



12 April 2012

Greetings!

We just wrapped up our 22nd season of avalanche forecasting with 138 advisories. It was a busy, challenging winter and Mark Staples, Eric Knoff and I want to thank everyone for their support.

The winter started out with La Nina's flirtatious promises. We truly believed we were going steady, reaping her gifts of deep and plentiful snow, but in the end she wouldn't return our calls. We were jilted for Alaska and lived with below average snowfall for most of the season which allowed weak, faceted snow to form at the ground. This poor snow structure led to many avalanches and prolonged periods of dangerous conditions. The first measurable snowfall occurred on November 6th with the season's first avalanches reported the next day. We issued intermittent avalanche bulletins until beginning daily advisories on December 7th. By the time the first large snowstorm arrived on December 29th, the snowpack's foundation had changed to rotten, airy depth hoar. We issued our first Avalanche Warning on the 30th. Before sunset on the 31st there were two separate avalanche fatalities outside Cooke City involving a skier and snowmobiler. Seven weeks later a huge snowstorm on top of an unstable snowpack led to a third fatality outside Cooke City, also involving a snowmobiler. Over the course of the winter we issued five separate Avalanche Warnings, a new record. The persistent weak layer at the ground caused some slopes to avalanche two or three times. There were many close calls in the backcountry. At season's end, besides the three fatalities, 51 avalanche incidents were reported.

THE GNFAC INDEX

- Total number of people getting our advisory every day: 4,365
- Percentage increase over last year: 15
- Number of "Likes" on Facebook and "Followers" on Twitter: 1,953 and 836
- Total number of avalanche classes taught and individual attendees: 80 and 4,411
- The number of Level 2 avalanche certification classes offered for snowmobilers by the GNFAC: 1
- Total number offered in the entire US, ever: 1
- The number of YouTube videos made this season about the snowpack: 55
- Number of views: 117,039
- Number of miles logged on each of the two Yamaha Nytro snowmobiles that were donated by Cooke City Motorsports: 1,350

- Estimated highway miles we drove to access the field: 14,000
- Number of field days: 110
- Days that volunteers accompanied us into the field: 84
- Gallons of coffee downed by Doug this season (estimate): 30
- Amount the Friends of the Avalanche Center spent this season on education, weather stations, administrative support and snowmobiles, respectively: \$29,681; \$6,200; \$4,296; 2,500
- Total amount the Friends have spent in support of the GNFAC since 1992: \$258,000
- The number of incidents and fatalities in the Gallatin National Forest since our inception 22 years ago: 715 and 38

Running the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center is a community wide effort. We rely on volunteers and broad financial support for our daily operation. Contributions from the Friends of the Avalanche Center and a Recreation Trails Grant from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks total 45% of our yearly budget. We are indebted to the recreation community and local businesses for supporting the Friends every year. The success of the GNFAC is a direct reflection of these strong local ties. Thank you for another great season.

With gratitude,

Doug Chabot