GNFAC Avalanche Advisory for Mon Apr 11, 2016

This avalanche information bulletin is issued on April 11, 2016 and does not expire. The Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center has stopped issuing avalanche advisories for the season. Traveling in the backcountry requires careful snowpack evaluation. Avalanches don't end until the snow melts.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

Spring is an active time in the mountains. Weather and snow conditions can change quickly, producing a variety of avalanche problems. Here are some avalanche concerns to keep in mind:

1. WET SNOW AVALANCHES

Spring and wet snow avalanches go hand-in-hand. Warmer temperatures and strong solar input (increased sunshine) can weaken the snowpack and increase wet avalanche activity. Conditions tend to become most unstable when temperatures stay above freezing for multiple days and nights in a row. During prolonged periods of above freezing temperatures, it's best to avoid avalanche terrain. If temperatures drop below freezing at night conditions will stabilize during the morning hours and become increasingly unstable as the day heats up, necessitating an early, sometimes pre-dawn start to your backcountry adventure. Typically, wet snow avalanches start on east and south facing slopes and transition onto west and potentially north facing slopes as the day progresses. Be aware that sunny aspects may have a wet snow avalanche danger while shadier slopes still have a dry snow avalanche danger. Pinwheels and point releases are obvious signs of wet snow instability. Getting off of steep, sunny slopes should be considered when these signs are present. Also, punching to the ground in wet, unsupportable snow is a red flag. Wet snow avalanches, whether loose snow or wet slabs, can be powerful, destructive and very dangerous.

Alex wrote an article detailing the spring avalanche problems **HERE**.

2. NEW SNOW AND WIND-LOADING

Spring storms are notorious for depositing heavy amounts of snow in the mountains. Fortunately, the snowpack throughout our advisory area is mostly stable, which will help keep avalanche activity limited to new snow instabilities if the mountains receive more snow. The main problems to look out for are avalanches breaking within the new snow, wind slabs, and loose snow avalanches. Wind loaded slopes are especially dangerous and should be evaluated carefully before committing to steep terrain. Remember, the likelihood of triggering avalanches spikes during and immediately after significant snow storms. During spring conditions, new snow instabilities tend to stabilize quickly, but it's a good idea to give new snow a day to adjust before hitting big terrain.

3. CORNICES

Cornices become increasingly unstable as the snow transitions from a cold winter pack to a warmer, wetter snowpack. They often lose strength and become unstable during prolonged periods of above freezing temperatures. They can break off suddenly and farther back than one might expect. Give these massive chunks of snow a wide berth along the ridges. It's also important to avoid traveling underneath large cornices as they

can break naturally. Cornice falls can also entrain large amounts of loose snow or trigger slab avalanches. Regardless of whether a cornice triggers a slide or not, a falling cornice is dangerous to anyone in its path.

4. DISCLAIMER

It does not matter if new snow falls or not, avalanches *will* continue to occur until the existing snowpack is mostly gone. Always assess the slope you plan to ride with diligence and safety in mind. Do not let your guard down. Travel with a partner, carry rescue gear and only expose one person at a time in avalanche terrain.

Have a safe and enjoyable spring and summer!

Doug, Eric and Alex