

SKAGIT ALPINE CLUB RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN



Prepared January, 2010

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SKAGIT ALPINE CLUB MISSION AND BACKGROUND

The Skagit Alpine Club (SAC) was formed in 1960 and gained official non-profit 501(c)7 status in 1969. For the past 50 years, SAC has dedicated itself to its mission as follows: “To promote the use and prevent the abuse of all outdoor recreational areas, particularly the North Cascade area and Olympic Mountains, the San Juan Islands, and the Pacific Beaches; to provide companionship and fellowship between outdoorsmen; to disseminate information regarding the safe and pleasant usage of the outdoors; to function as a group dedicated to the preservation of reasonable recreational and wilderness areas on the county, state, and national level”. Currently there are approximately 60 club members.

Club activities through the years have included hikes, technical climbs, ski trips, trail maintenance, fundraisers, and social events. Along the way SAC has partnered with and supported land management agencies, Skagit Mountain Rescue Unit and other causes aligned with SAC’s mission. SAC was integral in the establishment of North Cascades National Park and the preservation of local mountain lookouts at Mount Baker and in the North Cascades.

Beginning in 1960, collaboration between SAC and Skagit Valley College (SVC) resulted in a Basic Mountaineering Course (BMC), which has been offered annually to community members since that time. The initial course consisted of ten two-hour evening lectures and four field trips, and offered physical education credits through the SVC. Instructors at that time included club members, and other organizations including the Seattle and Everett Mountaineers and the US Weather Bureau. The original class had 46 students. The original course curriculum for the BMC was the book, *Freedom of the Hills* by the Mountaineers, which is still the case today.

Currently, the BMC offered by SAC is instructed entirely by club member volunteers, with occasional guest lecturers with specialized experience in avalanche awareness, mountain weather, or other relevant topics. Weekly four-hour class room sessions are combined with weekend outings over a 10-week period. In 2009, the level of interest greatly exceeded the slots available for students, resulting in a waiting list of about 20 prospective students. A total of 20 students completed the 2009 course.

Many class participants take on valuable roles as SAC members, becoming involved in climbing instruction, trail/lookout maintenance, conservation issues, backcountry access, and other relevant activities. In addition to mountaineering, SAC member interests also include: hiking, sea kayaking, white water kayaking, mountain biking, street cycling, snowboarding, skiing, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, ice climbing, and scuba diving. The BMC offered by SAC is critical for club member recruitment and has forged friendships and helped to develop the skills of new and experienced climbers. A web-based list-serve maintained by a club volunteer helps facilitate impromptu weekend outings among club members.

COURSE OUTLINE & OVERVIEW

The BMC involves ten weeks of classroom instruction and weekend outings (Appendix A). Instruction is provided by members of SAC who volunteer their time, with occasional outside assistance from industry professionals who specialize in avalanche awareness, mountain weather, or other disciplines. The time period for the course is usually early April through mid-June. Classroom sessions are once-a-week (generally three to four hours in duration) and involve lectures and hands-on participatory demonstrations. Weekend outings range from half-day training hikes (at the onset of the class) to two- to three-day trips later in the course. The text used for the course is *Freedom of the Hills*, with supplementary materials provided as appropriate.

The BMC is progressive in that classroom sessions and weekend outings build upon each other and move the student through basic hiking gear and techniques up to glacier travel, multi-pitched rock climbing and other advanced techniques in a 10-week period. Skills are practiced repeatedly both during classroom sessions and on outings before more advanced skills are taught.

Classroom sessions follow a somewhat prescriptive format that involves a quiz, evaluation/feedback regarding the previous weekend outing, lecture/demonstration elements, and a presentation of the upcoming weekend outing. Club member volunteers from the previous and upcoming outings are encouraged to attend this classroom session, but this is not mandatory. A student signup sheet is circulated, which is later used at the onset and culmination of the weekend outing to ensure that all students have returned safely.

Participation in weekend outings is limited to club member volunteers and enrolled students (who are granted a one-year club membership as part of their course fee). As a result, club members with an interest in participating, but who have not been involved in trip coordination and assigned a specific role, shall not attend the weekend outing.

