

Season Summary 2018



Submitted by Doug Chabot on Thu, 04/12/2018 - 10:54

On September 16th winter arrived with a foot of snow in the mountains. On the 17th a skier triggered the first avalanche of the season. On the 19th, after continued snowfall, Alex issued the first avalanche information bulletin, the earliest in 28 years of operation. This winter was the biggest snow year since 1996/97 in southwest Montana with snowpack depth averaging 120-160% of normal.

The country's first avalanche fatality occurred in the southern Madison Range on October 7th when two skiers were caught on the flanks of Imp Peak, killing one, a beloved local. A snowmobiler was killed on Sage Peak in the same mountain range on January 2nd. Fifty-one avalanche incidents (about average) were reported in our forecast area that resulted in 17 caught, 3 injuries, 9 partial burials, 2 full burials and 2 deaths. Nationally, there are 21 fatalities so far this season, well under the 10-year average of 27.

We issued 17 avalanche information bulletins in the fall and started daily avalanche advisories on November 24th which ended 136 days later on April 8th. Because of the large snowpack we are issuing avalanche information bulletins every Monday and Friday through April, making this our longest season by far. Steady snowfall hindered the development of lasting weak layers that can form with a shallow snowpack or during clear weather, two things that were in short supply. We issued avalanche warnings 6 days during the most dangerous times compared with 13 warnings last year.

Besides avalanche advisories, we concentrate on education. Working closely with the Friends of the Avalanche Center, in 2017-18 we taught more classes to more people than ever before (stats below). Avalanche education keeps people safe in the backcountry. As MSU enrollment swells along with a growing high school population, we are making an extra effort to reach young adults. In November we launched a 4-part video campaign titled "Get Avalanche Smart," specifically targeting this audience. The series had 58,600 views and helped increase enrollment in our ASMSU class *Introduction to Avalanches with Field Course* by 50%. Over 300 people attended 2 nights of lectures and a field session. We also filmed "Dashboard Talks," seven informal conversations about avalanches as we drove home from the field. These were viewed 33,000 times. Our goal of keeping people informed and alive is accomplished through avalanche advisories, videos from the field, photos, social media updates each morning and after every field day, and education offerings for all ages and user groups.

GNFAC INDEX

- Number and % increase of email subscribers to the avalanche advisory: 5975 and 32%
 - Number and % increase of daily views to our Advisory page: 1548 and 106%
 - 106% increase in one year!!
- Total number of avalanche classes and attendees: 134 and 5300
 - Total number of elementary and secondary school students: 857
 - Total number of snowmobilers: 960
- Number of videos posted to YouTube and total views: 119 and 233,942

- Increase from last year in videos and views: 69% and 64%
- Number of videos posted to Instagram and total views: 66 and 168,847
- Number of field days: 115
 - Total number of snowpits we recorded on snowpilot.org: 115
- Miles driven on each snowmobile: 1200
- Highway miles driven in our two vehicles for field work: 13,500
- Number of media interviews: 65
- Inches of [snow water equivalent](#) (SWE) at Brackett Creek in the Bridger Range from October 1 to April 12: 35"
 - Date that Fisher Creek SNOTEL outside Cooke City hit 35" of SWE: February 4th
 - *Current SWE at Fisher Creek: 56", breaking a record set in 1971!!*
- Ratio of flip phones to smartphones at the GNFAC: 2:1
- Number of times Alex and Doug got their snowmobiles stuck in a 100 yard swath outside Cooke City: we stopped counting at 8.
 - Number of shovels broken digging out the sleds: 1
- The gas station where Doug had a split-second lapse in attention and soaked himself in fuel: Town Pump on Huffine Lane.

In order to run the avalanche center, Alex, Eric and I rely on many individuals, community partnerships and volunteer efforts. This winter 34 volunteers accompanied us on 70 field days. Almost 40% of our funding comes from outside the Forest Service. The Friends of the Avalanche Center along with a grant from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks fill in the shortfall. Businesses that financially support our work through the Friends include: Grizzly Outfitters, Yellowstone Artic Yamaha, Yamaha Motor Corp, Montana State Parks, the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, Gallatin County Search and Rescue, Mystery Ranch, World Boards, Spark R&D, Montana Ale Works, Community Food Coop, Cooke City Super 8, Bridger Bowl, Gallatin Valley Snowmobile Association, Stronghold Fabrication, Highline Partners, Knoff Group Real Estate, Alpine Orthopedics, and Cooke City Motorsports.

Enjoy the spring and summer. We will be back in October in anticipation of another record-breaking season.

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