GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Mon Apr 15, 2019

Good Morning. This is Ian Hoyer with spring weather and snowpack information on Monday, April 15th at 7:00 a.m. The Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center has stopped issuing daily avalanche forecasts for the season. We will issue weather and snowpack updates on Monday and Friday mornings through April. This bulletin does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Since Friday the mountains received 8-11" of dense snow (0.8-1.3" of Snow Water Equivalent) near Big Sky, Bozeman and West Yellowstone, and 14" (1.6" of SWE) near Cooke City. This morning temperatures are high 20s to low 30s F and wind is northwest at 15-30 mph. Today will be mostly cloudy with temperatures reach 40 F. Winds will be southwest at wind at 15-30 mph. Snow showers are likely with accumulations of 1-2" today. Another round of snowfall is expected Tuesday afternoon into Wednesday. The end of the week will be dry and warm.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

All Regions

Consistent snowfall over the last week and more snow last night has brought winter back to the mountains. Strong winds have drifted the new snow into cohesive slabs that are breaking under the weight of skiers and riders. Over the weekend we received multiple reports of natural and human-triggered avalanches in the Bridger Range, near Cooke City, and near Big Sky (**details**, **details**). On Saturday, a solo skier in the Crazy Mountains (outside our advisory area) was caught in a slide and partially buried. Luckily he was uninjured and able to dig himself out. All this avalanche activity serves as a reminder that while it may be flip flop weather in town by the end of this week, it is still avalanche season. Conditions change rapidly as you increase in elevation. Yesterday, after starting out on dirt at the Buck Ridge trailhead, Eric and I found a foot of settled powder up high. It is worth digging to check the stability of the new snow and its bonding with the old snow surface before getting onto steep slopes.

Wet avalanche hazard will increase once the sun comes out and temperatures are above freezing (**photo**). At this time of year it only takes a few minutes of sunshine for the snow surface to become wet. Sticky snow, roller balls and pinwheels are good signs that it's time to get off steep slopes to avoid triggering a wet slide.

GENERAL SPRING SNOWPACK AND TRAVEL ADVICE

Spring weather can be highly variable and create a mix of avalanche problems to watch out for. Snow conditions and stability can change drastically from day to day or hour to hour. Anticipate rapid change and plan accordingly. Abundant snowfall over the winter with more spring snow to come makes avalanches possible into summer.

NEW SNOW AND WIND LOADED SLOPES

Spring storms are notorious for depositing heavy amounts of snow in the mountains. Even with a deep and generally stable snowpack throughout the advisory area, heavy and rapid loads of new snow will decrease stability. The main problems to look out for are avalanches breaking within the new snow, wind slabs, and loose snow avalanches. The likelihood of triggering an avalanche spikes during and immediately after snowstorms.

New snow instabilities tend to stabilize quickly, but it's a good idea to give new snow a day to adjust before hitting big terrain. New snow instabilities can be difficult to assess, and spring storms bond to old snow differently across aspects and elevations. Conservative terrain selection is essential during and immediately following storms. Wind loaded slopes and slopes steeper than 35 degrees should be avoided for 24-48 hours after new snow and wind.

New snow can quickly change from dry to wet on a spring day, and stability can decrease rapidly with above freezing temperatures or brief sunshine. New snow may bond well early in the morning, and then easily slide later. Wet loose slides are likely during the first above freezing temperatures or sunshine immediately after a storm. Anticipate changes in snow stability as you change aspect or elevation, and over the course of the day. An early start is always an advantage. Be ready to change plans or move to safer terrain at the first signs of decreasing stability.

WET SNOW AVALANCHES

Spring and wet snow avalanches go hand-in-hand. Above freezing temperatures, rain, and/or intense sunshine cause the snow to become wet and weak, and make wet avalanches easy to trigger or release naturally. Conditions tend to become most unstable when temperatures stay above freezing for multiple days and nights in a row. Avoid steep terrain, and be aware of potential for natural wet avalanches in steep terrain above you, if you see:

- Heavy rain,
- Above freezing temperatures for more than 24 hours,
- Natural wet avalanches,
- Roller balls or pin wheels indicating a moist or wet snow surface,
- Or if you sink to your boot top in wet snow.

In general, if the snow surface freezes solid overnight, the snowpack will be stable in the morning and stability will decrease through the day as snow warms up. The snow surface hardness, rate of warming, duration of sunshine, aspect and elevation determine how fast stability will decrease through the day. Be aware that sunny aspects may have a wet snow avalanche danger while shadier slopes still have a dry snow avalanche danger. Getting off of steep slopes should be considered when, or before, the above signs of instability are present. Wet snow avalanches, whether loose snow or slabs, can be powerful, destructive and very dangerous. Conservative terrain choices, starting early in the day, and careful observations can keep you safe. See Alex's recent **video**, and this **article** for more spring travel advice.

CORNICES

Cornices along ridgelines are massive and can break under the weight of a person (**photo**). Prolonged above freezing temperatures and rain make them weaker and possible to break naturally. They can break off suddenly and farther back than one might expect. Cornice falls can also entrain large amounts of loose snow or trigger slab avalanches. Stay far back from the edge of ridgelines and minimize exposure to slopes directly below cornices. Regardless of whether a cornice triggers a slide or not, a falling cornice is dangerous to anyone in its path.

DISCLAIMER

It does not matter if new snow falls or not, avalanches will continue to occur until the existing snowpack is mostly gone. Always assess the slope you plan to ride with diligence and safety in mind. Do not let your guard down. Travel with a partner, carry rescue gear and only expose one person at a time in avalanche terrain.

Have a safe and enjoyable spring and summer!

Doug, Eric, Alex, and Ian

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).

SHARE YOUR AVALANCHE OBSERVATIONS

We will update our weather and avalanche log daily through April. It is a valuable resource for backcountry travelers through winter and spring. If you have any avalanche observations, please share them with us to include in this database. Contact us via our website, email (mtavalanche@gmail.com), phone (406-587-6984), or Instagram (#gnfacobs).

Info and Announcements

Bridger Bowl is closed for the season. Backcountry conditions exist and there is no avalanche hazard reduction or ski patrol services.

The Hyalite road is closed to motorized travel until May 16th. Bike and foot traffic is allowed.

We will issue weather and snowpack updates on Monday and Friday mornings for most of April, and update our weather log daily.