



A Prolonged Moist Winter Storm over the Central Rockies Enhanced Decision Support – A 2016 Case Overview



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28 January – 2 February, 2016 iDSS

- Impact Decision Support Services (iDSS) are those services that allow NWS customers to better use our forecasts to create timely decisions involving life and property
- The Grand Junction forecast office used many different outlets to promote iDSS including:
 - Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)
 - Local website graphics such as Top News of the Day and Weather Story
 - Collaborating with Core Partners, neighboring forecast offices, transportation officials, and National Forecast Centers ensuring a unified forecast message



Credit: Colorado Department of Transportation
Image 1: Snowfall impacting X-Games traffic in and out of Aspen, CO.
Credit: Richard Bord/Getty Images
Image 2: Heavy snow falling during sporting event at the 2016 X-Games in Aspen, CO.

X-Games Impacts

- The Winter X-Games was held in Aspen, CO. from 28 – 31 January 2016. Over 100,000 spectators attended the games which were broadcast live on ESPN
- WFO staff provided iDSS to the Pitkin County Incident Management Team
 - Online and phone briefings
 - Issued Spot weather forecasts for the winter sports venues
 - Monitored Highway 82 from Glenwood Springs to Aspen with CDOT for any travel threats
 - Impact wording was used in messaging to alert Emergency Management & CDOT of impending severe weather conditions
- Collaboration with Emergency Personnel on 30 January 2016 regarding winter snow bands resulted in the men's Super-Pipe snowboarding event being postponed



Timeline of events from Jan. 22nd to Feb. 2nd:

- Jan. 22nd:** Began to advertise storm via "Top News of the Day" on local WFO website. Pair of Winter Storms To Bring Snow to the Area. Social media post featuring picture of WFO GJT's morning "huddle" where forecasters were discussing the potential for the next big winter storm.
- Jan. 25th:** The weather story was updated with a picture of the 6-10 day CPC outlook which featured a shift towards above normal precipitation for the region and below normal temperatures.
- Jan. 26th:** Coordination calls were held with neighboring offices. NWSChat was utilized to organize calls with Utah and Colorado DOTs.
- Jan. 27th:** First winter storm outlook briefing emailed to partners during the evening.
- Jan. 28th:** Received request for "special" balloon sounding to be released at 06 UTC 31 January 2016 for additional model support as storm continued to evolve. Staffing levels increased through the weekend. Coordination calls continued with surrounding offices, UDOT, CDOT, and national partners (WPC). An avalanche watch was issued for the La Sal and Abajo Mountains at the request of the Utah Avalanche Center.
- Jan. 29th:** Additional staff members were called in to help with verification, releasing the special 06 UTC sounding, collecting reports, and holding three more coordination calls with surrounding offices, UDOT, CDOT, and national partners (WPC).
- Jan. 30th:** Updated briefing slides were sent to WFO BOU to distribute to CDOT. Multiple phone briefings were provided to school district 51 personnel to assist with decisions on potential delays or closings the next day. Support continued for the last day of the Winter X-Games. Phone and in-person briefings were given to snow plow companies at the GJT airport. Forecasters coordinated with the Colorado Avalanche Center about potential impacts to highways in the San Juan Mountains.
- Jan. 31st:** Final weather briefing was given to school district 51 administration early in the morning. A decision was made shortly after to cancel classes for the day (last snow day back in 2010). Phone and in-person briefings were provided to snow plow companies and for Telluride Helitax, a private flying company. Multiple media interviews were given, and the last updated briefing slides were sent to WFO BOU to be distributed to CDOT.
- Feb. 1st:** Social media posts continued as the storm wrapped up. Satellite image loop posted showing the large winter storm progressing eastward out of the region and into the Midwest.
- Feb. 2nd:** Rain along I70 from Fruita to Silt is starting to soak. Heavy snow on the mountains. Significant accumulations are expected in the Grand, Larimer, and Clear Forks areas. Heavy snow on the mountains. Significant accumulations are expected in the Grand, Larimer, and Clear Forks areas.



Who Does iDSS Support?

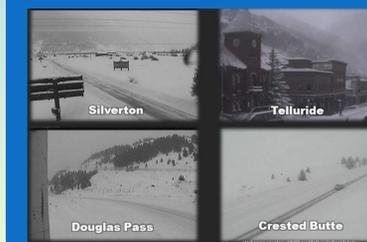
- Emergency Managers
- Utah and Colorado Department of Transportation
- Backcountry avalanche prone users
- Aviation industry
- Snow plow industry
- Heli-Skiing industry
- Tourism industry
- General public



Challenges

- Volume of conference calls exceeded workload expectations
- Multiple calls were scheduled on very short notice
- Some calls were scheduled at the same time, requiring additional forecasters
- Calls occurred daily throughout the event
- An already high work load increased because of the Aspen X-Games support
- Supplemental staffing support was needed to handle extra workload

Discussion Points



- A significant cultural shift in forecasters' daily routines will need to occur to continue improving iDSS activities
- Shifting from developing and creating a forecast to providing support and explaining the forecast will be areas for continued growth
- Testing new software early in the process will allow for more rapid growth
- Drive toward more and more graphical depictions of significant weather events