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April 2020

What's New

Thank You From the Staff of the UAC

The staff of the UAC would like to thank the entire backcountry community and all of our supporters for an amazing season. Our daily forecasts have wrapped up for the season. We will continue to publish forecasts during storms and we will be publishing observation and avalanche submissions daily into May. We could not do this without all of the support from this amazing community.



Click for UAC end of season thank you

Spring Awareness Campaign

Thank you to the backcountry community for making the UAC's Spring Awareness Campaign a huge success. After the final tally for our Spring Awareness Campaign, just saying "thank you" doesn't quite feel like enough. Our community came together in force to make this campaign successful. Not only did hundreds of people donate, but many helped spread the word, and together we reached hundreds of new backcountry users with avalanche awareness information and resources. **THANK YOU for being a member of the Utah Avalanche Center team and a vital part of what makes our organization a valuable community resource!**



Click image to view a larger version

Meet Our Team

Bo Torrey

Bo is the UAC's Education Program Manager, is in charge of the UAC's social media, and plays a critical role in planning and managing all UAC fundraisers and events.



What is your personal background?

I grew up in Central New York in a small town called Skaneateles. Props to anyone who can say that correctly. Growing up I actually didn't ski much, I played hockey and that occupied most weekends. My family would take the occasional ski trip for a holiday weekend. At 15, I took a season off of hockey, joined my school's ski club and purchased my first season's pass. I've been skiing as many days a winter as I can ever since. In 2009, I moved to Salt Lake City to attend the University of Utah. I graduated with a degree in Adventure and Outdoor Education. As you might imagine the University of Utah has an incredible outdoor education program given the close proximity from campus to the mountains.

How did you become interested in working for an avalanche center?

When I moved to Utah I didn't know a single thing about avalanches. Luckily for me, I had a close friend I grew up with who had moved to Utah two years before me. He helped get me into the backcountry for the first time and showed me the ropes. Shortly after that, I took my first avalanche course from now-retired UAC forecaster Evelyn Lees. That course is what really sparked my interest in snow and avalanches. We dug snow pits, learned about avalanches and skied powder. I thought it was the coolest thing ever and was hooked.

How did you start working at the UAC?

In 2013, I was looking for an internship and heard the UAC was hiring. It seemed like the perfect way to combine my curiosity for snow and avalanches with my passion for skiing and working in the outdoors. After graduating I was hired full

time at the UAC to manage our Avalanche Awareness and Education Programs.

What was your greatest learning moment about avalanches and what was it?

Years ago, I visited the site of an avalanche fatality. The skier had been by himself and was caught and buried in an avalanche on a relatively small slope. As a skier looking down the slope it was not obvious or threatening avalanche terrain. It made me realize just how vigilant I need to be with every slope I step on because it doesn't need to be a big slope or a big avalanche to bury you. If you're traveling by yourself even a small mistake can have big consequences.

What would you tell an 18-year-old version of yourself?

Following your curiosity is the best way to stay excited and motivated. Or maybe, don't feel bad about skipping class to go skiing. You're building experience for your future work.

What's one piece of advice you have about avalanches?

Trying to understand snow and avalanches is hard work, but the reward could be your life. Be patient, be humble, and do your homework.

What do you like doing besides playing in the snow?

For me, riding my bike is a continuation of the same enjoyment I get from skiing. So when the snow is all melted I spend the majority of my time on two wheels riding dusty roads and singletrack. When I'm not riding my bike, you might find me making pizza, or working on a puzzle, maybe watching The Sopranos, you know the same quarantine activities we're all doing these days.



Education

Challenge Your Backcountry Partners with UAC Avalanche Trivia

Don't let shelter at home keep you from a little friendly backcountry competition. We may not be racing up a trail, but now you can challenge your backcountry partners to see who can get the highest score on the [UAC's Avalanche Trivia](#). We invite you all to challenge yourself and the rest of the community for the high score. The [Avalanche Trivia Challenge](#) will remain open until 11 PM on April 28. At the end of the challenge, the highest score wins a UAC Hoody. If multiple people tie with the high score, the winner will be drawn. To be eligible to win, your trivia challenge name must be your email address or Instagram handle.

Avalanche Forecast User Study

The Avalanche Research Program at Simon Fraser University, Avalanche Canada, and several U.S. Avalanche Centers are conducting an online survey to examine how backcountry recreationists—skiers, mountain snowmobilers, snowshoers, and ice climbers—use public avalanche safety information.





This particular study focuses on how avalanche forecast users understand the terrain information and travel advice statements. The results of this research will offer important insight for making our forecasts more effective for backcountry users.

