Strategic Mind-Sets

Mind-Set	Typical Conditions	Typical Operating Strategy
Assessment	There is a high degree of uncertainty about conditions, such as when first encountering the terrain for the season, entering new terrain, after a lengthy period with limited observations, or after substantial weather events with uncertain effects.	Select a small amount of conservative terrain in which to operate confidently while more information is gathered to gain confidence in the hazard assessment.
Stepping Out	Conditions are improving and/or we are gaining confidence in our assessment. The 'stepping out' mind-set covers a range from stepping out very cautiously to stepping out confidently. Stepping out cautiously occurs when there is acknowledgement that conditions are improving, but there is limited confidence in extrapolations from available observations. **This is common when persistent slab instabilities are becoming less likely to be triggered and for large storm instabilities in the early stages of recovery.** Stepping out confidently occurs when conditions are improving and the strength and weight of evidence gives confidence in the ability to extrapolate from the available observations.	When stepping out cautiously, it is common to seek specific information about each piece of terrain under consideration before opening that terrain. When stepping out confidently, it is common to open terrain based on extrapolation of evidence from other sites.
Status Quo	There is no substantial change in conditions, the evidence continues to support the current hazard assessment, and the comfort level for exposure under these conditions has been reached.	Change nothing and continue operating as before.
Stepping Back	Weather changes increase the hazard, or events or observations cause uncertainty about the validity of the existing assessment. A small step back may result from minor or subtle weather changes while substantial weather events or observations of unexpected avalanches may result in a large step back.	The typical strategy when stepping back is to close terrain that has become suspect based on weather changes or evidence that creates uncertainty
Maintenance	A potentially persistent weak layer is just buried or soon to be buried.	The focus of the ski program is to disturb the weak layer to reduce future avalanche hazard in specific terrain.
Entrenchment	Dealing with a well-established persistent instability. Entrenchment (not a preferred operating mode) requires discipline to sustain it for the necessary time; **this is the last resort short of closing operations completely.**	Limit skiing to a small terrain selection assessed as having acceptable risk until the situation has clearly changed. New evidence continues to be gathered and monitored for changing conditions, but new terrain is only considered for opening if there is compelling evidence to do so *(for example if an avalanche was observed that definitely removed the layer of concern)*. **Entrenchment mode is a successful operating strategy for persistent slab instabilities.** Establish a limited base of acceptable operating terrain and be disciplined to operate only within that designated terrain as long as necessary for the persistent instability to run its course. Expect this to take longer than anticipated and do not step out into new terrain prematurely. **Plan to maintain this discipline beyond the time when all evidence seems to indicate that the persistent instability is no longer a concern.** When dealing with persistent instabilities, discipline is more likely to be successful than cleverness – **it is better to wait out the instability than to try to outsmart it**.
Open Season	The hazard assessment suggests that only small avalanches are possible in very isolated terrain features, and there is a high degree of confidence in the hazard assessment.	Any skiable terrain may be considered with due attention to the possibility of small surface avalanches.
Spring Diurnal	The hazard assessment suggests that the only substantial hazard is from wet avalanches during the afternoon thaw phase of the diurnal freeze-thaw cycle.	Watch closely for adequate overnight freeze and avoid avalanche terrain during the thaw phase of the diurnal freeze-thaw cycle.