecasting and Stability Evaluation

At the time of this review, several chapters remain to be

published, including at least two chapters in Section IV and all of Section V.

Publishing in e-book form has advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that students and instructors can buy the book, use the available chapters, and access new chapters as they publish. There are at least three other advantages:

- The author can rapidly correct errors, update chapters as the discipline evolves, respond to users' feedback, and incorporate new references.
- The book can include videos and other non-print resources.
- Lists of references can include one-click links to scientific articles.

Birkeland makes deft use of all these advantages. For example, he presents persuasive evidence, illustrated using video analysis, that weak-layer cracks propagate in compression mode.

One possible disadvantage is that traditionalists and many members of the old guard tend to prefer printed formats. To me, a card-carrying senior citizen, the advantages of e-books far outweigh the admittedly pleasing heft of a printed volume. Also, my bookshelves are full.



Publishing an e-book before it is complete also has the disadvantage that, for some time, students, practitioners, and instructors using the book need to augment it with supplementary material. The most important example of a topic yet to be published in *The Starting Zone* is the conceptual model of avalanche hazard (CMAH, pronounced “see-ma”), which Birkeland helped develop. Since the publication of CMAH’s current structure in 2017, this methodology has become ubiquitous in avalanche hazard assessment. Users include snow-safety managers at resorts, mountain guides, backcountry patrollers, and transportation departments in cold, mountainous states. Fortunately, while we wait for Birkeland’s treatment of this topic, we enjoy free and easy access to a thorough, highly readable paper on CMAH, listed in the references.

The Starting Zone includes essentially no content related to avalanche rescue. For this reason, NSP avalanche instructors and practitioners will need to supplement this textbook with rescue-oriented material. As anyone who teaches NSP’s level-2 Avalanche for Rescue Personnel course knows, Avalanche rescue is a substantial and evolving topic. The second edition of *Avalanche Rescue Fundamentals*, by Lin Ballard and Dale Atkins, has been the bible since its publication in 2010. Owing to advances in avalanche transceiver technology during the past 15 years, the avalanche community needs an updated standard reference in this field. Dare I suggest an e-book?

Notwithstanding the lack of rescue-oriented content, I’ll argue that *The Starting Zone* is the best available textbook for the snow-science modules of NSP’s Level 2 Avalanche for Rescue Personnel. (This course differs significantly from recreation-track level-2 courses defined by the American Avalanche Association.) Among currently available

second-level textbooks, Sections II and III alone provide the clearest, most up-to-date treatment I’ve read of the physics and mechanics of nature’s most complicated material.

It is little wonder that *The Starting Zone* is now the main textbook for the National Avalanche School. Birkeland’s writing style is clear and concise, aimed at people who work and teach in steep, snowy mountains. The exposition rests on the best available scientific evidence, drawing compelling lessons from snow-column experiments and documented avalanche accidents. It contains a remarkable number of links to detailed accident reports. The book uses narrative, graphics, video, and citations to the literature to convey a precise, insightful account of the dragons that lurk in snow.

Myron Allen is a member of NSP’s national board of directors, chair of the national education committee, and former national program director for NSP’s Mountain Travel and Rescue program. He is an NSP level-2 avalanche instructor. +

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GORDON LEON BENOIT

Gordon L. Benoit, a member of the Hunt Hollow Ski Patrol in Naples, NY, died on August 26, 2025, at Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, while on vacation.

Gordy joined National Ski Patrol in 1979 at Ski Valley in South Bristol, NY, and advanced to become a senior patroller in 1985. When Ski Valley closed in 2000, he transferred to Hunt Hollow to continue his volunteer patrolling career. He was a dedicated member of NSP for 46 years, serving Ski Valley, Hunt Hollow, the Genesee Valley Region, and the Eastern Division with distinction. His exemplary service to the skiing public and leadership as an Assistant Patrol Director, Ski & Toboggan Instructor, Region Senior Outdoor Emergency Transportation Program Administrator, and Division Instructor Trainer earned him National Appointment Number 8814 in 1998 and the Distinguished Service Award in 2016.

Gordy will always be remembered for using his expert skiing and teaching abilities to help others improve their skills and as the guy who always got the job done right and on time.

