

GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Thu Mar 4, 2010

Good Morning. This is Mark Staples with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory issued on Thursday, March 4, at 7:30 a.m. Today's advisory is dedicated in memory of **Ben Richards** who died in an avalanche while skiing Yellow Mountain three years ago. His mother, Becky, sponsors today's advisory. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Yesterday the Madison Range and the mountains near West Yellowstone and Cooke City received an additional inch of snow with strong ridgetop winds blowing up to 40 mph from the SSW mainly south of Bozeman. This morning temperatures dropped into the high teens and low 20s F, and winds calmed blowing 10-15 mph from the SSE. Clouds will increase today as an area of low pressure to the south sends moisture into southwest Montana. Precipitation will be limited north of Bozeman while the southern areas should receive 1-3 inches tonight. High temperatures today will approach 30 degrees F with southerly winds blowing 10 mph.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

The Bridger, Madison and Gallatin Ranges, the Lionhead area near West Yellowstone, the mountains around Cooke City and the Washburn Range:

Yesterday my partner and I rode along Buck Ridge near Big Sky and skied Cedar Mountain. We found every snow condition imaginable including wet snow, hard crusty snow, and deep powder snow. Stability varies just as much. Doug found some of the most stable snow he's seen all season in Beehive Basin yesterday while skiers intentionally triggered a **large avalanche** in Hyalite Canyon on Monday. This avalanche broke on facets near the ground, the plague of this season's snowpack. Another weak layer containing either surface hoar or near surface facets exists 1-2 ft deep. In some areas this layer has gained strength while in other areas it remains sensitive. Because this layer is not buried deeply, evaluating its strength is quick and easy.

Stability continues to improve mostly because the snowpack has not been stressed by heavy snowfall. On many slopes the snowpack has not gained significant strength. Weak layers remain most sensitive on shaded slopes where the best skiing and riding conditions exist. These slopes may also have wind-blown snow from recent southerly winds which adds stress and increases the chances of triggering an avalanche. With mostly cloudy skies, sun exposed slopes shouldn't warm enough today for wet snow avalanches.

Despite improved stability, the snowpack remains tricky and demands careful evaluations of stability and terrain. For today human triggered avalanches are possible and the avalanche danger is rated **MODERATE**.

I will issue the next advisory tomorrow morning at 7:30 a.m. If you get out in the backcountry let us know what you find. You can reach us at 587-6984 or email us at mtavalanche@gmail.com.

Avalanche Education & Events

1.Bozeman

Join us to discuss the snowpack, weather, and circumstances leading up to the avalanche on Saddle Peak. We will show videos, pictures, and share stories about this popular sidecountry destination. Cost: Free, When: TONIGHT from 6:30-7:30 p.m., Where: Bozeman Public Library meeting room.

2. Bridger Bowl

29th Annual Pinhead Classic on Saturday, March, 6th. "Carnival" is this year's costume theme, so come dressed up to race, socialize and win great prizes. Registration fee is \$30 but gets you all sorts of cool stuff. Check out the website <http://pinheadclassic.com> for details.

3. Moonlight Basin

Comprehensive avalanche awareness class - Thursday, March 4th to Saturday, March 6th

events@moonlight.com or 406-993-6026

4. Bell Lake Yurt, Tobacco Root Mountains

Montana Backcountry Adventures - Level I Avalanche Course

Wednesday, March 12th to Friday, March 14th

For more info call 995-3880 or go to www.skimba.com