GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Thu Mar 14, 2024

Good morning. This is Doug Chabot with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Forecast on Thursday, March 14th at 7:00 a.m. Today's forecast is sponsored by the **Yellowstone Club Community Foundation** and **Montana State Parks**. This forecast does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

In the last 24 hours 2-3" fell throughout our forecast area with 4" in Big Sky. Wind is W-NE at 5-15 mph with gusts of 20-30 mph. Today, high pressure builds and will create sunny skies. By the weekend temperatures will warm 10-20 F above average which will continue into next week. Wind will remain west to north at 10-20 mph and daytime temperatures will climb into the low 30s F today. Don't put your snow shovels away yet, but finding your flip-flops isn't a bad idea.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

Gallatin Range Madison Range Lionhead Range Cooke City Island Park

Recent snowfall, even a few inches, will keep many slopes on the edge of avalanching. This winter is unusual and instability lingers days after seemingly minor snow falls. Sunshine habitually and falsely, makes us feel safer, smarter, and bolder. We are 3-6 days out from massive, destructive avalanches in Cooke City, the northern Gallatin and northern Madison Ranges. Some were triggered by people, some from cornices breaking, and others were hair-raising naturals. The weak snow that formed near the ground in Nov-Jan is our bane.

Our latest 4 field videos chronicle **Island Park**, **Beehive Basin** and Cooke City (**video 1**, **video 2**). Mother Nature's greatest-hits include an avalanche on Mt. Blackmore (**yikes**), Beehive Basin (**yikes**, and **yikes**), and huge avalanches on many peaks around Cooke City (**my God!**).

Today is the first day of many without snowfall. Although time is our friend and helps stabilize the snowpack, we need to be patient. Dangerous avalanche conditions permeate the mountains. Watch your slope angles and only nibble low-angled avalanche terrain if you can't help yourself (**terrain mgt video**). Avalanches are running deep, wide, destructive and are unsurvivable.

The avalanche danger is rated CONSIDERABLE.

Bridger Range

In the Bridger Range the snowpack is weak and not fully trusted. Wind loading, most notably winds that blow *downhill*, have loaded many slopes at mid-elevation. This occurred again yesterday, which means some slopes could be wind drifted and prime to avalanche. Looking to the past helps inform us about the future, and the slides on Ross Peak (**photos**), Saddle Peak (**details and photos**) and Naya Nuki (**photos**) illustrate today's danger.

Small avalanches can be just as deadly as a large one, especially if it pushes us into an unforgiving terrain trap (trees, cliffs, gullies). Be on the lookout for signs of instability (whumpfs, cracking in wind drifts) and always ask yourself, “What if I’m wrong and this slides?”

I recommend sticking to low-consequence terrain because this snowpack has a well documented history of fooling us. Human-triggered avalanches are possible, and the avalanche danger is rated MODERATE.

Upcoming Avalanche Education and Events

Our education calendar is full of awareness lectures and field courses. Check it out: **Events and Education Calendar.**

Next weekend in Cooke City: Friday at The Antlers at 7 p.m., Free Avalanche Awareness and Current Conditions talk, and Saturday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at Round Lake Warming Hut, Free Rescue Practice.

Loss in the Outdoors is a support group for those affected by loss and grief related to outdoor pursuits. Check out the link for more information.