



Beacon Checker and Avalanche Danger sign heading out of Cooke City. Photo: M. Simone

May 9, 2023

We just ended our 33rd year of operation with a winter of cold temperatures, above average snowfall and snow depth measuring 100% to 152% of normal on April 1. After a few anemic seasons this was a reminder that the snowfall pendulum swings both directions. A basic tenet of forecasting is that more snow equals more avalanches. The first snow fell on October 21 and the first recorded avalanche was seen the next day in Beehive Basin. We issued 12 early season bulletins before starting daily avalanche forecasts on November 23. On April 11 we issued our 140th and last forecast which was followed by bi-weekly updates through April.

Our team of 4 full-time avalanche specialists remained the same. Myself, Alex Marienthal, Ian Hoyer and Dave Zinn dug pits, made movies, investigated avalanches, wrote forecasts and taught classes. This season our intern was Alex Haddad, an MSU graduate student who accompanied us on 28 field days, learned to snowmobile, broke trail, dug many snowpits and helped us in the office.

Weak snow formed at the ground early in the season, and a few more weak layers were created during brief periods of clear weather through the winter. Steady snowfall loaded these layers, which resulted in an elevated avalanche danger for days at a time. On New Year's Eve, a snowmobiler was killed in an avalanche near Cooke City. We issued Avalanche Warnings on 8 days in our forecast area. The public also took advantage of our new Observation Page and submitted observations, including 62 avalanche incidents. Nationally there have been 25 avalanche deaths, near the 10-year average of 27.

The Friends of the Avalanche Center and the GNFAAC worked together to teach avalanche classes. Shannon Regan, Education Coordinator, infused the avalanche education program with new energy and focus. In total we offered 100 classes to 5,489 people, including 626 kids under 18 and 566 snowmobilers.

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- Total number of people getting our daily forecast: 6,595
- Number of field days: 128

- Number of snowpits recorded in SnowPilot.org: 146
- Number of observations submitted this season: 686
- Number of belts we burned through on our Yamaha Mtn Max sleds: 3
 - Total number we burned through in the last 5 years: 0
 - #1 reason why: deep snow
- Miles off trail in Lionhead that Doug ripped the A-arm off a sled: 12
 - Number of hours it took Dave to ride it back out on 1 ski: 4
 - Frequency that Dave reminds Doug that he did this for him: Every. Single. Day.
- Miles ridden on each new sled: 1,700
- Scariest words I heard all season: Ian saying, “I think this will go, we should be alright”, before dropping off the trail on a sled into thick trees. (It worked. Barely.)
- Reported avalanche incidents last season and this winter: 29 and 62
- Number of videos and total views: 141 and 1,349,958 views
- Total followers on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter: 21,700; 18,557; 7,761; and 2,335.
 - Percentage increase from last year: 12%

The GNFAAC relies on many individuals and community partnerships to operate. The Friends of the Avalanche Center along with a grant from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks help fund our education program and operations with 50% of our total budget. In June we will send out a detailed annual report outlining all our programs, budget, and community support.

Enjoy the spring and summer. When I asked our office Magic 8 Ball if next winter will have historically heavy snowfall, it unequivocally answered, “Yes”, so there you have it.

All the best,



Doug Chabot
Director

Forest Service
Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center