

GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Sun Jan 30, 2011

Good morning. This is Eric Knoff with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory issued on Sunday, January 30, at 7:30 a.m. Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, in cooperation with the Friends of the Avalanche Center, sponsors today's advisory. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Cooler temperatures have started to move into southwest Montana, but they have forgotten the snow. Currently, mountain temperatures are ranging from the mid teens to low 20s and winds are blowing out of the WSW at 10-20 mph. An approaching cold front will enter our area by early afternoon, dropping temperatures significantly through the later part of the day. Snow will likely arrive with this front, delivering 3-5 inches to the mountains by tomorrow morning. Temperatures will plummet well below zero tonight and will struggle to reach double digits above zero tomorrow.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

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

Warm and dry conditions over the past few days have helped stabilize the snowpack on most slopes. Yesterday, I nearly forgot what month it was when I was hiking around the Bridger Range in a light fleece top; it felt far more like April than January. Although weak and unstable snow can be found in a few scattered areas, this is the exception to the rule.

The avalanche activity over the past week, however, has provided a reminder that even amidst generally stable conditions surprising avalanche events can still occur. Slides in the Bridger and Madison ranges have provided valuable information about the specific instabilities that the snowpack still holds ([photo1](#), [photo2](#), [photo3](#)). Recent avalanches have not been confined to specific aspects or elevations and they have shared a similar theme - weak, faceted snow near the ground fighting to support heavy loads. Today, the main area of concern is high elevation alpine terrain, where stiff wind slabs could be sitting on weak, faceted snow, which may be sensitive to the weight of a skier or rider. Although recent slides have not been propagating over wide areas, meaning the weak layer is not widespread, they have been running long distances, making them quite dangerous. If you are seeking adventure in alpine terrain, use extra caution on steep slopes that have been previously wind affected.

A secondary concern is weak snow forming on the surface. An observer in Cooke City has found a large crop of surface hoar growing on most aspects and elevations. He also mentioned a facet-crust combination forming on SSE facing slopes. Although we have not received numerous reports about growing surface hoar, I would not be surprised if this pesky layer becomes an increasing problem over the next week. If new snow does arrive, pay close attention to wind loaded slopes and slopes steeper than 35 degrees.

Today, the avalanche danger is rated [MODERATE](#) on wind loaded slopes steeper than 35 degrees. All other slopes have a [LOW](#) avalanche danger.

I 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.

West Yellowstone: Beacon Park Operational

Skiing or riding near West Yellowstone? Test your beacon skills at a beacon park near the old airport where you can search for pre-placed beacons switched on/off by a control panel. Look for it by orange snow fence and signage just south of the snow cross track.

9th ANNUAL KING AND QUEEN OF THE RIDGE

The 9th Annual King and Queen of the Ridge will be held at Bridger Bowl on Saturday, February 12. ALL proceeds go to the Friends of the Avalanche Center who use the money to promote avalanche education in southwest Montana. Last winter we taught 64 classes reaching over 4,900 people. You can help raise money to continue this education in 2 ways:

- 1). Get pledges and hike the ridge. You don't have to do 20 laps – you can get flat pledges and hike just once! Or you can test your mettle and try and break John Yarrington's record of 29 laps in 5 hours.
- 2). Sponsor someone. If you don't have someone to sponsor, consider sponsoring the GNFAC since we'll be hiking for dollars.

Go to http://bridgerbowl.com/events/view_event/81/ for more information and registration forms.

Avalanche Education

February 2, 3, and 5 in Bozeman

Advanced Avalanche Awareness –Wednesday & Thursday 7:00p.m. – 9:30 p.m. at MSU SUB Room 235 with a field day on Saturday at Bridger Bowl. ADVANCED REGISTRATION REQUIRED ([more information](#)) ([Register](#))

For additional information and a listing of other avalanche classes, go to:

<http://www.mtavalanche.com/workshops/calendar>