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Responding to surging interest, Colorado launches Backcountry Winter Safety Awareness campaign

DENVER - Dec. 7, 2020 - With growing signs that unprecedented numbers of recreationists will be heading into the Colorado backcountry this winter, Gov. Jared Polis today proclaimed "[Colorado Backcountry Winter Safety Awareness Week](#)," kicking off a winterlong effort to reduce risk and injury in Colorado's wild spaces.

Running Dec. 7 - 13, the awareness week launches a four-month campaign to encourage backcountry recreationists to take a new [Colorado Backcountry Winter Safety Pledge](#). The three-part pledge encourages people to **Know Before You Go, Recreate Responsibly and Care for Colorado**.

The initiative was developed as a collaboration among three state agencies -- the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO), the Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry (OREC) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) -- to reduce pressures on natural resources, Colorado Search and Rescue and rural public health systems already stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The effort also has been joined by federal land managers, including the USDA Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Avalanche Information Center and Colorado Search and Rescue Association, as well as a wide range of outdoor recreation organizations and industry members.

"All of us were seeing signs of a surge of interest in winter outdoor experiences, whether backcountry skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing or fat biking," said CTO Director Cathy Ritter. "With so many people trying outdoor experiences for the first time these days, we saw an important opportunity to help backcountry newcomers get on the right path to stay safe and reduce their impacts."

The CTO today is launching a campaign running through March encouraging backcountry enthusiasts to take the pledge and [send donations to the all-volunteer Colorado Search and Rescue Association](#). Unlike past tourism campaigns aimed at inspiring travel, the CTO's latest effort uses a [30-second video](#), digital advertising and social media to encourage people to keep themselves and others safe.

The tourism campaign guides both Colorado residents and people actively booking trips to Colorado to a new [winter backcountry safety microsite](#) on Colorado.com filled with resources, including a listing of both online and in-person safety classes as well as a directory of guides and outfitters for virtually any backcountry pursuit.

"Over the last decade, we have seen an increase in consumer demand for off-grid winter recreation, and that demand continues to grow as we navigate the COVID pandemic," said OREC Director Nathan Fey, whose office worked with outdoor recreation groups to compile the new education and guide services directories, and craft the Pledge. "Our goal is to encourage people to take the Colorado Winter Backcountry Safety Pledge so they head into the backcountry educated about the risks and with safety in mind."

All agency partners are promoting key messages each day of the new awareness week, as follows:

- Day 1 - (Dec. 7) Choose Your Destination Wisely
- Day 2 - (Dec. 8) Avoid Activities Beyond Your Skill Level
- Day 3 - (Dec. 9) Trash the Trash
- Day 4 - (Dec. 10) Check Avalanche Forecasts and Danger Ratings
- Day 5 - (Dec. 11) Bring Proper Safety Equipment
- Day 6 - (Dec. 12) Keep Wildlife Wild
- Day 7 - (Dec. 13) Take the Colorado Backcountry Winter Safety Pledge

“Everyone is invited to join us in sharing these messages,” said CPW Assistant Director of Information and Education Lauren Truitt. “Colorado is home to 22 million acres of public lands, which provide endless opportunities for winter outdoor recreation at every skill level. Regardless if you enjoy relaxed activities like snowshoeing and ice fishing or more advanced activities like snowmobiling and skiing, we encourage everyone to recreate safely. Making a conscious effort to minimize your impact on trails and in campgrounds helps conserve wildlife and the wild spaces that make Colorado so special.”

“While winter backcountry presents unique challenges, it’s important to #KnowBeforeYouGo #RecreateResponsibly #CareForColorado every day of the year,” Truitt said. “As our state offers unparalleled outdoor experiences all year long, our need to care for our lands, waters and wildlife must remain a part of all outdoor activities to ensure we can share this outdoor lifestyle with generations to come.”

More information on backcountry winter safety is available at these websites:

[Colorado Avalanche Information Center](#)

[Colorado Search and Rescue Association](#)

[Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#)

[Colorado Tourism Office Care for Colorado](#)

[USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region](#)

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About the Colorado Tourism Office: The Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) is a division of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade. The CTO’s mission is to generate traveler spending through promotion of Colorado as a four-season, four-corner, world-class travel destination and development of compelling, sustainable travel experiences. In 2019, Colorado travelers directly spent \$24.2 billion, generating \$1.49 billion in local and state revenues. Replacing those revenues would have cost each Colorado household \$707 in additional taxes last year. Tourism is the state’s second-largest employer, directly supporting 181,200 jobs in 2019. For more information, please visit industry.colorado.com/research.

About Colorado Parks and Wildlife: Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is an enterprise agency, relying primarily on license sales, state parks fees and registration fees to support its operations, including: 42 state parks and more than 350 wildlife areas covering approximately 900,000 acres, management of fishing and hunting, wildlife watching, camping, motorized and non-motorized trails, boating and outdoor education. CPW’s work contributes approximately \$6 billion in total economic impact annually throughout Colorado. For more information, please visit cpw.state.co.us.

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry (OREC) office is a division within the greater Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT). The OREC Office serves as the State’s central coordinator of outdoor recreation industry matters, which includes policy and resource development, industry promotion, and connection with the constituents, businesses, and communities that rely on the health of the State’s outdoor recreation economy. For more information, please visit choosecolorado.com/programs-initiatives/outdoor-recreation-industry-office.