

# THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF AVALANCHE PROFESSIONALS<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract.--This paper describes the formation of an association of avalanche professionals in the United States. It was presented to the participants of the 1986 ISSW for their comments and input. Included is a brief historical description of avalanche work in the United States. Also, activities undertaken thus far to organize the association are outlined. Finally a brief description of the ISSW participant's response and the steps taken to incorporate their ideas is presented.  
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## INTRODUCTION

For many years avalanche mitigation in the United States was the sole responsibility of the USDA Forest Service. Snow Rangers were assigned to control and forecast avalanches along highways and within ski areas, and Forest Service Researchers undertook the task of evaluating techniques and investigating alternatives. In addition, the Forest Service was the sole sponsor of a nationwide avalanche school every other year.

During the past 10 to 15 years responsibility for avalanche safety has shifted more and more to the private sector and state governments. Avalanche control and forecasting for developed ski areas is now done by trained ski area employees. Forecasting and control along highways is undertaken by State transportation department personnel. There is no longer a Forest Service avalanche research program and State universities are struggling to obtain avalanche research grants. In addition, many small avalanche awareness courses are now being taught by private groups and individuals all over the country.

This diversity of avalanche programs has led to a growing lack of communication and cooperation among professional individuals involved in avalanche safety. Without combining efforts to share knowledge, ideas, and needs, there is a concern that the gap between existing avalanche hazards in the United States and currently effective safety measures could become unmanageable.

Currently, there is some effort to coordinate the avalanche profession through workshops like the ISSW, data systems like the Westwide Avalanche and Mountain Weather Network, and organizations like the National Avalanche Foundation. However, it is not clear that these functions completely satisfy the needs of the diverse professional community. This is especially true as America's avalanche problems continue to change rapidly with increasing mountain development.

## INITIAL STEPS

To help create a more consistent pattern of cooperation and open the lines of communication, a new association has

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been recommended and initial work toward formation has been completed. Below is a calendar of events outlining the formative steps of the American Association of Avalanche Professionals.

Oct 1985 - The first notions of an association were discussed at an informal dinner gathering with approximately 20 instructors from the 1985 National Avalanche School in Reno, Nevada.

April 1986 - The need for an association was discussed more formally by a group of 14 avalanche professionals (forecasters, controllers, consultants, educators, and scientists) at a gathering for another project in Alta, Utah. This group felt that the timing of an association would be optimized if the basic structure could be formulated before the October 1986 ISSW and if an initial membership drive could occur at that time. To facilitate this idea, the group suggested that The Avalanche Review, Inc. (a non-profit corporation that publishes The Avalanche Review) become the corner-stone organization. This took advantage of the diversity of participation, information, and communication that that monthly newspaper has established over the last several years. Also the current readership (1,000 U.S. subscribers) could form a potential founding membership of the association. Finally, members of the Board of Trustees of TAR, Inc. actually volunteered to undertake the task of organizing the project.

June-July 1986 - Letters were sent to the attendees of the April meeting, existing professional organizations in the U.S. with a similar focus to the proposed avalanche association, and to the Canadian and French avalanche associations. All were asked how to get started, how to structure the organization, who should be involved in the initial organization, who should be involved in the final organization, and what the main focus should be. In addition, informal conversations about the project were solicited from as many people, in as many different aspects of the field as possible.

August 1986 - An informal draft of the proposed bylaws was prepared by accumulating all the gathered ideas of the previous three months. This was distributed for critical review to the 14 attendees of the April meeting.

September 1986 - At each opportunity, group discussions were initiated among avalanche workers to solicit their opinions on the proposed structure, membership requirements, and purposes as outlined in

the preliminary drafts of the bylaws. (This included a meeting with Americans attending an avalanche symposium in Davos). A fairly complete draft of the proposed bylaws was made from comments accumulated thus far. This was distributed for review to nearly 50 avalanche professionals around the country representing all aspects of professional avalanche activities and every geographical location.

October 22, 1986 - Many suggestions were received and the proposed bylaws were rewritten to reflect the views submitted thus far. In addition, during the previous six months, several people had volunteered to run for positions as officers and to head suggested committees. The revised bylaws, the suggested structure, and a list of volunteers and proposed functions were presented to participants of the ISSW meeting.

#### ISSW PARTICIPATION

Participants of the ISSW were asked for their comments, criticisms, and suggestions. There were many. A meeting was organized at the workshop to discuss AAAP. A steering committee was chosen by electing representatives from seven different geographic regions. Their task was to ensure that the proposed association met the needs of the professional avalanche community.

The elected Steering Committee is made up of these individuals:

|                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Knox Williams   | Colorado      |
| Don Bachman     | Colorado      |
| Brad Meiklejohn | New Hampshire |
| Barry Voight    | Pennsylvania  |
| Larry Heywood   | California    |
| T.W. Tesche     | California    |
| Doug Fesler     | Alaska        |
| Reid Bahnsen    | Alaska        |
| Dale Gallagher  | Oregon        |
| Bruce Meek      | Oregon        |
| Ron Johnson     | Montana       |
| Randy Elliott   | Montana       |
| Renny Jackson   | Wyoming       |
| Liam Fitzgerald | Utah          |

Also on the committee are Sue Ferguson, Dick Penniman, and Betsy Armstrong, officers of the mother corporation, The Avalanche Review, and initial organizers of the proposed association.

The Steering Committee met twice before the end of the Workshop. They recorded the purposes and membership requirements to guarantee a more representative association. They then elected to

continue reviewing the proposed structure by mail before the association is enacted into law.

#### CONCLUSION

Organizing such a diverse, special interest field comprised of unique

individualists is difficult. Already much of the initial leg-work has been completed, and yet much more must be done. Hopefully all can work together to make the American Association of Avalanche Professionals an effective and worthwhile organization.