



2026-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

Enabling confident, data-informed backcountry recreation for all



Photo: Colin Wiseman

Serving the PNW since 1975

MISSION

The Northwest Avalanche Center exists to increase avalanche awareness, reduce avalanche impacts, and equip the community with mountain weather and avalanche forecasts, education, and data.

VISION

We envision a community of backcountry users in the Pacific Northwest aware of avalanche risk, making informed decisions, and returning safely.





NWAC is...

COMMUNITY-POWERED

We are a community-supported organization; we exist because of the backcountry user community and a coalition of partners, and we serve them with pride and gratitude.

INCLUSIVE

We encourage and support all participants who recreate in the winter mountains. We aspire to be an inclusive and diverse organization that serves and reflects the needs of an ever-changing community.

CREDIBLE & APPROACHABLE

We strive for expertise and accuracy in our products, realistically portraying the winter environment and risk. We create opportunities to learn from and engage with professionals. We advise, forecast, and report on avalanche information, risk, and incidents without judgment or shame.

COLLABORATIVE

We are a public-private partnership between the US Forest Service NWAC and the non-profit NWAC, functioning as a cohesive team to achieve our shared mission. We nurture our professional partnerships, respect their expertise, and continually seek new ideas, technologies, and growth opportunities.

TRANSPARENT

We serve the community by providing free, open access to weather and forecast data for safe decision-making. As a learning organization, we seek and value feedback on our products and processes. We strive to add a personal element to bring our organization to life for the community.



Navigating Change

Change is the defining characteristic of the mountain landscapes we traverse. From shifting weather patterns to a backcountry community that grows larger and more diverse every season, NWAC must evolve to stay ahead. Developed in collaboration with our staff, board, and community, this three-year strategic plan reflects our commitment to lead with innovation and integrity. Our work is guided by three strategic imperatives: building organizational resilience, evolving to serve unmet needs, and acting as a national catalyst.

Scott Schell
Executive Director

Celebrating Progress

*BEFORE LOOKING FORWARD, WE CELEBRATE
THE MILESTONES THAT BROUGHT US HERE*

Operational Stability: Secured permanent USFS forecaster positions and expanded NWAC's non-profit team

Capacity Growth: Achieved record-breaking funding through a broad base of individual donors and a targeted Murdock Trust Grant

Forecasting: Produced 1,664 avalanche forecasts across the 2025-26 season

Digital Innovation: Launched AvyApp (uniting centers across North America) and AvyWeb, extending consistent digital services and serving over 700k online users annually

Community Impact: Expanded outreach and education programs to reach over 5,000 people annually



2026-2029 Strategic Priorities & Outcomes

- 1 Build Organizational Resilience:** NWAC is a financially secure, fully staffed organization prepared to deliver essential products year after year
- 2 Evolve to Serve Unmet Needs:** NWAC delivers clearer, more approachable information that empowers a wider, more diverse community
- 3 Act as a National Catalyst:** NWAC helps enable a stronger, more integrated US network that strengthens local centers, expands shared capacity & improves public safety nationwide



Build Organizational Resilience

VISION

NWAC operates with confidence & consistency, delivering reliable services resilient to economic or environmental shifts.

Financial Durability: Diversify funding streams, strengthen organizational partnerships & establish a strategic reserve fund to ensure uninterrupted services

People & Continuity: Invest in staff retention, leadership development & succession planning so NWAC remains durable & effective over time

Enhance Governance: Strengthen board composition, expertise & community representation to support strong governance, effective stewardship & long-term growth

Modernize Technology: Stabilize, strengthen & modernize mission-critical technology to ensure NWAC can continue delivering reliable, scalable, actionable products & programs

Responsible Technology: Explore tools to amplify staff expertise & efficiency while keeping expert human judgment at the center of forecast interpretation, public communication & mission-critical decisions





STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Evolve to Serve Unmet Needs

VISION

Every person venturing into the winter mountains—regardless of experience level or activity—finds & uses the information they need to make informed decisions.

Broader Reach: Proactively engage underserved & emerging user communities to lower barriers to finding & using relevant safety information

Intuitive Products: Enhance the clarity & usability of our services (forecasts, data, education) so they are as easy to interpret for novices as they are for professionals

Adaptive Services: Evolve programs & products to meet changing user needs, recreation patterns & decision-making contexts in the winter mountains

Increased Collaboration: Build new community partnerships that expand the reach, relevance & trusted distribution of NWAC services to new audiences.

Act as a National Catalyst

VISION

NWAC drives innovation, helping to create a more coordinated & sustainable avalanche forecasting system across the US

Innovation with Integrity: Act as a driving force for new forecasting technologies, sharing lessons learned to elevate the entire field of avalanche safety

National Collaboration: Lead collaborative efforts to standardize core forecast products & build sustainable shared technology platforms across US avalanche centers

Reciprocal Learning: Actively listen & learn from peer centers, partners & the broader community; bringing insights back to strengthen NWAC & the national system

Advocacy & Leadership: Champion sustainable funding, public safety recognition & increased USFS capacity so avalanche centers across the country can operate effectively

Community Network: Strengthen connections between US avalanche centers & professional partners to accelerate shared learning, mutual support & system-wide resilience



Your Support Matters

Your support makes this vision a reality. By investing in NWAC, you help:

- Empower better decisions through accessible, trusted data, forecasts & education
- Stabilize critical public safety services
- Advance the science of avalanche forecasting for the entire country

