



Greetings!

All of us at the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center--- Mark Staples, Eric Knoff and I, Doug Chabot--
- want to thank you for a great year. We are grateful for the community support of the Gallatin National Forest and Friends of the Avalanche Center. This month finishes our 21st year of operation with a record 145 avalanche advisories.

It was a long season. The first snows hit the valley floor on October 26th and our first reported avalanche was November 9th. La Nina predictions of steady snowfall proved true and we began issuing daily avalanche advisories on November 15th, the earliest start in 14 years. Steady intervals of snowfall kept weak layers from developing into longstanding problems. This season most of the instability was associated with new snow and wind-loading, a more manageable avalanche problem than persistent weak layers. With above average snowfall and no major avalanche cycles people hit the backcountry with abandon. Big lines got skied, boarded and highmarked, but not all outings had good endings. A snowboarder was killed in Truman Gulch in the Bridger Range on February 14 when a steep gully avalanched after severe winds cross-loaded slopes. A week earlier a skier broke his femur in Frazier Basin, also in the Bridger Range, when he was swept in an avalanche down a steep slope. We had 33 avalanche incidents reported, less than half of last season's number.

Our Highlights

- An average of 3,725 people a day got our advisories, a 6% increase from last year.
- In partnership with the Friends of the Avalanche Center we taught 79 classes attended by 4,595 people.
- We created 35 YouTube videos that were viewed 29,627 times. Shooting with a Flip camera, many of these movies were in HD.
- On the social media front, the Friends of the Avalanche Center have 1,485 followers on Facebook and 495 folks on Twitter.
- The Friends purchased a new weather station that we placed near Flanders Peak up Hyalite Canyon in the Gallatin Range. This allowed us to keep better tabs on wind-loading in a range that is seeing a huge increase in backcountry use, both from ice climbers and skiers/boarders.
- The Friends ran an online survey to which 500 folks responded. We all learned more about backcountry use and as a result changed and added a few things to our website. Snowpits are now viewable, the weather page is more streamlined, photos are attached to the emailed

advisory, stability tests tutorials are on line as well as postings of avalanche lectures. More changes, like maps with the avalanche danger and place names, are forthcoming.

- Team Bozeman and Yamaha partnered with the Friends to loan us two, 2011 MTX Nytro snowmobiles. We clocked over 1,300 miles on each one which allowed us to visit otherwise inaccessible popular riding areas and investigate far flung snowpacks and avalanches.
- We ran a one day Professional Development Workshop on “Surprise Avalanches and Post Control Releases” in March. It was attended by 45 avalanche professionals. Eight of the lectures were recorded and posted on our website (www.mtavalanche.com).
- The Friends purchased a new Beacon Park which was installed at Beal Park in Bozeman, and West Yellowstone had one operating on a major trail for its second year. Next year a third park will be installed in Cooke City. These parks let people practice using their avalanche transceiver, a life saving skill.
- Last October we presented a paper on the Saddle Peak avalanche to an audience of over 600 avalanche workers at the International Snow Science Workshop in Squaw Valley, California.
- Our software program SnowPilot (www.snowpilot.org) was updated twice this winter. It’s a free graphing and database program to record snowpit information. Since its inception in 2003 over 5,000 snowpits have been recorded from all over the world, allowing researchers to study snow and avalanches from a robust dataset.
- Mark, Eric and I, along with Karl Birkeland of the National Avalanche Center and Jay Pape and Dale Gullett of the Friends of the Avalanche Center, won a national award from the Forest Service for *Safety and Occupational Health*. This was in response to the great partnership between diverse groups to further avalanche education, especially among snowmobilers. Only one group a year (in the entire United States) receives this award and we were honored to be chosen.

It’s a team effort to run the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center. Montana FW&P Recreation Trail Program and the Friends of the Avalanche Center provide substantial monies to our operation. We are also fortunate to have the local community help us in many diverse ways. Each of our biggest supporters contributes money, gear or expertise worth thousands of dollars: Team Bozeman and Yamaha, Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, Montana Import Group, Northern Lights Trading Company, Alpine Orthopedics, Bridger Bowl, the Hans Saari Memorial Fund, Montana Ale Works and Gallatin County Search and Rescue contribute to the Friends and Avalanche Center.

If you have received the daily advisory, taken a class from us, sent in an observation or made a donation, thank you. The GNFA’s success is a direct reflection of all your support.

With gratitude,

Doug Chabot