Deep Slab in playground

Date
Sun, 03/24/2024 - 16:45
Activity
Skiing

Toured out to the playground Sunday. 2-3" new snow provided good riding on smooth surfaces. HS around 1.5-2M at 8-8500' on North side of compass. Did not plan to dig but after observing a significant deep slab from afar that propagated into shallow angled terrain AND took out ski tracks, I found myself with a hypothesis I could not ignore: Have we transitioned to a wet spring snowpack? I assumed this was a wet slab but needed more information. In fact at this location the snowpack was still dry and we still got stubborn propagation at the basal facets (ECTP25). Very difficult to estimate timing of incident however it stands to reason that loose wet snow came down from above and pulled out this slab; most likely caused by rapid warming and a poor refreeze sometime last week. While not a far running avalanche, it did take out the whole snowpack and deposited 10-15' of debris in the trees. We classified it as HS-N-D2-R2-G

Final thoughts: I have not skied in SW MT much this winter but a few things stood out to me yesterday. Thin, shallow snow equals weak snow. Most slabs are hovering right around the 1M mark, just enough for a human to trigger. Recent activity has pulled out many shallow slopes that I have often wondered over the past decade, "can this avalanche?" This winter has provided me many good images of "sneaker" slopes that are just steep enough to run. Despite the allure of untracked snow, seeing propagation at the ground in late winter has my hackles up and I will be staying out of avalanche terrain (sigh) for the foreseeable future. My suggestion: Go to the Tetons where there is 100" sitting on the deck or stay out of avalanche terrain for now.

Note from GNFAC: This avalanche happened on 03/20/2024: details here.

Region
Bridger Range
Location (from list)
Playground
Observer Name
Andrew Newman