

[GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Sun Feb 26, 2012](#)

Good morning. This is Eric Knoff with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory issued on Sunday, February 26 at 7:30 a.m. The **Montana Import Group**, in partnership with the Friends of the Avalanche Center, sponsors today's advisory. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

AVALANCHE WARNING

ISSUED ON FEBRUARY 26 2012 AT 5:00 am

The Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center is issuing a **Backcountry Avalanche Warning for the Bridger Range, southern Madison and southern Gallatin Ranges, the Lionhead area near West Yellowstone and mountains around Cooke City**. Heavy snowfall, high winds and an extremely weak snowpack are causing unstable conditions. Today the avalanche danger is **HIGH** on all slopes. Natural and human triggered avalanches are likely. Avalanche terrain including avalanche runout zones should be avoided.

You are urged to contact the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory for more detailed information.

Website: www.mtavalanche.com/advisory

Avalanche Hotline: 406-587-6981

Mountain Weather:

Over the past 24 hours the Bridger Range and mountains near west Yellowstone picked up 8 inches of new snow, 5-7 inches fell elsewhere. Winds blew 30-40 mph out of WNW during the storm, but have decreased to 20-30 mph out of the WNW. The exception is the Bridger Range where ridgetop winds are still blowing 30-40 mph. Mountain temperatures are ranging between 5-10 degrees F under cloudy skies. Today, temperatures will warm into the mid to high teens and winds will gradually decrease to 15-25 mph out of the west. Lingering snow showers could produce 1-2 inches of new snow by this afternoon, but conditions will dry out by this evening.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

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

Yesterday, 6-8 inches of snow fell in under eight hours, applying a rapid load to a weak and fragile snowpack. This new load will likely push the snowpack past its breaking point, producing widespread natural activity. If slopes are failing naturally, there is little chance they will support the weight of a skier or rider.

Prior to this latest storm, the snowpack was already displaying its ability to produce large natural and human triggered avalanches. On Friday, Mark and his partner observed extensive natural activity near Fairy Lake in the northern Bridger Range ([photo](#)). On the same day a skier triggered and was caught in a potentially deadly slide on Saddle Peak ([photo1](#), [photo2](#)). A skier also triggered a large and dangerous slide in Wolverine Bowl north of Bridger Bowl ski area ([photo1](#), [photo2](#), [video](#)).

Farther south, natural and human triggered avalanches have been reported in the mountains around Cooke City. This past Wednesday a snowmobiler was killed by an avalanche on the road leading to Daisy Pass ([photo](#), [video](#)). Yesterday, in the mountains around West Yellowstone, skiers experienced widespread cracking and collapsing, obvious signs of instability.

All these clues are sending a very clear message - THE SNOWPACK IS HIGHLY UNSTABLE! Staying off any steep slope, this includes lower angle slopes connected to steeper slopes is highly recommended. It's important to remember that even small slopes such as road cuts can produce deadly avalanches.

Today, if you travel in avalanche terrain you will likely find avalanches. For this reason the avalanche danger is rated **HIGH** on all slopes.

The northern Gallatin and northern Madison Ranges:

Although the northern Madison and northern Gallatin Ranges have slipped just under the avalanche warning criteria, they still have dangerous avalanche conditions. Yesterday, six inches of snow fell in a short period of time, applying additional stress to an already struggling snowpack. In addition to the new snow, winds blew 30-40 mph out of the west/northwest during the storm, heavily loading slopes on the east half of the compass. Today, wind loaded slopes will be the most likely to produce natural and human triggered avalanches, however, slopes steeper than 35 degrees will also be prone to avalanche activity.

Many avalanches will fracture on a layer of weak, near surface facets buried 1-2 feet deep. This layer exists on all aspects and in all areas. However, a few low elevation areas do not have it, mainly in the northern Gallatin Range. When avalanches break on this layer, they can easily step down to facets near the ground. This scenario occurred over the past few days at both Big Sky and Moonlight Basin ski areas during control work ([photo](#)). Also, a skier near Big Sky observed 6 natural avalanches and remotely triggered a slide from thirty feet away on Friday ([photo](#)).

Today, staying safe in the backcountry will depend entirely on decision making. Slopes full of untracked powder will have a powerful allure, but the avalanche dragon will be lurking. Make sure terrain is assessed carefully and always stay in visual and voice contact with your partner.

Today, very dangerous avalanche conditions exist on all wind load slopes and slopes steeper than 35 degrees which have a **HIGH** avalanche danger. Less steep, non wind loaded slopes have a **CONSIDERABLE** avalanche danger.

Additional Information

The accident reports for the avalanche fatality near Cooke City and the slide on Saddle Peak are now available. See links below.

http://www.mtavalanche.com/sites/default/files/Saddle%20Peak%20Accident_Public.pdf

<http://www.mtavalanche.com/sites/default/files/Daisy%20Pass%20Avalanche%20Public.pdf>

Also, another avalanche fatality occurred yesterday near Marias Pass outside of Glacier National Park. This makes the third avalanche fatality to hit Montana in the past six days and raises the total number of avalanche fatalities in the United States to 20.

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 or call us at 587-6984.

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.

31st Annual Pinhead Classic

Come to Bridger Bowl on Saturday, March 17th (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.