His personal warmth and loyal friendship were felt by everyone, especially when he was barking orders to “get to work” and completing the necessary tasks to keep the ski patrol running smoothly. We will always “keep it up” as he often admonished us.

As a Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute-educated chemical engineer with a master's degree, Gordy worked for many years at the Mobil Corporation Research Laboratories, where he developed over two dozen patents in thin film materials science. Gordy was also a master woodworker who dedicated his skills to Habitat for Humanity for over 20 years as one of

the brightest lights of the “Hammer and Saw” family. In addition, he was renowned for his skills as a birdhouse builder and origami creator.

Gordy was a loving family man who treated everyone



Gordon Leon Benoit

with true friendship and fairness. He was very dedicated to the Mendon Presbyterian Church, where he served as head of buildings and grounds for 20 years and was Clerk of the Works when a new church was built. He is survived by his wife, Beverly Cole Benoit; his children, Nicole (Robert) McCool and Mark (Irina) Benoit, stepdaughters Susan Plano Faber and Karen Stotz; and eight grandchildren.

Gordy had unrelenting dedication, passion, and energy for the Hunt Hollow Ski Patrol. His thoughtfulness and actions have left a meaningful impact that will endure for generations, and he will be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues in the ski patrol family.

Norm Robinson, Skip Millor, and Nick Schiavetti
Genesee Valley Region Alumni

RON DULL

Ron Dull, of Massanutten Ski Patrol in Virginia, passed away unexpectedly on March 23, 2025, at the age of 65. Until his health forced his retirement five years prior, Ron served as a Massanutten patroller for 26 years, as a Senior patroller for 19 of those years, and as Massanutten's patrol representative for 11 years. In both 2016 and 2018, Ron was selected as the Southern Division's Outstanding Patrol Representative.

As patrol representative, Ron led by example. His calm demeanor in addressing any issue or challenge served as the model for patrolling. Volunteer and paid patrollers at Massanutten operate together seamlessly in large part due to the calm, respectful, and measured communications that Ron maintained with our patrol director. Years after Ron's retirement, that culture of camaraderie continues.

As a volunteer patrol rep, Ron was a fixture at the hill almost every weekend. Ron served as a floating supervisor and applied himself exactly when and where he was needed most, both on the slopes and in the aid room. During shortages, or especially busy shift changes, when one of the two mountain teams or the aid room staff was in danger of being overwhelmed, Ron was there serving extended shifts, negating potential shortages, and smoothing over

operations, increasing morale and making the patrol director's job easier.

Ron provided a significant portion of our fundraising by donating each year for the sale of more than 100 printed T-shirts, hats, sweatshirts, and golf shirts, with all profits going to patrol fundraising, and also contributing to our entire patrol's (paid and volunteer) sense of team. Even five years after Ron retired, our patrollers are still seen wearing these items, both in the aid room and on the hill, advertising the resort and creating a sense of teamwork.

Ron's work to improve morale was not limited to traditional ski patrol duties. He improved our sense of community by scheduling, preparing, and executing an annual potluck gathering following our refresher every fall. He hosted, choreographed, and paid for dinner for the entire patrol. Ron's fall barbecue helped all of us catch up and enhanced our patrol's sense of team and camaraderie.

Almost every weekend during ski season, Ron hosted a Saturday afternoon barbecue, providing at his own expense hamburgers, hot dogs, venison, and vegetarian options that he prepared for the patrol at shift change. Ron's Saturday afternoon shift change barbecues were a constant for years. This last winter, years after Ron's retirement, he returned to the patrol for one more barbecue, and several of our patrollers offered that they were so thankful to have had that last cookout with Ron and to talk about hunting, fishing, skiing, and life with him just like old times. All the venison and tuna were just a nice addition to the sweet, quiet man who graced us with his presence. Ron had a heart of gold, did his job, and never complained. Ron leaves a wonderful legacy to our patrol.

Our prayers go out to his family, as well as our heartfelt gratitude for having the time to patrol with Ron. Ron leaves behind his wife, Regina, and daughters, Sandra and Samantha, both of whom were also patrollers.

DAVID HANNING

CDavid R. Hanning, an alumnus of the Swain Ski Patrol in Swain, New York, died July 13, 2025, at the Hildebrandt Hospice Care Center in Greece, New York, at the age of 98.