There are four distinct roles for club member volunteers who assist with the BMC, particularly the weekend outings. These include: Lead Instructor, Trip Leader, Safety Coordinator, and Outing Assistant, which are described in Appendix B. A club member volunteer with the appropriate qualifications and experience may fulfill one or more of these roles on different outings. However, all outings must have a separate designated Trip Leader and Safety Coordinator who have distinct and separate roles and responsibilities – particularly in the event of an backcountry accident resulting in injury. The climbing resumes of club members volunteers likely to assist with the BMC are in Appendix C.

With the exception of occasional guest lecturers with specialized expertise, only active club members who are in good standing with the club (i.e. annual dues have been paid and are otherwise active in club activities) shall assist with the course. No club member is paid for the time they contribute to providing classroom instruction or participating in course outings.

THE SAC RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

For nearly fifty years, SAC has provided mountaineering instruction to the residents of Skagit, Whatcom, Snohomish, and Island Counties through the BMC. Over the years, hundreds of students from all walks of life have committed to and completed this rigorous 10-week course. Some course graduates have gone on to pursue more ambitious climbing objectives, others have developed other backcountry interests and skills, and many have become important members of the local “backcountry community” who continue to support outdoor recreation through involvement with SAC, Search and Rescue, and other local institutions.

The perseverance of SAC and the BMC, the sustained interest and support within the community, over the lifetime of the organization are a testimony to the skills, experience and commitment of the club members who volunteer their time to provide this instruction. No medical insurance claim, lawsuit, or injury related to the BMC or other club activities, to current SAC members’ knowledge, has been brought forward in the history of the club. Thus, the insurance covered provided through SVC to SAC and students of the BMC never had a claim or dispute. Nonetheless, in 2009, SVC administrators concluded that revenue shared between SVC and SAC was insufficient to justify the perceived liability associated with the BMC. Thus, in 2010, SVC indicated that they were no longer willing to allow SAC to administer and insure the course.

With the knowledge that instruction and activities associated with the BMC pose inherent risks and hazards to club member volunteers and students, SAC set about developing this risk management plan in the winter of 2009-2010. Because this plan is SAC’s first effort to formalize many procedures either already in place or being developed anew, this plan will likely be modified in future years as inefficiencies are identified, education/skill levels evolve, and feedback is generated by the “users” of this plan.

The main components of this risk management plan which are explained in detail in this document are:

- Student Applicant Screening – health insurance coverage and evaluation of medical conditions
- Volunteer Club Member Education/Experience – specific roles commensurate with level of education, training and experience
- Trip Planning and Preparedness – pre-emptive work to minimize and mitigate hazards and risk
- Trip-Specific Risk Assessment and Minimization – adherence to standardized risk management procedures
- Emergency Action Response Procedures – chain of command, roles, and procedures in the event of a backcountry accident or injury
- Record Keeping – application form, emergency contacts, standardized first aid form, and record keeping procedures
- Equipment/Gear Inspections and Maintenance – procedure(s) that reduce the potential for equipment/gear failure

All club member volunteers and students shall read this risk management plan prior to participating in the BMC weekend outings.

TRIP-SPECIFIC RISK MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

In addition to the standards and protocols detailed in other sections of this document, the following procedures shall be mandatory for all BMC outings.

FIELD EQUIPMENT

- Current weather report/avalanche bulletin (read to participants before departure)
- Emergency contact numbers of all outing participants
- Contact numbers for local emergency response agencies/search and rescue
- First aid report forms
- Cell phone and/or VHF radios (extra batteries)
- First Aid Kit
- The “ten essentials” (each party member responsible for own)

BMC OUTING RISK MANAGEMENT PROTOCOLS

- Instructor/Assistant-to-Student ratio not to exceed 1:6
- Instructors/Assistants will lead all demonstrations
- Outing itinerary, route options, and rescue protocols to be discussed before departure
- Turn-around time to be announced by Trip Leader and adhered to by all outing participants
- Roll call shall be taken prior to departure and upon return
- All party members must remain at the trailhead for final roll call to ensure that everyone has returned safely
- No student shall depart early from a BMC outing without being escorted by the Trip Leader or a qualified Outing Assistant

