



Backcountry Avalanche Forecast for Front Range



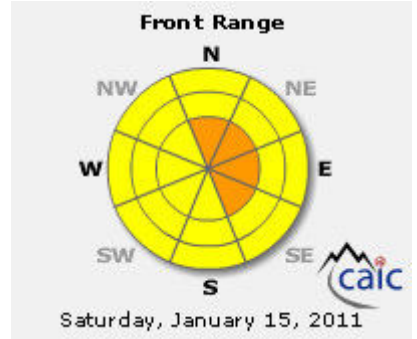
Issued: 01/15/2011 6:39 AM by Ethan Greene

Highlights

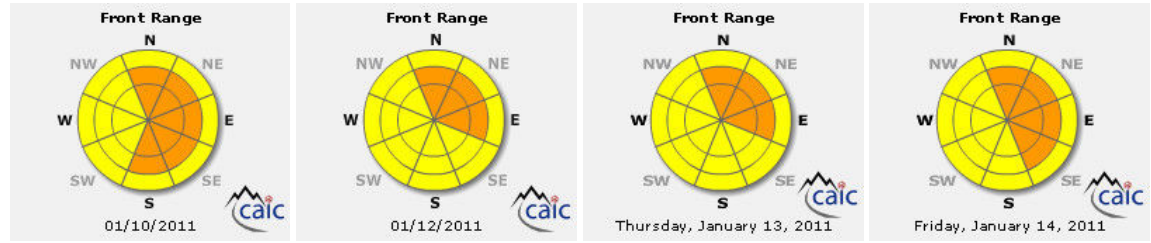
The winds in the Front Range have eased off a bit, but you could still trigger a new wind slab in isolated alpine areas. Buried weak layers remain in most areas, but avalanche activity has been limited to areas near Berthoud Pass. Moderate to strong winds east of the Continental Divide will continue this morning and ease through the day.

Avalanche Danger

The avalanche danger in the Front Range Zone is CONSIDERABLE (Level 3) on N-NE-E-SE aspects above treeline. The danger is MODERATE (Level 2) on all other aspects and elevations. North America has adopted new definitions for the danger scale this season. Check out those updates [here](#).



Rose Trend



Snow & Avalanche Discussion

Snow showers brought 1 to 4 inches of snow to the south side of the zone and no new snow to the north. Wind directions range from northeast to southwest across the zone this morning. Wind speeds have dropped into the 10 to 20 mph range in most areas, but are stronger near treeline on the east side of the Continental Divide.

On Friday there was a small human triggered avalanche in the Jones Pass area. It was on a north-facing slope above treeline in a wind-loaded pocket. Thursday there was a human triggered avalanche on a southeast facing slope near treeline on Berthoud Pass. The side was about a foot deep and less than 100 feet wide. Avalanche workers in the area also triggered avalanches with explosives on northeast and east facing above treeline slopes. These avalanches are wind slabs running on buried surface hoar.

There are two avalanche issues to consider today. Continued westerly winds are building wind slabs in alpine areas. These are not huge slabs, but they could be over a foot deep. You are most likely to find them in exposed alpine areas that face the east half of the compass. There are many cross-loaded terrain features, such as gullies and subridges.

There are also several buried persistent weak layers in our snowpack. These are surface facets and surface hoar that formed between storms earlier this month. In some areas these are reactive, but don't have very much snow on top of them. The wind has been moving a lot of snow around in the high country and areas with thick slabs on top of one of these layers could be quite dangerous.

For the last month we have been talking about weak snow near the ground. This remains an issue, but is becoming less of a concern. With the snowpack in the Front Range it is probably not a good idea to forget about the weak facets or facet/crust combination near the ground. However, layers in the upper and mid portions of our snowpack have been more reactive over the last two weeks.

Weather Discussion for 11,000ft

Issued: 01/15/2011 5:43 AM by Ethan Greene

Today is a day of transition. Colorado is currently under a lobe of high pressure. This feature will flatten today and give way to a fast moving short-wave trough. As this happens the flow will back to the west. Expect scattered clouds and a few snow showers in the Northern and Central Mountains. Tonight a strong north-south oriented jet will wipe across the state from west to east. Northwest winds will become strong by the end of the day and continue through the night. All mountain areas could see strong northwest winds on Sunday morning. Snowfall will

gradually increase on Sunday, initially favoring the Steamboat zone and the northern Front Range zone. Overnight snow spreads through the state. Periods of heavy snowfall will continue through Monday and taper off on Tuesday. Storm totals will be in the 1 to 2 foot range. Areas favored by northwest flow will do the best.

Weather Forecast	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
Temperature (°F)	25 to 30	13 to 18	22 to 27
Wind Speed (mph)	15 to 25	15-25G40	15-25G50
Wind Direction	WNW	WNW	WNW
Sky Cover	Partly Cloudy	Increasing	Mostly Cloudy
Snow (in)	0 to 2	0 to 1	2(S)/6(N)

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