David joined National Ski Patrol in 1964



David Hanning

and patrolled for 40 years, serving with distinction as an assistant patrol director, membership chairman, Outdoor Emergency Transportation and Mountain

Travel and Rescue instructor, and Western New York Region Chairlift Evacuation Program administrator. He became a Senior patroller in 1966 after passing the Senior ski and toboggan test during a blizzard that left all the Senior candidates and examiners stranded in the storm and unable to travel home for two days. For his ski patrol leadership and dedicated service to the skiing public, he received National Appointment Number 7099 in 1989 and the National Ski Patrol Distinguished Service Award in 2004. Upon his ski patrol retirement, the David Hanning Commendation Award was established in his honor, to be awarded for cumulative career contributions to the Swain Ski Patrol.

In 1998, David initiated and managed the dedication ceremony and installation of graveside granite stones and brass plaques he had designed to commemorate Minnie Dole's founding of National Ski Patrol and the 10th Mountain Division. He arranged for the presence of NSP officials and 10th Mountain Division soldiers, as well as members of the Dole family, at the Paul Smiths, New York, cemetery celebration and co-authored an article describing the event that was published in the fall 1998 Ski Patrol Magazine (vol. 15, issue 1).

David was born in Saranac Lake, New York, in 1927 and enlisted in the Army upon high school graduation in 1945. Assigned to the 24th Infantry Division, he was sent to Yale University to study Japanese and was deployed to post-war Japan to interpret for Army engineers overseeing the dismantling of fortifications and to inspect manufacturing plants for the detection of munitions and weapons assembly. Upon his return to the U.S., he served in the Army Reserve 98th Infantry Division and retired as a lieutenant colonel. He worked at Eastman Kodak in

Rochester, New York, for 34 years, retiring in 1986 as unit director of the materials management division.

David was an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting, fishing, sailing, and skiing. His hunting excursions included many trips out West in search of big game and birds with fellow patrollers and hunters. He was an avid America's Cup fan and traveled to Newport, Rhode Island, to experience crewing the Weatherly after that vessel's retirement from racing. David was a longtime member of the Rochester Ski Club, completing many of their trips over the years, especially his favorite annual trek to Sunday River.

David was preceded in death by his wife, Jean Conheady Hanning; his eldest son, Paul Hanning; and his two stepsons, Steven and Scott (Trucker) Wright. He is survived by his wife, Korleen Dickinson; son, Stephen (Donna) Hanning; daughter, Shauna (Ernest) Newcomb; daughter, Maura (Kenneth) Hanning Sims; stepchildren, Sheryl (Earl) Dunbar and Shellee Wright; and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

David's exemplary ski patrol accomplishments made him an inspiring role model for young patrol candidates and seasoned patrollers alike. David was a loyal friend to his fellow patrollers, and his engaging personality, quick-witted humor, admirable leadership, and personal generosity will be remembered fondly by all who knew him.

Nicholas Schiavetti,
Swain Ski Patrol, New York
(alumnus)

DONALD HICKS

Don Hicks, 84, of Leominster, Massachusetts, passed away on April 15, 2025, after a brief illness. Don was a longtime patroller at Wachusett Mountain in Massachusetts. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Nancy; daughter, Karen; and son, Andrew.

Don was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, and received his education in Lowell schools and at the University of Massachusetts. He began his banking career in Lowell and held several positions at various community banks before retiring as president and

CEO of Reading Cooperative Bank in 2002.

Don joined National Ski Patrol in 1973, and during his NSP career, he served as patrol director, EMARI Region section chief, EMARI Region director, and for nine years as the Eastern Division treasurer. Don was recognized with many NSP and patrol service awards, including the Distinguished Service Award in 1999. Don remained an NSP Alumni member after retiring from active patrolling at Wachusett Mountain.

Don was an active outdoor athlete — golfer, tennis player, and skier. He was a prominent and distinguished civic leader and served as grand master of the Masons in Massachusetts during 2002-04. He was a mild-mannered gentleman, an accomplished NSP member, and he will be missed.

John W. Shipman
Wachusett Ski Patrol,
Massachusetts (retired)

MARTY HUEBNER

Martin F. Huebner Sr., 97, of Idaho Falls, Idaho, passed away peacefully on June 10, 2025. He was born in Elyria, Ohio, and made his way to the Intermountain Division and Idaho, where he worked as a nuclear engineer at Idaho National Laboratories for 30 years. As an avid outdoorsman, Marty was quickly attracted to the mountains and forests of Idaho, and among his activities, skiing was a favorite.

