

Hello Chugach State Park backcountry snow safety program concerned organizations and individuals:

It has been over half a decade since the project that became the Anchorage Avalanche Center (AAC) was conceived, and the initially identified stakeholders were met with in order to learn about the project and provide input. In that time, more critical stakeholders have been identified. This message is going out to stakeholders old and new, as well as organizations and individuals that have expressed interest in the past.

Since 2012 the AAC ([www.AnchorageAvalancheCenter.org](http://www.AnchorageAvalancheCenter.org)) has been providing a volunteer-organized backcountry snow safety program for Chugach State Park (CSP). However, the project remains precarious in its current form. Through the process of piloting such a program for five seasons, much has been learned and tested about making such a program a reliable and sustainable service for our community and the unique needs (critical components) of an avalanche information program serving Anchorage's backyard mountain playground.

Given the precarious nature of its current format and the desire to ensure that such a program is rooted in the local community, the AAC project is soliciting for input and feedback from interested organizations and individuals in regard to a reformation that could become a sustainable institution for our community. Other than insisting that a public observations platform alone is not enough to adequately prevent the sort of tragic casualties and fatalities that have previously resulted from avalanche accidents in CSP, the AAC is seeking input on reformation from the ground up from stakeholders critical to ensuring the institutionalization and sustainability of a backcountry snow safety program for CSP.

The AAC project realizes that this is a complex process: there are multiple parties involved with diverse orientations. There are also well-established existing backcountry snow safety institutions in our community that this project wishes to cooperate and collaborate with in mutual respect, rather than infringe upon. The AAC project seeks to find a working model that will allow it to achieve sustainability by finding a new niche for funding and operations that addresses the unique needs of a backcountry snow safety program for CSP, while contributing to (rather than infringing upon) existing snow safety institutions in the greater Anchorage community.

The following are critical components of a backcountry snow safety program for CSP, with a brief explanation:

1. **Advisories:** While some parties may be opposed to CSP advisories with a danger rating (i.e. telling the public the avalanche danger is low, moderate, considerable, high, or extreme), more is needed than just a platform for hosting public observations. The AAC has been providing a “weekend avalanche outlook” for the duration of its existence. This has been experimental and has gone through many iterations. From the process of operating a CSP avalanche information program for over five years, it has become clear that some agreeable iteration that provides the general public (basic users with only awareness level avalanche education) with clearly communicated information of anticipated avalanche problems is necessary. It seems that at least a “Level 1” education is requisite for understanding and contextualizing public observations, and it is unrealistic to expect that all users of CSP avalanche terrain will ever be willing to invest the time and money for this level of education. However, such users would be willing to invest in shorter, cheaper learning opportunities niche to CSP (as AAC education programs over the past half decade have proven); and would benefit from some form of regularly issued advisory.
2. **Observations:** Public observations are of undeniable importance for providing an effective

avalanche information program, both as a means of providing data for avalanche specialists managing the program and for public users to know what conditions others are finding in the park. However, public observations alone (without contextualization, editing, and updates) can be misleading and dangerous for the general public (basic level users) – especially given the unique aspects of Chugach State Park (e.g. readily accessible by the unwitting public, complex and highly spatially variable avalanche terrain).

3. Education: There are multiple avalanche education providers operating in the Anchorage area with established programs. The AAC project does not wish to infringe upon established programs and their providers. However, opportunities exist for niche programs that serve the unique needs of a CSP program and its diverse user groups. These programs could provide a means for revenue, and mutually beneficial collaboration with multiple stakeholder organizations.
4. Media outreach: Given that CSP is home to what is arguably Alaska's most readily accessible and frequently visited avalanche terrain in the backyard of the state's most densely populated region, with diverse users groups that are arguably less knowledgeable than users that travel from Anchorage to destinations specifically for recreation in avalanche terrain (Hatcher and Turnagain Pass), special attention is needed in regard to media outreach. The AAC has worked with local media on multiple occasions, but messaging could be improved and would be best if done in collaboration with other local avalanche centers.
5. Cultivation of future avalanche specialists: The AAC has been operating since its inception as a grassroots, volunteer program. Whether a future program is to continue being grassroots and volunteer based, or includes paid avalanche specialists (funding for paid employees perhaps being the ultimate measure of sustainability and institutionalization), mutually beneficial opportunities exist to provide a CSP backcountry snow safety program with human resources through the cultivation of the next generation of avalanche specialists that can serve our community and other areas of the state.

You are receiving this communication because your organization has been identified as a valuable stakeholder in the project to provide a sustainable avalanche information program for Chugach State Park, or you have expressed interest and/or concern in this project in the past. Please view this as a positive first step in the next five years of providing a backcountry snow safety program for CSP. Please provide any input and feedback you and/or your organization is willing to offer.

The AAC project would also like to request time to meet with interested stakeholder organizations. Please respond with possible dates and times for meeting with your organization to discuss the future of this project. A half hour seems reasonable to have initial in-person discourse, after your organization has had time to reflect upon and discuss this message. The AAC project can respond via email or phone to any inquiries in the meantime. Specifically, this project is interested in your organization's vision for a future CSP backcountry snow safety program and how your organization might want to be involved in the next five years of a CSP backcountry snow safety program.

Respectfully,  
Mat Brunton  
[Mat@AnchorageAvalancheCenter.org](mailto:Mat@AnchorageAvalancheCenter.org)