FURTHER EFFORTS

1) Risk Management Basics

- All club member volunteers and students shall read this risk management plan
- The Safety Coordinator shall have the emergency contact information for all party members and local emergency response entities during the outing
- Review cell phone or radio coverage for outing
- Trip Leaders shall choose outing locations based upon learning objectives and have appropriate maps/route descriptions

2) Instructional Team Coordination

Prior to departing for weekend outings instructional team shall coordinate/discuss:

- Proposed objectives and options
- Skill level of students
- Departure, turn around, and return times
- Potential terrain and weather hazards

3) Emergency Response Plan

- File a trip plan with an individual not on the trip
- 24-hour contact person should be available to act as a liaison and base rescue leader
- Ensure communication between party teams via radio is possible throughout outing

- Determine cell phone range prior to departure
 - Determine access to local medical facilities
 - Ensure that all party members know where car keys are kept and how to operate vehicle
- 4) Self-rescue is first priority and it is the Trip Leader's responsibility to ensure that equipment essential for safety and care of and individual is carried on with the party. With few exceptions this shall generally include:**
- Ten essentials
 - VHF radio or cell phone
 - First aid kit
 - Watch
 - Tent or bivy sack
 - Stove
 - Shovel
 - Sleeping pad
 - Insulated pad
 - Fire starter/matches
 - Personal locator beacon
- 5) First aid report form and incident report to be completed by Safety Coordinator after any incident when an injury has occurred.**
- 6) Post-incident debriefs are to take place with all outing participants regardless of whether they were involved in the incident. Even close calls that don't result in injury should be discussed to better understand what went wrong with risk management protocols or how they might be adjusted.**

STUDENT REGISTRATION AND LIABILITY RELEASE FORMS

To enroll in the SAC BMC all potential new students shall complete a course registration form (Appendix D). This form ensures that SAC has the appropriate contact information on file in case of emergency. No potential student shall be enrolled without personal health insurance. In addition, relevant medical/health issues shall be identified and evaluated by a subset of Climbing Committee to determine whether a potential student shall be enrolled.

All students and all SAC member volunteers who participate in the BMC shall complete a liability release form (Appendix D). By signing this form, individuals participating in the course as students or club member volunteers agree to hold SAC harmless for any accident/injury resulting from participating in course-related activities.

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORTING, FORMS AND RECORDKEEPING

The SAC uses a two-page first aid report form (Wilderness First Aid Basics by the American Red Cross) to guide consistent first aid response and create a consistent and useful record of the incident for immediate and long-term purposes (Appendix D). This two-part form includes a page that is kept on site with the accident victim and on-site care givers, and a second Rescue Request/Vital Sign Record page that is taken out, if necessary, with an advance party to provide to rescuers from outside.

Prior to the first weekend outing for the BMC, all club member volunteers who will function as Safety Coordinators on weekend outings will be provided with copies of the Wilderness First Aid Basics accident report form. The Safety Coordinator for each weekend outing will have copies of the form on his/her person. All incidents in which first aid is necessary not including minor blisters, strains, or other small scale issues that can be anticipated, shall be reported using the first aid report form.

In addition to the first aid report form, the Safety Coordinator will prepare a written summary (i.e. incident report) of the events that led up to the incident that are not captured by the first aid report form. These two documents become part of a permanent record to be used in future Climbing Committee meetings to guide future BMC risk management procedures and to provide a written record in the event of disputes between the injured individual(s) and SAC.

All records will be maintained by the Lead Instructor in a permanent file folder associated with the BMC for that year. After the end of the class, these records will be retained by the SAC secretary as a permanent record.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

The SAC emergency action plan for the BMC is based upon the principles provided in *Mountaineering First Aid: A Guide to Accident Response and First Aid Care – Fifth Ed.* (Carline, Lentz, and MacDonald 2004). Club member volunteers who perform the roles of Safety Coordinator and Trip Leader shall have mountain/wilderness specific first aid credentials and be familiar with these techniques. Thus, the emergency action plan described below describes a prescriptive approach, but does not provide extensive detail for what tend to be very site- or case-specific steps taken in the event of a mountaineering injury.

