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Mirror Feature Writer

*Editor's Note: This is the first in a four-part series on safe skiing that will run in the Montrose Mirror. The series is prompted by the news that there are more than 600,000 ski-related deaths annually. Colorado and the Western Slope are world-renowned for skiing. The Mirror serves the region that skis at Telluride, Crested Butte and Powderhorn.*

REGIONAL-Montrose: Shockingly, law enforcement is not present on Colorado ski slopes 80 percent of the time. This can lead to out-of-control skiers or snow boarders endangering others on the slopes. In fact, more than 600,000 ski-related deaths are reported annually.

A confidential group of participants in snow sports have formed the group Ski Safety Advocates (SSA) with local Randall White heading the effort to create safer ski environments for skiers.

Recent area ski deaths have prompted this effort, White says. Yes, ski areas do have members of ski patrols who are not law enforcement officers; in many cases these patrols simply respond to accidents and do not actually "patrol" the slopes for safety, says the SSA.

The group took its "urgent concerns" Nov. 15/16 to State Parks and Wildlife Commission members, presenting a letter of "views or arguments" at the commission's monthly meeting.

Recently the group interviewed multiple organizations associated with enforcement of the Colorado Ski Safety Act. From those interviews, says White, they deduced that an "enforcement gap" exists compromising public safety. SSA is concerned and is seeking to shine a light on the matter and spur safety advancements.

SSA reports law enforcement is not present 80 percent of the time on ski slopes. Basically, stakeholders continue to point fingers at each other:

# NO POLICE 80% OF THE TIME VIOLATIONS UNCHECKED ON THE MOUNTAIN

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) points to United States Forest Service (USFS) as having this duty.

Then, USFS points to ski areas, and ski areas say 'it's not our job - we are not law officers'.

SSA says the ski areas "are right." However, when the ski areas claim, 'there are no problems needing enforcement efforts' SSA insists "...they are wrong"

### Who, then, is left to Serve and Protect?

This leaves us, our children, and our grandchildren not 'Served and Protected' on ski slopes. Bottom line as SSA sees it – this enforcement gap compromises public safety. The enforcement gap could also potentially undermine the vitality of this vital Colorado industry. White points out, "The ski industry has been in a 'mature and declining' stage of business cycle for years now."

Ski Safety Advocates say examples of recent finger pointing include:

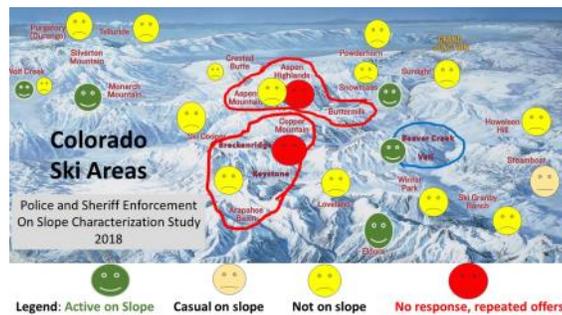
Telluride: Police say "...Telluride Mountain Village Police are in a passive 'call in as required' posture regarding on-slope public safety enforcement and react to specific requests from the ski area, rather than taking an active enforcement role.

And "As far as 'on snow' enforcement, we defer to the ski area to monitor and when needed they will call us for a response." -- Chief Chris Broady to SSA in an August 20 email.

San Miguel CO. Sheriff's: "... Telski has responsibility [for enforcement] as during the ski season the property is not like public and instead like private land" San Miguel Sheriff's officer, Dec 30, 2017.

Mt Crested Butte Police: "... we respond if called in by ski patrol, but not patrolling on the slopes..."

Mesa County Sheriff: "... we have a deputy assigned to Grand Mesa, and available



for call-ins, but not on slope..."

Pot shop in Telluride: "... about half of the vape users are loaded with THC..." This despite it being illegal to use pot on USFS lands.

The Colorado Ski Safety Act involves many Colorado-wide agencies, as indicated above.

SSA has called for "A Summit Conference that is desperately needed involving all agencies."

SSA's White states "the Summit Conference would address, in 'time is of the essence' fashion, joint cooperation and actions to close the existing 'enforcement gap' including a Memorandum of Agreement to formalize and activate advancements.

"The group believes that with the enforcement gap closed it would promote better 'Serve and Protect' activity on the slopes. Further, a safer, more family-friendly experience would be possible that could in turn advance/sustain participation and potentially grow the sport, leading to stronger economic vitality for Colorado." The Founder of SSA adds, "Had this gap been closed, little Elise Johnson (a five-year-old child killed at a small Wyoming resort) would be a teenager today." *Dangerous out-of-control skiers aren't the only hazard of skiing in Colorado's high country. In future safe skiing series watch for information on High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and Subdermal Hematoma injuries in the Mirror.*