

GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Fri Feb 3, 2012

Good morning. This is Mark Staples with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory issued on Friday, February 3 at 7:30 a.m. Montana Import Group in partnership with the Friends of the Avalanche Center sponsors today's advisory. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Yesterday morning, lingering snowfall deposited an additional trace to one inch of snow. Winds remained calm since then and were blowing 5-15 mph from the eastern half of the compass this morning. On the Bridger Ridge winds increased at midnight and were blowing easterly at 20-25 mph. Temperatures were in the upper single digits to low teens F this morning. Today will be beautiful and sunny with temperatures near 20 degrees F and continued calm winds.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

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

Yesterday, Eric triggered a large, potentially deadly avalanche on the south face of Mt. Abundance ([photo1](#), [photo2](#)). He was near the bottom of the slope on relatively flat terrain cautiously approaching this area. Eric and his partner unintentionally hit a sweet spot where they initiated a fracture (or a collapse) in weak, faceted snow at the ground. This fracture travelled 600 ft above them and across the entire slope. The resulting avalanche broke 3-6 ft deep. This avalanche is a major warning sign. There have been many other avalanches in this area in recent days.

Today's conditions are ones cause avalanche fatalities for three reasons:

1. The snowpack can easily produce more deadly avalanches. Unfortunately, it will give few warning signs and may allow several people to ride on a slope which will not break until someone finds the right trigger point. It is difficult to know where these trigger points exist.
2. The weather will inspire a false sense of security. It's easy to be cautious during a storm. It will be much harder today especially if you see other people riding in avalanche terrain and getting away with it. Know that they are playing Russian Roulette.
3. Eric commented that while snowmobiling, conditions "feel" stable but they are not. It will be easy to ride and climb steep slopes because the snowpack is supportable, but supportable does not mean stable.

The snowpack near the Taylor Fork and near West Yellowstone is just as weak and unstable ([photo](#), [video](#)). The only difference is that it has received less snow making slopes a bit less sensitive and avalanches not quite as big. Today dangerous avalanche conditions exist and the avalanche danger is CONSIDERABLE.

The Bridger Range and northern Madison Range:

The Bridger Range and the mountains near Big Sky have plenty of weak snow ([video](#) from Saddle Pk), but these areas have received less snow in the past week. Less snow means less stress on the snowpack and fewer avalanches. Ones that occurred last weekend did so on heavily wind loaded slopes. Yesterday's snowfall wasn't enough to tip the balance and calm winds didn't transport any snow except at the Bridger Ridge where E winds increased overnight and blew snow to the W side of the ridge. Today human triggered avalanches are possible

and the avalanche danger is [MODERATE](#).

The northern Gallatin Range:

The northern Gallatin Range especially the Hyalite Canyon area has received more consistent snowfall throughout this season. This snowfall has been just enough to build a snowpack lacking widespread weak layers. Today, slopes steeper than 35 degrees have a [MODERATE](#) avalanche danger. Slopes less than 35 degrees have a [LOW](#) avalanche danger.

Eric will issue the next advisory tomorrow morning at 7:30 a.m. If you have any snowpack or avalanche observations, drop us a line at mtavalanche@gmail.com or call us at 587-6984.

[FUNDRAISING](#)

February 4: Poker Run

The Gallatin Valley Snowmobile Association is sponsoring their annual Buck Ridge Poker Ride this Saturday. All proceeds benefit the Friends of the GNFAC. Registration is at 9 a.m. in the Buck Ridge parking lot. More info at www.gvsa.net

February 8: 4th Annual Montana Ale Works Wine Dinner

Join us for a wonderful evening with a multi course dinner and wine parings created just for this event at Montana Ale Works. Menu and ticket information is here: <http://bit.ly/wEg01j>

February 11: 10th Annual King and Queen of the Ridge

The 10th Annual King and Queen of the Ridge Hike/Ski-a-thon fundraiser is Saturday, Feb 11th. The event supports avalanche education in southwest Montana. Collect pledges for one, two or the most Ridge hikes you can do in the five hours of competition. 100% of the proceeds go to the Friends of Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center. Kids and families are encouraged to hike too! [More Information](#) / [Registration Form](#)

[EDUCATION](#)

Bozeman

FREE 1-hour Avalanche Awareness at REI on Thursday, February 16 at 6:30 p.m. For more information call REI at 406-587-1938