

GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Wed Oct 28, 2009

This is Mark Staples from the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center with an early season Avalanche Information Bulletin issued at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, October 28.

Mountain Weather

Overnight up to 2ft of snow has fallen in the Bridger Range, 12-16 inches near Big Sky, and 4-5 inches in the mountains near Cooke City and West Yellowstone. Northerly winds have been blowing 12-15 mph with gusts up to 38 mph. October has been especially cold and snowy with preliminary climate data indicating Bozeman may experience its coldest October on record beating 1969 for the coldest daily average temperature. Precipitation has been above normal with MSU recording an additional ½ inch of water above the monthly average.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

With such cold weather and abundant snowfall, avalanches are a very real possibility. A human triggered avalanche occurred on October 6th in the Bridger Range on Sacajawea near the summer trail breaking on the interface from the October 1st storm. On Saturday, October 24th a group of four skiers was caught in an avalanche near Trapper Peak south of Missoula. The West Central Montana Avalanche Center collected an excellent report from one of the skiers:

<http://www.mtavalanche.com/sites/default/files/Gem%20Lake%20Avalanche%20102409.pdf>

We also got a report from some folks working on the Carrot Basin SNOTEL site in the Southern Madison Range of sugary faceted snow near the ground capped by a supportable ice crust. These conditions are good ingredients for an avalanche. Other skiers in the northern Gallatin Range reported snow depths of several feet with a good supportable base and no obvious weak layers. This time of year conditions vary widely. Recent frigid temperatures have created weak layers on some slopes now covered by new snow or wind drifted snow while other slopes have a supportable base with well bonded snow on top.

WHAT TO DO:

It may be early season, but it's no time to be rusty with your avalanche skills. Make sure to pull out your shovel and take a look at the snowpack before venturing into avalanche terrain. Hand pits are good too. Because the snowpack is shallow, it's easy to dig many quick pits in the hunt for signs of unstable snow. It doesn't matter if you are skiing, riding, climbing or hunting. Snow covered slopes steeper than 30 degrees can produce avalanches even if they seem small and benign. In October 2004, a pair of ice climbers died in a small avalanche that swept them off a cliff on Sphinx Mountain.

A SPECIAL CAUTION TO HUNTERS:

Since many hunters travel solo, do not carry avalanche rescue gear and focus their energies on game instead of snow, they are susceptible to getting caught in a slide. It's not unusual for hunters to trigger avalanches this time of year. Be wary of crossing any wind-loaded gullies. Hunters need to avoid avalanche terrain which is any snow covered open slope steeper than 30 degrees.

We will send out Avalanche Information bulletins as conditions warrant. In the meantime, play it safe and don't get injured! We're always interested in your backcountry observations so drop us an email at

mtavalanche@gmail.com or leave us a phone message at 587-6984.

POWDERBLAST

The Friends of the Avalanche Center and Jeff King of Edward Jones sponsored the 11th annual Powder Blast which was tons of fun and a huge success raising enough money to possibly be one of our best yet. We'd like to thank all of our sponsors, everyone who donated items to the silent auction, and especially everyone who attended.

TWITTER/FACEBOOK

Follow us on twitter.com/avalancheguys and Facebook under Friends of the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bozeman-MT/Friends-of-the-Gallatin-National-Forest-Avalanche-Center/173768210029?ref=ts>

PRAY FOR SNOW

The Pray for Snow Party is an evening of fun and entertainment held to celebrate the upcoming winter season and to raise money and awareness for the Friends of the Avalanche Center. Friday, November 6th at the Gallatin County Fairgrounds in Bozeman from 6pm-11pm. Live music, a ski movie from Cold Smoke Awards and the Burning Dog will highlight the event. Details:

<http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=295005610081&index=1>

AVALANCHE EDUCATION

We're busy taking reservations for our avalanche classes. We've already scheduled the Basic Avalanche Awareness class at MSU on Dec 2,3&5. Snowmobile Awareness classes are offered Dec 2,3 &8 in Bozeman and Dec 17&18 in West Yellowstone. Check out our classes at

<http://www.mtavalanche.com/education2/index.shtml>

If you would like to schedule a class you can drop Jay Pape (Education Coordinator) an email at friendsofgnfac@gmail.com