



Investigating an avalanche crown on the Fin, Cooke City, January 9.

April 13, 2021

We just ended our 31st year of operation after a winter of increased backcountry traffic on an avalanche prone snowpack. The season started on October 14 with an early season snowstorm and first recorded avalanches. We issued 12 early season bulletins before the start of the daily forecasts which ran for 121 days from December 12 to April 11.

This was the first season we've had 4 full-time forecasters which gave us increased flexibility to cover more areas and get out in the field with each other. Because COVID-19 put a crimp in our volunteer program we relied on our intern Zach Keskinen to be a regular field partner.

The season was defined by weak, sugary snow near the ground which avalanched on many slopes, sometimes more than once. Cooke City was spared this weakness, but our forecast area as well as most of the Rocky Mountains were not. This resulted in 36 avalanche fatalities in the United States: 22 skier/snowboarder, 8 snowmobiler, 5 climber/hiker. Tragically a local splitboarder was killed in an avalanche on February 14 in Beehive Basin, our only fatality. Throughout the Custer Gallatin National Forest there were 53 avalanche incidents reported (aka. close calls), some resulting in injuries and partial burials. The busiest week for avalanche activity was between January 2-9 when over 60 avalanches and 12 incidents were reported.

We worked with the Friends of the Avalanche Center to move our education platform online and dropped our student to instructor ratios to 4:1 in response to the pandemic. We taught 43 classes to 3,110 participants, including 458 snowmobilers and 467 kids under 18. With funding from Montana State Parks we continued our weekly Cooke City education program consisting of a Friday weather and avalanche video update and Saturday rescue practice. This is the 5th year of the program and 5th year without a fatality in Cooke City.

GNFAC INDEX

- Total number of people getting our daily forecast: 6,951
- Percentage of people accessing mtavalanche.com on a smartphone, desktop, or tablet: 62%, 36%, 2%
- Number of Beacon Checkers at trailheads: 8

- Number of field days: 112
 - Area with the most field days: Cooke City with 22
- Number of snowpits we recorded in SnowPilot.org: 135
- Number of snowmobile a-arms broken by rocks in the first 100 miles of riding: 3
 - Forecaster with the most: Dave with 2
- Highest wind gust reported: 104 mph on Lone Peak Summit, March 29
- Most number of skiers caught in a single avalanche: 3
 - Where and when: on The Fin outside Cooke City, January 8
- Percent annual increase of vehicle traffic to Hyalite in January: 67%
 - Total number of vehicles in January: 17,297
- Reported avalanches and incidents: 318 and 53
- The most avalanches recorded in a single day this season: 17+ on January 9
- Number of videos and total views: 146 and 1,147,735 views
 - % increase in views from last winter: 97%
- Total number of minutes/days watched on YouTube: 523,152 minutes/363.3 days
 - Aka. a year of non-stop YouTube avalanche bliss
- Number of times Doug was witnessed double-ejecting out of his skis: 1
 - Number of times unwitnessed: he's not saying
- Total followers on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter: 16,300; 13,796; 5,800; and 2,197
 - Percentage increase from last year: 25%

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. Later this spring we will send out a detailed annual report outlining all our programs, budget, and community support.

Enjoy the spring and summer. We will be back in October to get ready for a storm packed winter!

All the best,



Doug Chabot
Director

Forest Service
Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center