

GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Thu Dec 21, 2023

Good morning. This is Doug Chabot with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Forecast on Thursday, December 21st at 7:00 a.m. This information is sponsored by [Alpine Orthopedics & Sports Medicine](#) and [Knoff Group Real Estate](#). This forecast does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

At 5 a.m. there is no new snow and mountain temperatures are in the mid 20's F with west to southwest wind averaging 15-25 mph. Under mostly clear skies, temperatures will rise into the mid to upper 30s F with southwest wind at 10-20 mph. No new snow is forecast until Friday night through Saturday when a small storm passes.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion



Cooke City

The snowpack in Cooke City continues to show more instability than other mountain ranges in our advisory area. Yesterday, Dave and his partner were “surprised by the abundant signs of instability nine days after the last measurable snow...My partner and I felt that triggering an avalanche would be likely if we ventured into avalanche terrain. I am worried, and we are avoiding steep slopes.” His [video](#) from yesterday and Alex's [video](#) from Sunday, outline their worry. It is still dangerous in the backcountry with whumpfing, cracking, and poor test scores being seen day after day.

The snowpack in Cooke City remains unstable and the danger is rated **CONSIDERABLE**.



Bridger Range Gallatin Range Madison Range Lionhead Range Island Park

From Bozeman to Big Sky to West Yellowstone and Island Park, the snowpack is weak on all slopes and unstable on a few. Snow on the ground changes with time, and the longer we go without new snow, the weaker it becomes. On slopes with a cohesive slab perched on top of this weaker snow (i.e. wind-load), we will get collapses (whumpfing), sometimes cracking and occasionally avalanches. On Sunday, Ian found a small slide up Buck Ridge that was triggered by sledders using the slope to test stability, which was a good idea ([video](#)).

With time stability is slowly improving. Our snowpit tests take more force to break layers and avalanche activity is decreasing. However, over the last few days, collapsing in Lionhead and whumpfs and cracking in Bacon Rind are signs of lingering instability.

I do not trust most slopes in our advisory area until I dig and test to determine if a slab and weak layer combination exists ([video](#)). It is still possible to trigger avalanches and the 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](#).

We offer *Avalanche Fundamentals with Field Session* courses targeted towards non-motorized travelers in [January](#) and one geared towards [motorized users](#). Sign up early before they fill up.

[*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.