

## **GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Thu Mar 1, 2012**

Good morning. This is Mark Staples with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory issued on, Thursday, March 1 at 7:30 a.m. A Montana FWP Recreation Trails Grant sponsors today's advisory. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

### Mountain Weather

Since yesterday afternoon the Lionhead area received 6-8 inches of new snow, the mountains near Cooke City and the Taylor Fork received 6 inches, and the mountains near Big Sky and Bozeman received 3-4 inches. Yesterday strong westerly winds averaged 20 mph with gusts of 40 mph. This morning temperatures dropped into the single digits F and will rise into the teens F today. More snow will fall with 2-4 inches accumulating by tomorrow morning. Winds will blow from the W and SW averaging 10 mph and gusting to 20 mph.

### Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

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

New snow and strong winds: Fresh drifts and wind slabs will fracture and produce avalanches throughout the advisory area. While climbing in Hyalite Canyon yesterday, Eric had several wind drifts collapse and he triggered a very small slab near the ice climb. Because he was well below treeline in relatively safe terrain, he said these signs were "nothing dangerous but a definite clue as to what's happening in other terrain." A skier near Cooke City also noted that "fresh drifts were becoming sensitive."

Near surface facets buried 1.5-3 feet deep: In addition to fresh wind slabs, a thin layer of near surface facets that formed in early to mid February will also fracture and produce larger avalanches. This layer exists throughout the advisory area ([photo](#), [video](#)) and produced both natural and human triggered avalanches last weekend. Today with the stress of new snow and wind-blown snow, this layer will remain near its breaking point. Although this layer exists on most slopes, its strength varies.

I have analyzed this layer in many snowpits during the last two weeks. In some cases it has given stable results in stability tests yet produced an avalanche on a nearby slope. In general do not trust it. Even if you make a very thorough stability evaluation and decide to ski or ride a slope, stack the odds of survival in your favor by selecting a slope with a clean run out zone and slope angles under 35 degrees.

For today, new snow, recent wind loading, widespread and persistent weak layers, and recent avalanche activity ([photo](#)) indicate dangerous avalanche conditions. Some natural avalanches will occur but most slopes will need a skier or rider to trigger an avalanche and today the avalanche danger is [CONSIDERABLE](#).

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](mailto:mtavalanche@gmail.com) or call us at 587-6984.

### Accident Reports

[The accident reports](#) for the avalanche fatality near Cooke City on February 22 and Friday's avalanche on Saddle Peak are available on our website.

## Events/Education

[FREE 1-hr Avalanche Awareness Lecture](#), Friday, March 2, 7-8 p.m. at the West Yellowstone Holiday Inn in the room next to the bar.

### [31<sup>st</sup> Annual Pinhead Classic](#)

Come to Bridger Bowl on Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup> (St. Patrick's Day) with telemark skis, AT skis, alpine skis, snowboards, split boards, or even snow blades. The theme is Snowpocalypse based on the wildly popular Mayan 2012 apocalypse. \$30 gets you into the races, a pint glass, t-shirt, a good time, a raffle ticket, and food by Cafe Fresco. Pre-register at Mystery Ranch or Grizzly Ridge March 11-16. Visit <http://pinheadclassic.com/> or the Pinhead [Facebook](#) page for more info.