Marty launched his National Ski Patrol volunteer career in 1966 as a charter member and assistant director of the Taylor Mountain Ski Patrol,



Marty Huebner

also authoring the patrol's avalanche plan. He instructed first aid as it transitioned first to Winter Emergency Care, then Outdoor Emergency Care. He also

taught Avalanche, Mountaineering, and Professional Ski Instructors of America Level II Nordic and alpine skiing. He transferred to Grand Targhee Ski Area, dual registering as co-founder of Idaho Falls Nordic while serving across all levels as NSP adviser for the Avalanche, Nordic, and Awards programs. He served as the national Nordic director (1978-86) and national Alumni advisor (2013-17). He was an invited presenter for national Nordic seminars, U.S. Forest Service National Avalanche School, and five Fédération Internationale des Patrouilles de Ski conventions, as well as a contributor/editor for the first NSP Nordic Manual.

Marty has won Intermountain Division Outstanding Alpine Patroller (1979) and Outstanding Nordic Patroller (1983), also receiving a Gold Merit Star for NSP National Outstanding Nordic Patroller (1983). He holds National Appointment Number 3378 and was inducted into the National Ski Patrol Hall of Fame in 2017.

Marty was predeceased by his wife, Patricia, also a patroller, and is survived by his children, Marty Jr., Pete, and Maggie.

STANLEY KLIMA

Stanley “Stash” Klima, age 94, has finished his last run. He passed away on August 14, 2025, the same way he came into the world — at home. He was the son of Albert and Stella (Chojnacki), beloved husband of 59 years to Mary Ellen (née Maher), and loving father to Catherine Gletherow (Jamie), John (Jill), Mary Lynn Golliher (Doug), Carol Auth (Rodney), and Jim (Angela). Stanley was a U.S. Army veteran, a NASA engineer, and an avid skier.



Stan Klima

Stash was always slightly amazed at how his life turned out. Hailing from the small town of Buck Lake in

Michigan's Upper Peninsula, his military service showed him the world. When he returned home, the GI Bill paved the way for him to go to Michigan Technological University, leave work on the family farm and in the mines, and eventually land a job at the NASA Lewis Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, where he worked as a metallurgical engineer on research and testing that was used in the space program.

He was heard to say, “Hard work pays off, but you still need a little bit of luck.”

Stash spent over 50 years volunteering with National Ski Patrol, working at both Brandywine Ski Resort in Ohio and Holiday Valley Ski Resort in New York. Always eager to make one more turn, he was fond of telling friends and family that “Some of the best skiing is in the rain,” — a not-so-subtle reference to the fact that East Coast skiers are a hardy breed whose love of skiing overrides snow conditions.

Stash has nine grandchildren — Travis Auth (Maggie), Marin Auth, Hallie Auth, Julia Auth, Isabel Auth, Luke Klima, Kate Klima, Wesley Golliher, and Owen Golliher — and one great-grandchild — Dorothy Auth. He is the brother of Nancy Horansky and the late Eleanor Boehm; Albert Klima, Mary Stanek, Jean Musial, Violet Miller, Frank Klima, Walter Klima, Ed Klima, and Leonard Klima.

CHAR MCCLEAR

The most universally admired and respected patroller I've known has left us. Char McClear swept her last run on September 19, 2025.

Everyone who ever had a chance to work with her will never forget her. As tiny as she was, there were few who could outski her. As a firefighter/paramedic and Senior patroller, there was no first aid scenario she couldn't handle. She was, simply, the epitome of the ideal ski patroller.

I am one of many patrollers who can proudly say they worked incidents with her, and even though her skills and experience far outdid us, you were never an

“assistant” to Char; you were a colleague with whom she was eager to share her knowledge and encouragement.

She was a member of National Ski Patrol for 42 years and a member of the Barrington (Illinois) Fire District for 30 years, retiring as assistant chief. In her years as a firefighter, she became skilled in confined space operations, high-angle rescue, rope work, and below-grade rescue. She qualified as an engineer, driving and operating the rigs and pumps. She was a complete firefighter.

