GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Wed Dec 2, 2009

This is Doug Chabot from the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center with an Avalanche Information Bulletin issued at 7:30 a.m. on Wednesday, December 2**. Jeff King of Edward Jones** in cooperation with the **Friends of the Avalanche Center** sponsor this bulletin. This information will be updated on Saturday morning when we begin issuing daily advisories. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Yesterday's cold front dropped temperatures and a bit of snow. Those watching the thermometer saw it plummet from the 20s to the single digits in three hours. This quick blast of snow added another 3-5 inches from Lone Peak to the Bridgers while the southern mountains got 1-2 inches. Winds are currently west to north at 10-15 mph and should remain light through Friday. Skies will become clear and sunny until Saturday when another band of snow looks on track to hit us. Daytime temperatures will reach the 20s, but dip to below zero in the evenings.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

The Bridger and northern Gallatin Ranges:

The snowpack in the northern Gallatin and Bridger Ranges remain strong and can easily support the new four inches of snow. Stability tests and general observations from these ranges continue to indicate a stable snowpack. The mountains around Bozeman are getting hit hard by skiers and ice climbers since our early season conditions are the best in years. Strong westerly winds Monday night created isolated wind drifts near the ridgetops which is our lone avalanche concern.

The Madison and southern Gallatin Ranges, including the Lionhead area near West Yellowstone and the mountains around Cooke City:

The snowpack around West Yellowstone is thin and there have not been many reports of folks skiing or riding just yet. Further north, especially near Lone Peak, the snow is two feet deep at 8,500 feet. Skiers touring into Beehive/Bear Basins are finding supportable, but also weak snow. Dense snow at the ground is keeping skiers off the rocks and dirt, but above this are sugary facets in between ice crusts. The slopes are mostly stable right now, but could quickly change for the worse if we get a big storm. Video of stability tests from Sunday: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHxIiJCfh2k. Isolated wind slabs at the ridgeline are a concern. In Middle Basin yesterday, someone ski cut 6-8 inch slabs formed during Monday night's strong winds.

If you're gonna be dumb, you better be tough. And not being the sharpest, Mark and I elected to put up the Cooke City weather station yesterday when it was 2 degrees and blowing 20 mph instead of last week when it was sunny and in the 40s. With numb fingers we got it up and working (http://bit.ly/5yXgti). Here's a picture of the site: http://www.mtavalanche.com/images/09/cooke-city-weather-station

With minus 22F wind chill chasing us, we warmed ourselves up by digging two snowpits in Fischer drainage: one on a south and another on a north aspect. The north facing slope had three feet of stable snow. The south was 2 ½ feet deep and layered with sun crusts and facets which could be a problem with a big snowstorm. Snowmobile tracks were everywhere. Brave riders over Thanksgiving hammered the slopes with abandon and risked trashing their sleds as they weaved around and over boulders. Thankfully, the snowpack was deep enough, supportable enough and stable enough for folks to get out and play. But I'm sure many parts departments saw a spike in trailing arm purchases.

Mark will issue the next advisory Saturday morning at 7:30 a.m. If you get out in the backcountry give us a call or send us an email with your observations. You can reach us at 587-6984 or at mtavalanche@gmail.com.

AVALANCHE EDUCATION THIS WEEK

Basic Avalanche Awareness at MSU (12 Hour Course):

Evening Sessions: December 2 and 3, 2009, 7:00pm to 9:30pm, at MSU in Leon Johnson Hall, room 339.

Field Session: December 5, 2009, 9:15am to 3:00pm, at Bridger Bowl Ski Area.

Cost for the entire workshop is $25.00 ($5 each evening and $15 for the field session). ***Registration is not required for the evening sessions, but is required for the field session, which can be done at either of the evening sessions.***

Basic Avalanche Awareness for Snowmobilers (12 hour Course):

Bozeman:

Evening Sessions: Wed and Thursday, December 2 and 3, 2009, 7-9:30 pm; ***Team Bozeman***

December 13 is an all day field session, exact location TBD. ($30 Donation)

No Registration Required.

One Hour awareness:

A basic one hour awareness class will be offered at Red Line Sports in Butte, Dec 9th at 6 p.m.

A full listing of the avalanche classes offered in southwest Montana can be found on the education page of our website: http://www.mtavalanche.com/education