GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Sat Jan 26, 2019

Good morning. This is Eric Knoff with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Forecast issued on Saturday, January 26th at 7:00 a.m. Today's forecast is sponsored by **Grizzly Outfitters** and the **Friends of the Avalanche Center**. This forecast does not apply to operating ski areas.

Avalanche Fatality Tobacco Roots

Yesterday, four skiers were caught in an avalanche while ascending a steep forested slope in the Tobacco Root Mountains near Bell Lake Yurt. Two skiers were able to arrest by grabbing trees, the other two skiers were swept downhill. One skier was seriously injured, the other died from trauma. The GNFAC will issue more information once it becomes available. Our deepest condolences go out the family and friends of the victim.

Mountain Weather

Since yesterday morning, the mountains near Bozeman and Big Sky picked up 5-7" of new snow while the southern ranges received 2-3". At 5 a.m. temps range from the single digits near Cooke City to the low teens F elsewhere. North-northwest winds are blowing 30-50 mph in the northern ranges and 15-25 mph in the south. Today, an imbedded northwest flow will keep skies mostly cloudy and produce the occasional snow flurry in the mountains. By tomorrow morning, 1-2" of new snow is possible. Highs today warm into the upper teens to mid 20's F and winds will remain moderate to strong out of the west-northwest.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

All Regions

The avalanche fatality in the Tobacco Roots yesterday is a somber reminder that dangerous avalanches remain likely in the backcountry. This is the eighth U.S. avalanche fatality during the month of January. A hundred good decisions in the backcountry can be offset by one poor decision. When conditions are unstable, it is best to play the conservative card and avoid avalanche terrain.

Today, the snowpack will be working hard to adjust to the recent load of new and wind-blown snow. As the pack slowly gets a breather, signs of instability such as cracking/collapsing and avalanches will become less likely. This can create a false sense of security the snowpack is getting more stable. Don't be fooled!

Avalanches are still likely on steep slopes. Areas with wind drifted snow will be the most unstable (**photo**, **video**). Yesterday, skiers near the south boundary of Saddle Peak observed a large natural avalanche pour over the southern end of the cliffs into the Going Home Chute. This slide is bull's eye data that yesterday's loading event pushed the snowpack past its breaking point. Strong west-northwest winds will continue to transport low density snow and form thick wind drifts that will be easy to trigger or could fail naturally. Today, watch for and avoid all wind loaded slopes.

A secondary but more dangerous problem are slides breaking on persistent weak layers buried mid pack or near the ground (**photo**). It is likely the slide that caused the fatality in the Tobacco Roots failed on a persistent weak layer buried deep in the pack. The skiers reported hearing a loud collapse before the avalanche occurred, a tell-tale sign the slide failed on faceted snow. Areas with a shallower snowpack (less than 3' deep) are the most likely to harbor a poor structure (**photo**, **video**). All slopes should be considered suspect until proven otherwise.

Today, dangerous avalanche conditions exist and the avalanche danger is rated **CONSIDERABLE**.

If you get out and have any avalanche or snowpack observations to share, contact us via our website, email (mtavalanche@gmail.com), phone (406-587-6984), or Instagram (#gnfacobs).

King and Queen of the Ridge

Saturday, February 2 at Bridger Bowl. This is the Friends of the Avalanche Center's second biggest fundraiser of the year. Come on out and help us raise some money by hiking and skiing some 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.

Upcoming Avalanche Education and Events

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

BOZEMAN

Today, GVSA Poker Ride, Buck Ridge. Registration is from 8 a.m. to noon, ride ends at the Corral Bar at 4:30 p.m. Proceeds benefit the Friends of the Avalanche Center. More info is HERE.

February 2, **King and Queen of the Ridge** at Bridger Bowl (fundraiser). Register with Bridger to hike in the event, and create a pledge page to raise funds with your Ridge laps.

WEST YELLOWSTONE

Tonight, **1-hr Avalanche Awareness for Snowmobilers**, 7-8 p.m. Holiday Inn West Yellowstone.

LIVINGSTON

January 31, **Intro to Avalanches w/ Field Day**, Info and Register Here.

DILLON

January 31-February 2, **Intro to Avalanches w/ Field Day**, Info and Register Here.

COOKE CITY

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