In those years of fighting fires and skiing with us, she found time to become the Illinois State Senior Women's Amateur golf champion not once, but three times. Three times she qualified for the United States Women's Golf Open. She served on the U.S. Golf Association's Women's Amateur Public Links Championship Committee and on the board of directors of the Illinois Women's Golf Association.

When she retired, she moved to Nevada to continue patrolling at local and destination ski areas and took up and excelled at wildlife photography.

Then there was pickleball. Needless to say, she became a ferocious competitor and helped organize competitions. It is perhaps fitting that at 82, she experienced a heart attack on a pickleball court. CPR helped, but she passed away quietly at the hospital.

Those of us on the Wilmot Mountain Ski Patrol who knew her are better human beings for having known and been influenced by her. May her memory be a blessing.

Sam Frank

*Wilmot Mountain Ski Patrol,
Illinois*

THOMAS STUDLEY

Thomas Peter Studley, of Fayston, Vermont, died in a tragic accident on July 5, 2025, at age 74. He was born May 5, 1951, in Wakefield, Massachusetts. Tom graduated from Wakefield High School in 1969 and received a bachelor's degree from Lowell State College with the dream of



Thomas Studley

becoming a history teacher. After college, Tom played rugby and helped coach soccer and hockey.

Tom moved to the Mad River Valley of Vermont in 1982, where he

purchased property in Fayston. He began working at Mad River Glen in the 1980s in the base lodge and then as a liftie. Tom joined the Mad River Glen Ski Patrol in 1996 and became a Senior patroller in 2002. He became a Certified instructor and took many NSP courses.

Tom was a talented craftsman and handyman, with training from the Yestermorrow Design and Building School. Tom would balance his seasonal life by working as a carpenter as well as doing farm work. Tom followed his pursuit of taller mountains and deeper snow in 2006 when he and his then partner, Cindy Conlin, began patrolling at Powder Mountain in Utah. They continued their cross-country lifestyle, patrolling out West and coming back to New England during the summers for 13 years. In 2019, Tom moved back to his home in Fayston full-time.

Tom will be remembered for his thoughtful nature, dry wit, caring demeanor, and love of skiing. Tom was known by most to be a quiet, hard-working guy who lived a simple, peaceful existence. He took immaculate care of his land and built hundreds of feet of marvelous rock retaining walls. Tom volunteered for Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports at Sugarbush and later for Ogden Valley Adaptive Sports at both Snowbasin and Powder Mountain in Utah. Tom was a humble soul and was always willing to lend a helping hand.

Tom lived his life in and around the mountains he loved so much. His drive to help others was evident in the way he patrolled and interacted with the public. He was loved and will be missed terribly by the extended family of his community. We wish Tom endless powder runs with the friends who have gone before him.

ROBERT SALONEN



Robert Salonen

For 60 years, Bob Salonen and his wife, Betsy, were integral to the Ski Brule slopes in Iron River, Michigan, through their dedication to National Ski Patrol and each other. Their quiet leadership and commitment to service shaped generations of patrollers.

Born in Ironwood, Michigan, Bob dedicated over 30 years to teaching math in the West Iron County schools before embracing outdoor life on the slopes and golf course. As an Outdoor Emergency Transportation instructor, he trained hundreds of new patrollers with patience and humor, becoming a cornerstone of Ski Brule's patrol family due to his calm demeanor and problem-solving skills.

Bob and Betsy's shared dedication exemplified patrol service: teamwork, humility, and care for others. They consistently arrived early, stayed late, and led by example.

Beyond the slopes, Bob was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, cherishing his family, faith, and the Michigan Upper Peninsula's beauty.

Though the mountain will miss his tracks, Bob's legacy lives on in every patroller he trained and every safe run made under his watch.

Paul Eident

Ski Brule Ski Patrol, Michigan

DANNY SHIPE

Beloved Pennsylvania Denton Hill Ski Patroller Daniel "Danny" Shipe died peacefully on August 22, 2025, at the Gatehouse Family Hospice in Williamsport, PA, surrounded by loving family and friends, following an eighteen-month courageous struggle with cancer.

