GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Wed Jan 15, 2020

Good Morning. This is Doug Chabot with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Forecast on Wednesday, January 15th at 7:15 a.m. Today's forecast is sponsored by **Uphill Pursuits** and **Bridger Bowl**. This forecast does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Squalls yesterday and last night dropped 9" in the Bridger Range, 6" around Cooke City and 2-4" everywhere else. Under partly cloudy skies mountain temperatures are 0F with west to southwest wind blowing steady at 20 mph and gusting to 40 mph. Today will be mostly clear, temperatures will warm to 20F and westerly wind will remain strong and lessen tonight.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

Bridger Range | Southern Madison | Southern Gallatin | Lionhead Range | Cooke City | Island Park

The snow that fell in the last 24 hours was low density powder that will be easily blown into slabs of wind-drifted snow that will avalanche (**photo**). The Bridger Range, Cooke City, and the mountains south of Big Sky to West Yellowstone received at least 20" of snow in the last week. Wind picked up this morning and will move snow throughout the day. Wind drifts cracking under your skis or sled are a warning that if you continue to push into steeper terrain you'll likely trigger an avalanche.

Ian and I rode into Lionhead yesterday and tested the weak layer of faceted, sugary snow at the ground. We have been worried about this for a while and I'm happy to report that this layer is getting stonger and harder to trigger (**video**, **photo**). This is a positive trend, but it poses a unique problem: overconfidence. As we find numerous slopes that are stable we might blindly and incorrectly extrapolate that onto other slopes. Mother Nature brutally corrects us when we get lazy, so keep digging and assessing. Even though stability is improving, if avalanches break near the ground they will be deep, large and deadly. Our videos from **Bacon Rind**, and two from Cooke City (**Scotch Bonnet**, **Sheep Ck.**), all show cautious optimism about the snowpack with an extra warning about wind-loaded slopes.

For today the danger is rated CONSIDERABLE on all wind-loaded slopes and MODERATE on all others.

Northern Madison

The mountains around Big Sky have weak snow near the ground that can avalanche. On Sunday, I rode Buck Ridge and investigated an avalanche that broke on a wind-loaded slope (**avalanche activity**, **video**). I saw a few other slides that were similarly wind-loaded with the larger ones avalanching on sugary, faceted snow at the ground. A couple inches of snow and wind in the last 24 hours is not enough to raise the danger, but it's not helping to lower it either. Avoid wind-loaded slopes and investigate the snow structure (dig) before playing in avalanche terrain. For today, avalanches are still possible and the danger is rated MODERATE.

Northern Gallatin

The northern Gallatin Range picked up a few inches of snow with strong wind. The snowpack in this range is generally stable and our main concern is on wind-loaded slopes. Expect to find wind drifting near the ridges and in gullies. These drifts may crack as you approach them, a red flag that they may slide. Ice climbers are especially vulnerable since small slides can sweep them off cliffs. Alex shows us what to watch out for in his **video** from Mt. Blackmore. For today, the danger is MODERATE on all slopes with wind-drifted snow and LOW on all others.

If you get out, please send us your observations no matter how brief. You can fill out an **observation form**, email us (**mtavalanche@gmail.com**), leave a VM at 406-587-6984, or Instagram (#gnfacobs).

Upcoming Avalanche Education and Events

Our education calendar is full of awareness lectures and field courses. Check it out and plan to attend one or two: Events and Education Calendar.

COOKE CITY

Every Friday and Saturday, **Snowpack Update and Rescue Training**. Friday, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Soda Butte Lodge. Saturday anytime between 10-2 @ Round Lake.

BOZEMAN

TONIGHT! Introduction to Avalanche w/ Field Course, evenings of January 15 & 16 plus one field day either January 18, 19 or 25. Snowmobile specific field day offered January 25. **More Info and Register Here**.

January 27, **Avalanche Information and Demonstration Table**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Montana Science Center.

January 29, **GNFAC Forecaster Chat: Avalanche Myth Busters**, 6-8 p.m. at Uphill Pursuits.

January 31, Women's Only Companion Rescue Clinic, 6 - 8 pm at REI followed by a field day February 1. **More info and Register Here**.

February 1, **King and Queen of the Ridge** at Bridger Bowl (fundraiser). This is the Friends of the Avalanche Center's second biggest fundraiser of the year. Come on out and help us raise money by hiking and skiing laps on the ridge. Prizes, camaraderie and a good time is guaranteed. **Register with Bridger** to hike in the event, and **create a pledge page** to raise funds with your Ridge laps.

BUTTE

TONIGHT! 1-hr Avalanche Awareness, 7-8 p.m. at 5518 Designs.

DILLON

TONIGHT! 1-hr Avalanche Awareness, 7-8 p.m. at University of Montana Western.

January 29 and 30, **Introduction to Avalanche w/ Field Course**, evenings of January 29 & 30 plus a field day February 1. Snowmobile specific field day offered February 2. **More Info and Register Here**.

WHITEHALL

January 18, **1-hr Avalanche Awareness**, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Homestake Lodge.

WEST YELLOWSTONE

January 25, **1-hr Avalanche Awareness**, 7-8 p.m. at West Yellowstone Holiday Inn.

February 1, **1-hr Avalanche Awareness**, 7-8 p.m. at West Yellowstone Holiday Inn.

HELENA

January 28, **1-hr Avalanche Awareness**, 6-7 p.m. Carroll College.

LIVINGSTON

January 30, **Introduction to Avalanche w/ Field Course**, evening of January 30 plus a field day February 2. **More info and Register Here**.