

GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Fri Oct 9, 2009

This is Doug Chabot from the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center with the season's first Avalanche Information Bulletin. Today is Friday, October 9th, at 2 p.m., and this information will be updated as conditions change.

Mountain Weather

Early season new snow and record low temperatures at the beginning of October are a bad mix. Weak, faceted snow develops in these conditions which can increase the avalanche danger with subsequent snowstorms.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

The first nine days of October have been more winter-like than many Januarys. In the last 24 hours 4-6 inches have fallen. This brings the total snowfall since October 1st to 2 ½ feet in the northern areas and 1-1 ½ feet around Cooke City and West Yellowstone. People have been out skiing and boarding all week with some finding better lines than others. On Tuesday we got our first reported avalanche of the season. A skier triggered a slide in the Bridger Range in Sacajewea Bowl. It was a wind loaded, meaty slab that broke a foot deep, 50-75' wide and a few hundred feet vertical. It slid on the interface from the October 1st storm. The skier wrote, "It would not have been enough to bury a person but easily could have drug a guy through some rocks and tore up those nice new ski clothes." You can check out two photos here:

<http://www.mtavalanche.com/photos2/photos.php>

Temperatures are forecasted to plummet below zero tonight and only reach the mid 20s over the weekend. This worries me. Not because I'm afraid to get chilly (although that has been known to happen), but because frigid temperatures on a thin snowpack can change the snow structure for the worse. It turns the freshly fallen snowflakes into faceted, angular crystals which are weak and cannot support much weight. Termed depth hoar, this type of snow can grow like weeds and plague us for months.

With an avalanche on Tuesday and another 8-12 inches of snow since then, I'm making a strong bet folks will trigger slides this weekend. It's not just skiers I'm concerned about; hunters trekking solo in the mountains or ice climbers scrambling in the alpine regions are also at risk. In October 2004, a pair of ice climbers died in an avalanche that swept them off a cliff on Sphinx Mountain.

WHAT TO DO:

Whether you are skiing, riding, climbing, or hunting, use the same diligence and preparation you'd use mid-winter. This means carrying rescue gear, traveling with a partner, and only traveling one at a time in avalanche terrain. We've seen people get caught, injured, and killed in avalanches during this time of year. The avalanche doesn't have to bury you to be a threat, because it can sweep you off a cliff, run you over rocks, or into trees to cause injury. Open, snowy slopes that are steeper than 30-degrees are avalanche terrain. And small slopes can be just as deadly as big ones.

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.

I 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 are sponsoring the 11th annual Powder Blast on Friday, October 23rd. Once again, it'll be held at the Emerson Cultural Center from 6:30-10:30 p.m. A \$30 admission gets you one of the valley's best silent auctions with thousands of dollars of outdoor gear and other goodies. It also includes two drink coupons, a great meal from Bountiful Table, a raffle and music+videos by DJAJ. Tickets will certainly sell out, so get yours at Barrel Mountaineering, Northern Lights Trading Company, Team Bozeman and Timber Trails.

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