Daniel Brosius Shipe was born in Philadelphia on October 13, 1955, the son of Robert Amos and Virginia

(Burns) Shipe. His love of the great outdoors first developed during outings with his family in Central Pennsylvania, New England, and Canada. Danny was a UPS career employee for thirty-five years. An added benefit was that all of the walking and steps in and out of the UPS truck kept his skiing quads in shape. In addition to skiing, Danny's passions included gardening, music, and other outdoor sports, including fishing, kayaking, mountain biking, and hiking.

Danny's journey to becoming an avid cross-country and excellent downhill skier began during his college years. In 1989, he joined the Denton Hill Ski Patrol, serving for a total of 37 years, most recently through the NSP Alumni Program. He will be remembered for his passionate commitment to the Denton Hill Ski Patrol and its patrons. He had a calming persona, and when he took care of someone during an incident, it was like your best friend had shown up to help. Additionally, Danny was seen as a leader within the patrol, having led or participated in multiple committees and activities. He often helped with teaching OEC classes, instructed during the annual lift evac practices, and led candidates and his fellow patrollers through skiing and toboggan drills and annual training. He helped with mountain bike patrolling and fundraising as well. Finally, when reports of a distressed cross-country skier were received, he'd change into his cross-country gear and head out for the rescue. Danny was awarded various local, regional, and national NSP awards, including: The DHSP Exemplary Service Award (2005-2010), an NSP Blue Merit Star (2010), the Eastern Division Patroller Achievement Award (2013), and the DHSP Quarter Century Club Award (1989-2014).



Danny Shipe

In addition to his love of skiing, Danny was best known in Tioga County, PA, and beyond as a musician. A skilled guitarist, banjo player, and songwriter

with a rich baritone voice, he was a central figure in four bluegrass, progressive bluegrass, and folk bands: North Fork, Burnt Toast, Hickory Project, and Drowsy Maggie. In the last nine years, he sang in a folk duet with Molly Cary. With Burnt Toast and especially with Hickory Project, Danny performed to widespread acclaim in festivals across the U.S., in Ireland, Europe, and Australia, even playing a concert at the Kennedy Center.

He is survived by his wife, Pamela Walker Shipe of Mansfield, PA, whom he married in 1993. She continues to be an ardent supporter of the Denton Hill Ski Patrol and earned the Angel Award multiple times. Danny will be missed by all at Denton Hill. Those who knew him best knew his favorite saying when the snow was deep: "No friends on a

powder day!" With a smile on his face, he would yell, "Keep up if you can!" and off he would go...

Molly Bovard
Denton Hill Ski Patrol,
Pennsylvania

RICHARD DEAN "DICK" WILLY

Beloved Pennsylvania Denton Hill Dick joined Cascade Backcountry Ski Patrol in 1993 and very quickly became an integral part of the patrol with his sense of humor and dedication. Within a few short years, he took all the avalanche and Mountain Travel and Rescue (MTR) courses, became an instructor, and for years, taught some of the best courses in the region into his 70s. He earned his Senior Nordic status in 2000 and

National in 2007. He was awarded the Outstanding Nordic Patroller for the Northwest Region in 2011, the region's Outstanding Administrative Patroller for his work with the MTR program, as well as the prestigious Miller Memorial for his many years of leadership and service to the Northwest Region.

In addition, he was an active member of the Ski Patrol Rescue Team (SPART), a unit of King County Search and Rescue.

At the age of 84, he passed away on September 14, 2025, after a brief illness.

Dick was a devoted husband and father who was active in the community. He was involved in a variety of activities at his church. He volunteered for the Boys and Girls Clubs of King County, where he served as a board member for several years and as board president. He was active in Scouting for decades and served as the District's Eagle Scout advisor. Dick's service to Scouting was recognized with the Silver Beaver Award, which is awarded for distinguished service to youth and is Scouting America's highest council-level recognition for an adult leader.

After he retired from Boeing in 1999, he was able to spend more time on his favorite hobbies: bicycling, skiing, and autocross. In 2011, Dick was one of many individuals who raised money for the American Lung Association by bicycling from Seattle to Washington, D.C. on the Big Ride Across America. When not bicycling or skiing, Dick actively helped organize and participated in autocross events throughout western Washington as a member of the Northwest Region of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA).

Dick's legacy of faith, service, love, nonsense wisdom, humor, and outdoor adventure will be forever cherished by his family and friends and the many communities he touched throughout his life.



Richard Dean Willy



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