[Please take a few minutes and fill out this survey.](#)

ISSW 2020 Postponed to 2021

After careful deliberation, the ISSW 2020 organization committee has made the difficult decision to postpone the conference by one year, due to the many uncertainties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. ISSW 2020 is now scheduled for October 3 - 8, 2021, in Fernie, BC, Canada. For more details and questions, visit this [FAQ Page](#).



Tech Tips

Wet Avalanches

Having transitioned into spring, we need to focus our attention on different avalanche problems. Persistent Weak Layers have been put to rest, New Snow and Wind-Drifted Snow become less common and we now have to think about Wet Snow and Gliding Snow. Wet Slab and Glide avalanches are very challenging to forecast. In our [last UAC Podcast of Season 3](#), Drew talked with long-time avalanche forecaster Blase Reardon about wet snow avalanches.

Drew: Blase, in your years of forecasting wet avalanches along the Going to the Sun road in Glacier National Park, you and fellow forecaster Chris Lundy developed an excellent methodology for forecasting wet slabs avalanches. Go into that for a moment.



Blase: We learned a lot from a natural wet slab cycle early one season and started to find patterns with these avalanches. So we came up with this model for looking at the snow structure for wet slab release: the three parts of the toolbox are

1. The Water Factory
2. The Slab
3. The Funny Business

The Water Factory: First, you have to have at the surface what we called the Water Factory; you have to have some ways to produce a lot of liquid water going into the snowpack. That could be rain, that could be melting snow. The key is that you have to have some way to produce liquid water.

The Slab: Just like in dry snow, you had to have a slab. And, interestingly we found that the slabs were oftentimes dry. The liquid water above would preferentially flow through these percolation columns (vertical pipes) in the smaller grained slab down to the Funny Business.

The Funny Business: This is often a distinct persistent weak layer - often larger persistent snow grains where the water would hit this larger grained layer, move horizontally, pool and weaken the bonds between the layers and then the slab would release.



Years ago, in talking with Liam Fitzgerald, Liam said if you have a layer producing avalanches with each storm cycle, it will also often come to life when you transition to the spring avalanche cycle. (Liam was a long-time avalanche forecaster for Snowbird and head of the UDOT statewide avalanche program).

But it's way more complicated than that...and there are so many competing processes each spring that affect how things will play out. Some years you have spring with no slab avalanche cycle, other years you do. Here's just one example for The Water Factory: In introducing liquid water...it's highly dependent on the energy balance on the snow surface; cloud cover; how "old" is the snow at the snow surface (albedo); is there dust or other particulate matter on the snow surface; has the snow surface been wetted before?

How does this impact you? As the UAC's forecasting season wraps up operations for the year, we all need to be thinking about wet snow avalanches. Remember those persistent weak layers we (ugh, which ones?) had late in the season? If not, it is time to look back through the [UAC Observations](#) to identify the dragons lurking below the surface. As always, remember as the days warm up in the spring to start early and work your aspects as the sun warms them getting off of and out from under slopes before they warm up. Watch for roller balls and if you find yourself sinking into the wet snow, you have overextended you welcome and it is time to move off the warm slopes.

Photo 1: Mark Saurer; Photo 2: Blase Reardon

Giving Back to the UAC

The CARES Act Charitable Giving Incentives

By now everyone has heard of the CARES Act and some people have probably already received benefits. Did you know the CARES Act created some charitable giving incentives that will help you support your favorite nonprofits? Here are two of the many changes. For a list of other changes talk to your financial planner or contact the UAC. How does this affect you? The CARES Act includes a **Temporary Universal Charitable Deduction**. Taxpayers who do not itemize their deductions can take a one-time deduction of up to \$300 for gifts made to charitable organizations. The provision is intended only for the year 2020.

There are many ways to give back to the UAC such as workplace giving, planned giving, affiliate sales, and more. Read about options to give back to the UAC [on our donate page](#).

The Details

Upcoming Classes

The UAC classes are completed for the 2019-2020 season. As we get our classes scheduled for next season, they will be posted on the [UAC Education Page](#).

Upcoming Events

The UAC events are completed for the 2019-2020 season. As we get our summer and fall events scheduled, they will be posted on the [UAC Event Page](#).

Update Your Information

Have you moved, changed your phone number, or have a new email address? [Please use this link to update your UAC profile and communication preferences](#) so we can send you the information you want, where you want it. If you'd like to make changes to how your donations are acknowledged, such as having them come from you and your spouse, please [contact Hannah Whitney](#).

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Our mailing address is:

P.O. Box 521353
Salt Lake City, UT 84152
United States

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