

GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Fri Oct 30, 2009

Good afternoon this is Mark Staples from the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center with an early season Avalanche Information Bulletin issued at 3 p.m. on Friday, October 30th.

Mountain Weather

October continues to blanket the advisory area with snow. This morning the mountains around Bozeman and Big Sky had 7-8 inches of new snow, and the mountains around Cooke City and West Yellowstone had 2-4 inches. Ridgetop winds have been ripping from the west and northwest at 26-30 mph in the Bridger Range and 18-20 mph near Big Sky. Temperatures at 9000ft have warmed close to freezing and will stay there until late Saturday night when they will start to cool again. Precipitation will continue through the weekend. Above 9000ft several inches of snow may accumulate each day, and a mix of rain and snow will likely fall at lower elevations. Strong winds will continue blowing from the northwest and west possibly calming late Saturday night.

October has been cold and wet. Most river basins in Montana have above average snowpacks:

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/snowup-graph.pl?state=MT>

Average daily temperatures have been below normal:

<http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cacanom/images/tvdep28.gif>

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

Since last weekend numerous avalanches have been reported. On Saturday, October 24th a notable avalanche occurred near Trapper Peak south of Missoula where four skiers were caught and partially buried. The West Central Montana Avalanche Center collected an excellent report from one of the skiers worth reading:

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

On Thursday a skier triggered a small wind slab in a couloir on Sacajawea Peak in the northern Bridger Range. He was not buried but lost some gear and was bruised as the slide carried him over rocks.

<http://www.mtavalanche.com/images/09/couloir-sacajawea-peak>

Another skier near Hyalite Peak observed a natural avalanche at 9600ft on an east facing slope. This avalanche had a 2ft crown, was 150ft wide, and ran 400ft. Another natural avalanche was reported above Targhee Creek near West Yellowstone on an east facing slope near the ridgetop and was similar in size to the one in Hyalite. Climbers on Sphinx Mountain triggered a pocket of wind loaded snow yet found stable conditions on non-wind loaded slopes.

Yesterday I skied on Hardscrabble Peak in the northern Bridger Range. My partners and I found evidence of several natural avalanches on wind loaded slopes. We saw many drifts from recent northerly winds and experienced strong westerly winds at the ridge. On the descent our skis took a beating as we picked our way through rocky areas to avoid wind drifts until we found good powder untouched by the wind and stable conditions.

With strong winds and more snow this weekend, expect more touchy wind slabs to form. Additionally some avalanches may occur where warm dense snow (the slab) sits on top of cold low density snow(the weak layer), an upside down snowpack.

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 and 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