

EAGLE POST 21

EAGLE POST - The newsletter of **Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness**, apprising you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Wilderness Areas.

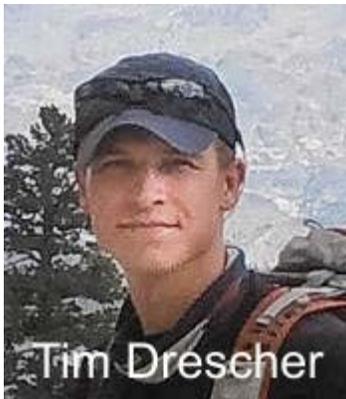
30 November: BREAKING NEWS: A new president for FENW:

TIM DRESCHER succeeds co-founder CURRIE CRAVEN, who moves to the role of Past-President. Other officers elected: Bill Betz, President-Elect; Ken Harper, Treasurer; Dan Siebert, Secretary. More to follow...

Dear *|FNAME|*,

Greetings!

Our topic this month:
The Search for Powder



Donate to FENW on Dec. 5
- Colorado Gives Day -

COLORADO  **GIVES.ORG**

INTRODUCTION:

Absolute powder corrupts. That's how they explain the spike in absenteeism after a big snowstorm in Colorado, as folks head for the slopes. For Joel Gratz, though, it becomes just another work-related field trip, to check first hand on the accuracy of his forecast. His website, [OpenSnow](#) is totally focused on making accurate, pin-point predictions of "powder days" at Colorado ski areas. And his reputation is becoming legendary, as he brings Powder to the People (OK, no more puns).

Joel and his [ten colleagues at OpenSnow](#) (not counting mascot Bruce the Snowman) bring intense scrutiny to weather data in order to quantify, as only weather- & data-nerds can, their



forecasts. They report their conclusions with freshness, wit, honesty, sometimes exhilaration, sometimes humility, and have gained a popular following that numbers in the millions.

Read below in a question-and-answer interview format how this enterprise has turned Joel's and his colleagues' passion for weather (meteorology majors in college), snow, and skiing into a growing and vibrant nation-wide company. We should add, Joel's passions also include skiing deep powder in the *backcountry*, and summertime hiking, biking, and chasing thunderstorms, and, most recently, welcoming a newborn son.

THE SEARCH FOR POWDER

By Joel Gratz, OpenSnow co-founder



ABOUT OPENSNOW:

1. What does the name "OpenSnow" mean?

What is "open" about snow?

The idea of OpenSnow was to have one place that skiers and riders could find forecasts for multiple regions. Previously, I was forecasting for Colorado on a site called ColoradoPowderForecast.com, Bryan was forecasting for Tahoe on a site called TahoeWeatherDiscussion.com, and Evan was forecasting for Utah on a site called WasatchSnowForecast.com. We wanted to bring all of this data into one place. So, the "Open" in OpenSnow is similar to OpenSource – we want many people to contribute forecasts.

2. The path to OpenSnow seems to have involved a steady progression of successful ventures, following your heart. Is that correct? I have loved snow and weather since I was six years old. After studying meteorology at Penn State and business at the University of Colorado, I worked as an analyst at a hurricane insurance company. But my true love was snow and skiing, so I started forecasting powder for my friends and me. After making these forecasts public on an email list and blog, I saw the opportunity for OpenSnow, quit my day job, and gave everything I had to OpenSnow. We are now a profitable, growing business with five full-time employees and six contract forecasters. We couldn't be happier doing what we do. I am absolutely doing the work that I love, following my passion.



3. You are famous for the accuracy of your forecasts. What is the "secret sauce" to your successful forecasting? Do you have your own private weather satellite?

The secret is that I am focused – forecasting snow at ski areas for skiers and riders in Colorado. I don't spend time forecasting for Denver, or Idaho (we have another forecaster in Idaho). My forecasts are often very accurate, but not always. When I get something wrong, I look back at why the forecast was incorrect and I discuss this publically. Every forecast is an opportunity to learn.

6. What is coming down the pike for OpenSnow? New and better forecasting algorithms? New business model? Going public?

I have lots of ideas for weather and snow data that I'd like to incorporate into OpenSnow. But it's a balance between providing more details that weather nerds (like me) will enjoy, and ensuring that the service is simple enough to quickly answer the question, "When and where is the next powder day?". Most of the information on OpenSnow is free to use, though some data like longer-range forecasts and removing ads from the site and mobile app come with a subscription to our All-Access Pass for \$19/year. Most new features will be incorporated into the All-Access Pass.

7. How do you quantify your forecast success? Is there a summary number that emerges for each winter? What was your least accurate individual forecast? Most accurate?

We have saved all of the forecasts, but have not done a rigorous analysis to determine the most accurate regions or lead times. We'll get there. Importantly, if and when a forecast goes wrong, I know it and am super upset about it, which spurs me to figure out how to do better next time.

