



Backcountry Avalanche Forecast for Front Range



Issued: 01/21/2011 7:32 AM by Spencer Logan

Special Advisory Statement in Effect through 01/23/2011 12:00 PM

Dangerous to very dangerous avalanche conditions have developed and will continue through the weekend. Strong winds have formed large dangerous drifts near and above treeline. In many areas the drifted snow is resting on persistent weak layers. This creates a combination that can produce large and deadly avalanches. Some natural avalanche activity is occurring, but not yet sufficient for an avalanche warning. However, human triggered avalanches are likely. Careful snowpack evaluation, cautious route finding to avoid traveling on or under steep slopes, and conservative decision making are essential for safe backcountry travel. Backcountry users need to monitor this situation closely. Look for watches and warnings to be posted as conditions warrant.

The statement is valid through noon Sunday at which time an update will be issued.

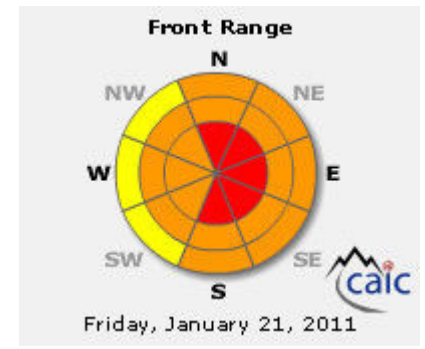
Highlights

Continued windloading will keep the avalanche danger elevated. Natural avalanche activity will continue in windloaded areas, and human triggered avalanches remain likely and are becoming increasingly high consequence. Potential avalanches are growing deeper, wider, and will run farther. You will need to select your terrain and routes carefully and cautiously today. Avoid traveling on or under steep slopes near and above treeline today.

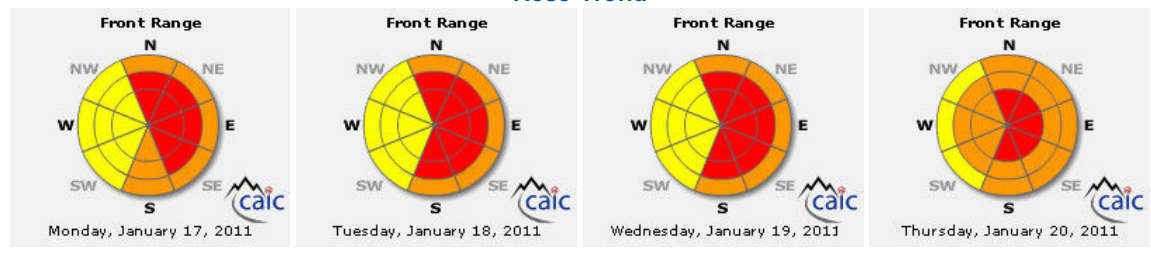
Avalanche Danger

The avalanche danger for the Front Range Zone is HIGH (Level 4) on north through east to south aspects above treeline. The danger is CONSIDERABLE (Level 3) on all other aspects near and above tree line, and north through east to south aspects below treeline. The danger is MODERATE (Level 2) on southwest, west, and northwest aspects below treeline.

North America has adopted new definitions for the danger scale this season. Check out those updates [here](#).



Rose Trend



Snow & Avalanche Discussion

A bit of new snow fell Thursday night, and a bit more will fall this morning. That is insignificant compared to the high rate of windloading that has, and will continue, to occur. Windward slopes near and above treeline are scoured to the ground. All that snow has drifted into adjacent starting zones, where it has formed deep, scary slabs. You will find drifted and loaded snow on all aspects near and above treeline. Loading will be deepest and most extensive above treeline on north through east to south aspects. The loading has triggered some natural avalanching above treeline, including paths that have run recently. Near treeline the loading patterns become more complex, especially with the changes in wind direction earlier this week. You will find stacks of multiple crossloaded drifts. Interfaces between the drifts are weak and reactive to skier triggering. Below treeline, open areas are now wind-effected and have a stiffening slab. Steep open slopes are producing small avalanches. Importantly, there are several persistent weak layers buried under windslabs and recent snow. Observers report a layer of surface hoar and facets about 2 inches thick, buried one to five feet down. Near treeline the persistent weak layers are sandwiched between stiff slabs and produce clean, fast shears. This make for a very dangerous situation--human triggered avalanches will not be that common, but high consequence when they go. Below treeline the weak layers are topped with softer snow. This soft snow can still avalanche, and you can

expect the soft slabs several feet deep, and several hundred feet wide. Storm instabilities remain an issue too, and you could see some fast running sluffs and shallow slabs.

Since Monday, most of the avalanche activity has been reported from Berthoud Pass south to Loveland Pass. You can find a partial [list here](#). Some notable events: east of Berthoud Pass, an avalanche started in a southerly starting zone and dusted US40, over 2000 vertical feet below. Tuesday riders triggered a large slide that stepped down into older snow layers up to 10 feet deep in Zero Creek (near Berthoud Pass), on an east aspect near treeline. In Butler Gulch, tourers triggered a remote avalanche from 300 feet away on an east-southeast aspect near treeline. The Stanley Path, a south to southeast facing aspect near Berthoud Pass, ran naturally Monday night. Avalanche mitigation work produced an even larger slide Tuesday morning in the same area. Monday, skiers triggered several avalanches on east and southeast aspects around Jones Pass, and the [fatal avalanche](#) occurred on a northwest aspect below treeline.

Weather Discussion for 11,000ft

Issued: 01/21/2011 1:13 PM by Spencer Logan

Northwest flow with embedded shortwaves continues to be the pattern for the next several days. The next shortwave moves in Friday night. Snowfall will start around midnight in the Northern Mountains and spread south to the San Juans by dawn or shortly after Saturday. Heaviest precipitation rates will be Saturday morning, favoring the Northern Mountains. The San Juan Zones will see snow showers and modest accumulations north of Red Mountain Pass. Snow fades quickly after midnight as upper level flow turns northerly behind the shortwave. Remnant clouds linger into Sunday morning. Winds will ease, a bit, on Sunday. Weaker shortwaves arrive late Sunday night, and again Tuesday, mostly affecting the Front Range and Steamboat Zones. A blocking ridge sets up over the West Coast and clears our skies by Wednesday.

Weather Forecast	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night
Temperature (°F)	10 to 15	17 to 22	5 to 10
Wind Speed (mph)	15-25 G40	20-30 G50	15-25 G40
Wind Direction	NW	WNW	NW
Sky Cover	Mostly Cloudy	Overcast	Overcast
Snow (in)	0 to 2	6 to 9	1 to 4

© 2008 - 2011 Colorado Avalanche Information Center. All rights reserved.

Powered by Metlogic media solutions.