GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Fri Apr 25, 2025

Good morning, this is Ian Hoyer with a spring weather and snowpack update on Friday, April 25th. Daily avalanche forecasts have ended for the season. We will issue conditions updates on Monday and Friday mornings through April. This information does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Since Monday, 2-3” of new snow have fallen in most of the advisory area, with no new snow around Bozeman. Winds have been generally easterly and moderate for the last couple days. Temperatures have been rising into the 30s and 40s and dropping below freezing at night.

Today will be mostly sunny, with high temperatures in the 40s F. There may be some thunderstorms this afternoon, particularly around Island Park and West Yellowstone, but any accumulations will be minimal.

Tomorrow will bring a mixed bag of spring weather. Temperatures will be a little warmer than today and there will be sun, clouds, and maybe some snow or rain showers - but again, not big accumulations.

Sunday will be cloudy, with snowfall starting later in the day. There could be some substantial snowfall Sunday night into early next week, but exact amounts are still quite uncertain at this point.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

All Regions

Avalanche hazards today, and over the next couple days, will generally be small and isolated.

If you get up onto steep, shady slopes that still harbor dry snow, watch out for triggering small **Wind Slab avalanches.** Without much recent snowfall, any wind drifts will likely be less than a foot deep and most of them will be well bonded at this point. You’ll want to look out for drifts that aren’t well bonded - cracks shooting out from your skis or sled are the bullseye data to watch for. If snowfall kicks in earlier than expected on Sunday, fresh wind slabs may become a more substantial issue later in the day.

When the sun is out and not obscured by clouds (mostly today, but also maybe in places on Saturday), **Wet Loose avalanches** will be a concern. In most places the snow surface has been worked over by multiple days of warm temperatures and won’t readily destabilize. Mostly watch for small slides in the softer, newer snow. A sticky, wet snow surface and roller balls running down from your tracks indicate that the conditions for these slides are developing.

While both wet and dry slides will be generally small, remember that any type of avalanche can be hazardous in terrain where they could push you into rocks, trees, over a cliff, or carry you a long way down a steep slope. Before riding steep slopes, assess the terrain for consequences of being knocked over by a small slide.

Daily forecasts are done for the season, but avalanches will continue. Remain diligent with your snowpack and terrain assessments, and be ready to adapt your plans to changing conditions. See our website for more general spring snowpack and travel advice.

GENERAL SPRING SNOWPACK AND TRAVEL ADVICE

Spring weather can be highly variable and create a mix of avalanche problems. 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 fresh snow a day to adjust before hitting big terrain. New snow instabilities can be challenging to assess, and spring storms bond to old snow differently across aspects and elevations. Conservative terrain selection is essential during and immediately following storms. Avoid wind-loaded slopes and slopes steeper than 35 degrees 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 the 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,
- Rollerballs or pinwheels 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!

Mark, Alex, Ian and Dave

For more spring travel advice see this **article** from our GNFAC forecaster blog