PRE-TRIP PLANNING AND PREPAREDNESS

While the consistent prioritized response to a mountaineering accident/injury is of paramount importance, SAC places considerable emphasis on pre-trip planning and preparedness. As a result, risks are better understood, prepared for, avoided or minimized, and the “seven-steps for first aid response” (described below) are familiar and predictable.

Club member volunteers and BMC students alike have some responsibilities for pre-trip planning and preparedness for weekend outings. At the most basic level, this includes mental and physical preparedness, each individual having their required gear and having clear knowledge of potential weather-related and environmental risks associated with the outing. The roles of club member volunteers must be clearly understood and communicated to all outing participants at the onset of the outing. The Trip Leader and Safety Coordinator have additional responsibilities including ensuring appropriate contact information, first aid report forms, radios and first aid kits are on-hand and distributed (as appropriate) to Outing Assistants.

THE SEVEN STEPS FOR FIRST AID RESPONSE

As described elsewhere in this document, all weekend outings shall have a Safety Coordinator present and that person shall have the appropriate and current first aid certification and credentials. In the event of an injury on a weekend outing, the Safety Coordinator is responsible for the development and execution of an emergency action plan. Provided that first aid skills of others in the party are sufficient to deal with the injured party member(s), the Safety Coordinator should remain focused on managing the situation and not treating the patient(s). The Trip Leader will assist with executing the emergency response plan, but maintain ultimate decision-making authority.

Overview of the Seven Steps

Step 1 - Take Charge of the Situation – Little time shall be spent on this, as it has been pre-determined what the member’s responsibilities are

Step 2 – Approach the Patient Safely – assess potential hazards (e.g. rock fall, avalanche) and do no further harm to the patient or the individual(s) who is approaching

Step 3 – Perform Emergency Rescue and Urgent First Aid – check for and treat responsiveness, breathing, circulation/pulse and severe bleeding (with patient consent).

Step 4 – Protect the Patient – from weather related exposure, terrain hazards, shock, etc... and provide care. **DO NOT MOVE THE PATIENT** unless absolutely necessary!!!

Step 5 – Check for Other Injuries – initial observations of patient, get information from others, check initial vital signs, head-to-toe examination and regularly monitor vital signs. **CRITICAL THAT FIRST AID REPORT FORM BE USED!!!**

Step 6 – Make a Plan – end the trip, assess first aid needs, move the patient, initiate self-evacuation, request outside assistance, plan for overnight stay, or combination of the above.

Step 7 – Implement the Plan – Decide who goes vs. who stays, use of radios and/or cell phones. Rescue request form, car keys, map/coordinates and necessary equipment go with rescue request party. Patient first aid party must continue to provide first aid and monitor, but also plan for rescuers (e.g. helicopter landing site and signaling)

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS & INSPECTIONS

The equipment/gear owned by SAC and used on group outings are limited to ropes, carabiners, helmets, webbing, cord, sewn runners, and a few ice axes. Club gear and first aid kit use is limited exclusively to the annual 10-week BMC, so it sees relatively little use.

All club equipment is inspected and inventoried annually by a subset of the Climbing Committee and the club's Gear Coordinator (who also stores the gear). Club gear is stored in sealable plastic totes in a cool dry place. An inventory sheet is maintained by the Lead Instructor and Gear Coordinator that documents the results of the most recent inventory and provides dates of when the gear was purchased.

ROPES, WEBBING AND CORD

The presumed life for ropes is generally believed to be two to three years; however, because the use of club ropes is limited to the BMC, we frequently keep ropes in use for four to five years. Older ropes that show signs of wear are limited to use in low angle situations and for classroom demonstration purposes. Ropes are inspected annually, wherein they are scored on a scale of 1-10 based on age, sheath wear, stretch, and suggestions of core damage (i.e. 1 = old/unusable and 10 = new/little use). Ropes are discarded outright if there is core damage, while ropes with sheath wear or stretch may still be used. A rope scored below a 7 is discarded.

