GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Fri Feb 6, 2009

Good morning. This is Mark Staples with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Advisory issued Friday, February 6th, at 7:30 a.m. The Pinhead Classic Telemark Festival in cooperation with the Friends of the Avalanche Center sponsor today's advisory. This advisory does not apply to operating ski areas.

Mountain Weather

Feeble winter weather has come to southwest Montana with temperatures in the mid 20s F and southerly ridgetop winds blowing 15-30 mph this morning. Cloudy skies today will produce snow with 2-4 inches accumulating by tomorrow morning. Mountain temperatures will remain in the 20s and mostly calm southwest winds will blow 10-20 mph shifting to the west. Tomorrow snowfall will end and a small ridge will bring dry weather for the rest of the weekend.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

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

Prolonged warm dry weather has allowed folks to venture onto bigger slopes with slowly increasing confidence. One group skiing Gallatin Peak in the northern Madison Range said "we stayed light on our feet" expressing some but not complete confidence in stability. A regular observer in Cooke City has been keeping a close watch on steeper wind loaded slopes which he said "have a moderate yet heavy hazard." Another observer gained a bird's eye view recently while flying and could not spot any recent avalanches.

Faceted snow found near the ground and much smaller faceted crystals buried about 6-12 inches deep are the two concerns. Both layers have gained some strength. More importantly dry weather has not stressed these layers with the weight of new snow. One group on an east aspect near 10,000 ft found facets near the ground still propagating fractures in stability tests after repeated pounding. In some high elevation areas strong winds last weekend scoured and groomed slopes further reducing stress on the snowpack. Unfortunately variability between slopes has increased. Many are mostly stable while some terrain features retain dangerous conditions and are capable of producing an avalanche under the weight of a human trigger. For today with the possibility of human triggered avalanches all slopes have a MODERATE danger.

The Bridger Range:

A similar snowpack exists in the Bridger Range where snowfall has been especially meager. The snow has been living a relatively stress free lifestyle and will not likely suffer a breakdown. Even with the irritation of a skier or rider, human triggered avalanches on less steep slopes are unlikely. For today, the avalanche danger is rated MODERATE on slopes steeper than 35 degrees and LOW everywhere else.

MONTANA ALE WORKS EVENT

Montana Ale Works is hosting a “Beer vs. Wine Dinner” to benefit the Friends of the Avalanche Center on Monday, February 9th at 6:30 p.m. Chef Roth Jordan and Sous-Chef Tony Adjutant will craft a five course special menu to be paired with both Montana Micro Brews and fine wines. This fun event will include “score cards” for guests to compare which beverage (beer or wine) created a better pairing with each course. DINNER LIMITED TO 40 SEATS. TICKETS ARE $75/SEAT, ALL INCLUSIVE, AND AVAILABLE AT MONTANA ALE WORKS OR 587-7700. More details are on our calendar at http://www.mtavalanche.com/education/index.shtml

KING AND QUEEN OF THE RIDGE

The 6th Annual King and Queen of the Ridge will be held at Bridger Bowl on Saturday, February 14th. ALL proceeds go to the Friends of the Avalanche Center who use the money to promote avalanche education in southwest Montana. Last winter the Friends education program gave 58 classes reaching over 1,500 people. You can help raise money to continue this education in 2 ways:

1). Get pledges and hike the ridge. You don’t have to do 20 laps – you can get flat pledges and hike just once! Or you can test your mettle and try and break John Yarington’s record of 27 laps in 5 hours.

2). Sponsor someone. If you don’t have someone to sponsor, consider sponsoring either Mark or myself since we’ll be hiking for dollars. Doug’s been riding the office and not skiing much so I wouldn’t expect him to get in many laps and a flat pledge would work best.

You can go to http://www.bridgerbowl.com/events/view_event/15/ for more information and registration forms.

I will issue the next advisory tomorrow morning at 7:30 a.m. If you get out in the backcountry give us a call or send us an email with your observations. You can reach us at 587-6984 or at mtavalanche@gmail.com