



Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center 2009-10 Season Highlights

Greetings!

We just finished our 20th year of operation at the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center (GNFAC). All three of us had a great, safe season and owe a huge thanks to all our supporters in the community, co-workers on Gallatin National Forest, and Friends of the Avalanche Center (FOAC). We could not have succeeded without all of your help.

The starter pistol of the avalanche season rang out on October 6th when a skier triggered a slide in the Bridger Range. We were fortunate to get early season snow in October and November, but below zero temperatures in December turned much of the snowpack into weak, faceted depth hoar. This layer avalanched all season. We began daily avalanche advisories on December 5th and continued until April 11th for a total of 127 posts. Unstable snow created avalanche activity and/or widespread collapsing and cracking on 83 (65%) of those days. *It was the most active avalanche season in our history.* We even had slides on Peet's Hill and the Moonlight golf course. The instability was unprecedented and we didn't issue a LOW danger rating the entire winter. Unfortunately, we did not escape unscathed. An ice climber died in an avalanche in Hyalite drainage in December, and a snowmobiler was buried and killed outside Cooke City in early January. Unstable conditions and more people in the backcountry meant there were more folks triggering slides than ever before. There were a record 85 avalanche incidents, almost double our average, with 19 people caught, 8 partial burials, and 2 full burials. Only luck kept many of these from ending up as fatalities. In one instance, Eric Knoff was digging a snowpit and watched a skier trigger and get buried in a slide. He and his partners did a textbook rescue.

Season Highlights:

- The Avalanche Center saw a 20% increase in the number of people getting the daily advisories. On average 3,906 people a day read or heard the advisory.
- Partnered with the FOAC we taught 64 classes reaching over 4,900 students.

- We brought in guest lecturers from Wyoming and Glacier Country for a Wet Snow Workshop for avalanche professionals (ski areas, MSU, forecasters).
- Our sidecountry movie Stay Alive, was reedited and distributed to a national audience.
- Our new website allowed us easier ways to give the public avalanche information. The *Advisory* page had embedded photos and videos, our new *Sidecountry* page had information on accessing the backcountry through ski areas, the new *Accidents* page listed our reports/photos in a database, and the *Donate* button allowed people to make contributions to the FOAC.
- The GNFAC entered the world of social networking. The Friends' Facebook page currently has 1,166 fans and our Twitter page has 275 followers. These were valuable new tools in keeping backcountry users abreast of changing conditions and education opportunities.
- This season we made 37 YouTube videos that were watched over 77,515 times; 3 times the views as last year.
- The FOAC partnered with Team Bozeman and Yamaha to loan us two, 2010 MTX Nytro 4-stroke snowmobiles. We rode over 1,280 miles on each one which allowed us to reach popular riding areas, investigate countless avalanches and access areas too distant to ski.
- A large, human triggered avalanche on Saddle Peak outside Bridger Bowl on February 16th narrowly missed killing many sidecountry skiers and boarders. We used this incident to dispel many myths about backcountry skiing and talk about history of the snowpack in this area. Our education efforts culminated in a lecture and Q&A session at the Bozeman Public Library attended by over 225 people. This hour long lecture/discussion is posted on YouTube and was viewed an additional 700 times.

Besides funding from the Gallatin National Forest, we rely on other sources too. We get substantial financing through the Montana FW&P Recreation Trails Program and Friends of the Avalanche Center. We're also fortunate to be supported by local community businesses and organizations that each donate many thousands of dollars: Team Bozeman, Northern Lights Trading Company, Bridger Bowl, the Hans Saari Memorial Fund, Gallatin County Search and Rescue, Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, and Montana Ale Works. This year the friends and family of Tyler Stetson, a young man who was killed in an avalanche in Beehive Basin in 2008, raised over \$15,000 for the FOAC through pledges at the King and Queen of the Ridge.

To everyone who has gotten the daily advisory, taken a class from us, made a donation or sent in an observation---Thank You. It's an honor to work for you.

Have a safe, enjoyable summer.

Doug Chabot
 Mark Staples
 Eric Knoff