New rolls of webbing and cord are purchased through a local gear vendor every year or two. Some webbing and cord is provided to students as part of a gear fee, while other material is owned by SAC and used for a few outings. All webbing and cord material, once cut to length for use, are date marked. Used club webbing and cord is discarded every two to three years depending on condition/level of use.

CARABINERS AND PICKETS

The club keeps and maintains carabiners and pickets for demonstrations and weekend outings. These are inspected once a year and discarded if there is an indication of damage, loss of function (i.e. bad gate), or other reason to believe they are suspect.

HELMETS AND ICE AXES

The few helmets (approximately 15) and ice axes (four) owned by SAC have traditionally been available for loan to students for the duration of the course. 2010 is the last year the club intends to offer up this personal equipment, so it will be disposed of at the end of the class.

FIRST AID KITS

The club keeps and maintains three first aid kits for use on weekend outings. The contents of each kit are the same and a list of contents is kept with the gear inventory. The kits are inspected annually prior to the BMC and re-provisioned as necessary.

TWO-WAY RADIOS

The club currently owns and maintains four two-way Motorola radios for communication between party members if the outing party becomes dispersed or rescue coordination is necessary. These are tested at the onset of the BMC to ensure they are functional and replaced as necessary. The Safety Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the batteries are fresh and that extra batteries are made available to Outing Leader and Assistants who carry the radios.

APPENDIX A. COURSE SCHEDULE AND SAMPLE OUTING DESCRIPTION

APPENDIX B. ROLES AND QUALIFICATIONS OF COURSE INSTRUCTORS AND ASSISTANTS

LEAD INSTRUCTOR

Role: Develops lecture and outing schedules, responsible for making the final go/no go decision on all outings after making a detailed risk assessment, develops/modifies classroom curriculum, creates roster of club member volunteers and their roles, coordinates outing logistics, reviews proposed lecture materials and outings, arranges guest lecturers, chairs and coordinates Climbing Committee, oversees annual gear inventory/inspection, coordinates acquisition of new equipment and gear, and ensures that all students and club member volunteers have provided appropriate forms/documentation, reviews and assesses the club's risk management plan.

Experience/Qualifications:

Minimum four years climbing experience including glacier travel, rock climbing, and safety and rescue techniques.

Completed the BMC from SAC, or equivalent with Washington Alpine Club, Mountaineers, or private for-profit entity.

Demonstrated involvement with mountaineering instruction and mountain safety through volunteer participation in BMC, search and rescue, and/or work as backcountry or mountaineering guide.

Demonstrated commitment to expanding mountaineering skills through participating in climbs unrelated to BMC, and through pursuit of relevant training, experience, and credentials.

Demonstrated ability to plan, coordinate, lead and execute climbs involving advanced off-trail navigation, glacier travel, and rock climbing.

Certifications:

- Mountain Oriented First Aid, Wilderness First Responder, or Wilderness EMT
- Level 1 Avalanche Assessment

TRIP LEADER

Role: Responsible for planning and coordinating specific assigned weekend outing(s). Essentially "in charge" of the entire outing from classroom preparation to trailhead departure to return. Specific tasks include: creating and distributing outing descriptions, developing contingency plans (i.e. Plan B destination for weather/avalanche, access or other problems), keeping student sign-up sheets, recruiting and managing appropriately qualified safety coordinator and outing assistants and providing them with clear roles/responsibilities, setting turn around times, submitting gear requests, monitoring and maintaining club gear and returning it in working order, notifying club Gear Coordinator of issues/problems with gear, filing a trip plan with an individual who is not on the trip. Final decision maker for execution of emergency response plan.

Experience/Qualifications:

Minimum three years climbing experience including glacier travel, rock climbing, and safety and rescue techniques.

Completed the BMC from SAC, or equivalent with Washington Alpine Club, Mountaineers, or private for-profit entity. The Lead Instructor and/or Climbing Committee may make an exception for individuals who demonstrate the skills/competence to perform the duties of Trip Leader but have not taken a formal course in mountaineering.