8. What's the best way for backcountry enthusiasts to use your site?

If you ski at Berthoud Pass or Cameron Pass, we have you covered. Otherwise, find the forecast for a resort close to the backcountry location of your choice. We are hoping to add more forecasts for more locations in the future. Another great resource are the model "point" forecasts from the [CAIC](#) website.

ABOUT JOEL GRATZ:



1. How many days a year typically do you ski? (However many it is, as a new father (congratulations!) divide by ten, and that is your future.)

On average, since I've been ten years old, I ski at least 30-40 days per year. Since I quit my job in 2010, I've averaged 50-70 days per year. My wife loves powder just as much as I do, and now that we have an infant son, it'll be more of a challenge to get on snow. My wife and I agreed that we would ski an equal number of days this season, and it's quality of powder over quantity of days or vertical feet. We have already skied with our son - we skinned up a low-angle slope in Rocky Mountain National Park with him strapped to my

chest. Powder day #1 for the kiddo!

2. Do you work mostly at home?

Our entire company is remote – we have no home office, and I love this. Who needs to commute or pay rent when we can get the work done that needs to get done, on our own schedule, at the location of our choosing? I work from home in a spare bedroom,

and I also work a lot from friends' houses and hotels if I'm on the road chasing powder. All I need is an internet connection and my laptop.

3. What's your take on climate change - especially global warming - and the future of the ski industry in Colorado?

Temperatures in Colorado have risen 2-4 degrees (F) in the past 30-ish years. The best computer forecasts show that the warming will continue. In terms of precipitation, there is no clear trend up or down and the future forecast models offer no clue as to what will happen. Putting these things together, it's likely that as temperatures continue to warm, the elevation at which rain changes to snow will decrease a bit, and we'll see more rain at lower elevations during spring and fall. Colorado is well positioned to deal with the warmth due to our higher altitude, compared to lower elevations closer to the Pacific Ocean which are more sensitive to small changes in temperature. That said, there will be impacts here in Colorado over the coming decades.

4. Do you ever get into the backcountry? Have you ever been in Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, or Ptarmigan Wilderness Areas?

I love the backcountry. Specifically, I love low-angle mellow terrain where there is little or no avalanche risk. And yes, I have been in Eagles Nest and Holy Cross Wilderness areas and love the remoteness of some of the trails and lakes.

5. What do you do outside in the summer?

Lots of hiking, some road biking, some mountain biking. I keep a close eye on the lightning forecast as well since I have no desire to be on top of a mountain when lightning is nearby!

6. What is your opinion of the Weather Channel snow forecasts?

Their forecasts, like most other automated forecasts, are fine. But you have to be careful about knowing whether the forecast is for the mountain or a nearby town. Also, the difference between me and The Weather Channel is that the Weather Channel will not come out and tell you, five days ahead of time, when the best powder day will be. I am not always correct, but my forecasts generally will put you in a great position for powder days.

7. What powder ski do you use?

I have a Wagner Custom ski with a design that says "OpenSnow". Pete Wagner started Wagner Custom Skis out of Telluride around the same time I started OpenSnow, and we went to business school together at the University of Colorado. I've had the same powder skis for about four years and I LOVE them - I won't ski on anything else.



Recent Newsletters ([ALL](#) newsletters)

- November: ["The Cabin on Bighorn Creek"](#) by Andy Walker
- October: ["Rename the Gore Range"](#) by Karn Stiegelmeier



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Make a difference!

Volunteer for our **2018 Trail projects:** [Details](#)

Become a **Volunteer Wilderness Ranger** in 2018. [Details](#).

In 2016, more than 50 VWRs contacted more than 12,000 hikers. *Greet & teach!*

We also need volunteers **outside the Wilderness**

If you're a **writer, social media advisor, website manager, marketer, event planner, meeter/greeter**, we need you! [Email us](mailto:info@fenw.org) (info@fenw.org)

Join us! for our next

Planning Meeting

THURSDAY, December 28, 5:30 PM,
USFS Minturn & USFS Silverthorne
([MAP](#))

Details at www.fenw.org/

- September: ["The Battle for Our National Monuments"](#) by Julie Mach
- August: ["Global Warming in the Gore Range"](#) by David Schimel
- July: ["The Continental Divide Wilderness & Recreation Act"](#) by Josh Kuhn
- June: ["The American Beaver: An Icon of the West"](#) by Elissa Slezak
- May: ["Meet Wilderness Manager Mike Beach"](#) by Mike Beach
- April: ["Future of Eagles Nest"](#) by April Phule
- March: ["Managing High Use Areas in Wilderness"](#) by Kay Hopkins
- February: ["A Cry From The Wilderness"](#) by Bill Reed
- January: ["Public Lands at Risk"](#) by David Lien
- December: ["My life as a Wilderness Manager"](#) by Cindy Ebbert

CITY MARKET COMMUNITY REWARDS PROGRAM

Please [register](#) your City Market Value Card, linking it to FENW, which will send rebates to FENW without compromising your earned fuel points. Please note that each card holder may only sign up for one tax exempt organization. **THANKS!**



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