Demonstrated involvement with mountaineering instruction and mountain safety through volunteer participation in BMC, search and rescue, and/or working as backcountry or mountaineering guide. This shall include a minimum of one year of fulfilling the role of Outing Assistant for this course.

Demonstrated commitment to expanding mountaineering skills through participating in climbs unrelated to BMC, and through pursuit of relevant training, experience, and credentials.

Demonstrated ability to plan, coordinate, lead and execute climbs involving advanced off-trail navigation, glacier travel, and rock climbing.

Certifications:

- Mountain Oriented First Aid, Wilderness First Responder, or Wilderness EMT
- Level 1 Avalanche Assessment (strongly preferred)

SAFETY COORDINATOR

Role: Responsible for all elements of safety and emergency response on weekend outings. Ensures that appropriate First Aid supplies are on hand, maintains student list/emergency contact information and response agency contact information, develops and executes emergency response plan during all emergencies and safety related incidents, completes emergency/incident report.

Experience/Qualifications:

Minimum three years climbing experience including glacier travel, rock climbing, and safety and rescue techniques.

Completed BMC from SAC, or equivalent with Washington Alpine Club, Mountaineers, or private for-profit entity. The Lead Instructor and/or Climbing Committee may make an exception for individuals who demonstrate the skills/competence to perform the duties of Safety Coordinator but have not taken a formal course in mountaineering.

Demonstrated involvement with mountaineering instruction and mountain safety through volunteer participation in BMC, search and rescue, and/or working as backcountry or mountaineering guide. This shall include a minimum of one year of fulfilling the role of Outing Assistant for this course.

Demonstrated commitment to expanding mountaineering skills through participating in climbs unrelated to BMC, and through pursuit of relevant training, experience, and credentials.

Certifications:

- Mountain Oriented First Aid, Wilderness First Responder, or Wilderness EMT

OUTING ASSISTANT

Role: Assists Trip Leader with trip coordination, travel and gear logistics, skill demonstration, student oversight and safety, route finding, assist in emergency response.

Experience/Qualifications:

Minimum one year climbing experience including glacier travel, rock climbing, and safety and rescue techniques.

Completed BMC from SAC, or equivalent with Washington Alpine Club, Mountaineers, or private for-profit entity. The Lead Instructor and/or Climbing Committee may make an exception to this for individuals who demonstrate the skills/competence to perform the duties of Outing Assistant but have not taken a formal course in mountaineering.

Demonstrated involvement with mountaineering instruction and mountain safety through volunteer participation in BMC, search and rescue, and/or working as backcountry or mountaineering guide.

Demonstrated commitment to expanding mountaineering skills through participating in climbs unrelated to BMC, and through pursuit of relevant training, experience, and credentials.

Certifications:

- American Red Cross First Aid (strongly encouraged)

CLIMBING COMMITTEE

Membership and Function: A Climbing Committee, chaired by the Lead Instructor has a critical role in course development and implementation. Climbing Committee membership is ad hoc but limited to club member volunteers who are involved with the BMC and whose experience levels and interest suited to the development of the course and other club sponsored outings. These individuals are generally Trip Leaders and Outing Assistants.

The primary function of the Climbing Committee is to develop, modify and expand the BMC curriculum as well as other club-sponsored climbing outings, seminars and clinics. In addition, select members of the climbing committee may be called upon to evaluate prospective students whose medical history or fitness level may present a risk to themselves or others and make decisions regarding inclusion or exclusion from the course or specific outings.

A subset of the Climbing Committee (including the Lead Instructor) is also responsible for the following:

- Inspection/evaluation of club equipment/gear and first aid kits
- Ordering new equipment/gear as needed
- Evaluating and screening student applications to ensure existing health/medical conditions and/or health insurance coverage are not an issue
- Ensuring that registration and liability release forms have been completed

APPENDIX C. CLIMBING RESUMES OF THE CLUB MEMBERS VOLUNTEERS (JANUARY 2010)

APPENDIX D. REGISTRATION, LIABILITY RELEASE AND FIRST AID RESPONSE FORMS