

**Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center**  
**Avalanche Advisory**

Contact: Kevin Davis (208) 265-6686, Ed Odegaard (208) 245-6209, or John Olson (208) 265-6608

This message available by calling (208) 765-7323 or toll-free at 1-866-489-8664.

E-mail address: [kevingdavis@fs.fed.us](mailto:kevingdavis@fs.fed.us), [eodegaard@fs.fed.us](mailto:eodegaard@fs.fed.us), [jrolson@fs.fed.us](mailto:jrolson@fs.fed.us)

Good Morning, Kevin Davis here with the Idaho Panhandle National Forest Avalanche Center. This advisory is valid for today, December 18th, 2009. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, December 18<sup>th</sup>. Special thanks to Idaho Parks and Recreation for sponsoring this morning's avalanche advisory. Thanks also goes to Dave Alley and the Silver Mountain Ski Patrol who called in with observations from their avalanche safety work at the ski area today.

**WEATHER**

The weather has been variable in the mountains but you may have noticed the rain in the valleys on a few days this week. Rain was intermittent in the mountains mixed with snow. At the highest elevations snow predominated where we picked up 12 inches of new snow at Lookout Pass, 14 inches at Lost Lake, 20 inches at Bear Mountain, and 12 inches at Hidden Lake. Weather systems were mainly out of the W/SW so loading is more pronounced on north and east aspects. For today the NWS is predicting a 40% chance of 1 inch of new snow in the mountains with moderate south winds and temperatures right at freezing. This evening the chance of snow increases across our area with an additional inch of snow, SW winds, and a low of 25 degrees. The outlook for Saturday calls for a slight chance of more snow with accumulations in the 1-2 inch range and temperatures fluctuating around freezing. On Sunday the chance of snow greatly increases and we can expect 2-4 inches to the south and 3-5 inches to the north.

**Avalanche conditions will remain for the outlook period.**

**Avalanche conditions for the entire Idaho Panhandle National Forest Advisory Area are rated as CONSIDERABLE on all aspects steeper than 30 degrees above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on slopes less than 30 degrees and below 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely, human triggered avalanches are **possible**.

Snowpack

Natural avalanches were occurring yesterday on steep northerly terrain as the snowpack adjusts to heavy loading from wet snow and rain. Explosive control at both Schweitzer Mountain and Silver Mountain yielded results on many terrain features. The slides were running to near the ground in places on the very faceted, sugary snow. In the Selkirks Oly and I found a significant weak layer midpack at a pronounced layer of surface hoar. On a 35 degree slope the weak layer failed when the block was isolated or with very light stress applied. The surface snow is highly variable from a slight ice crust, to hard wind

slab to several inches of powder. Within the pack the conditions are more consistent with a very weak base in the lower 2 feet and faceting snow around the surface hoar layer in the upper 2 feet of snow. The cold weakened that firm wind slab and most layers in the pack are loose and faceted. This means the bridge strength of dense layers is mostly gone. New snow load and loading from your weight will be more likely to penetrate to underlying weak layers.



### Terrain

Not a lot of snow out there yet so the shrubbery and logs and rocks are still poking out of the snow off trail making it difficult to get around in all but the highest elevations. There is enough snow for layers to have formed and resulted in early season avalanche activity. There is a considerable chance today that you could trigger an avalanche on any aspect in steep terrain. Oly and I were generating telltale whumphing on west aspects in the Selkirks near Schweitzer yesterday. Natural avalanche activity was most pronounced on northerly aspects. Surface conditions are variable with respect to aspect. Be aware of shallow snowpack and stay away since it is very weak and stay away from steep terrain surrounded by shallow snow.

The St. Joe and Lookout Pass crew will be out next week and we will issue our advisory for Christmas, Friday, December 25<sup>th</sup>. If you are out and about in the mountains, which I know you will be, and you see avalanche activity or you have some pit information, please give us a call or email so we can include it in the advisory.

If you're at Schweitzer Mountain this week and have your avalanche gear take advantage of the free avalanche beacon training at 10AM on Sunday at the Clock Tower. Schweitzer Patrol will help you hone your skills with a 1 hour free training. After that, hit the beacon park at the top of the Basin Express, compliments of the Selkirk Powder Company. For a great resource for avalanche education and weather observations check out <http://www.selkirkpowderco.com/>. On Thursday of next week Specialty Recreation on Kathleen in CDA will host an avalanche awareness class, 12/17/09. There will be free hotdogs at 6:00 pm and an avalanche presentation from 7:00 to 8:00 pm. Stop by see the new gear and get some knowledge to use it safely this winter!

The State of Idaho Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the IPNF-AC, is conducting (**Free**) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers this winter in Coeur d' Alene on January 8 and 9, Sandpoint February 12-13, and in Priest Lake March 5-6. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at [www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov](http://www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov), or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

The Panhandle Avalanche Center in Sandpoint and Sandpoint Parks and Recreation is sponsoring free avalanche workshops for all snowgoers. "Decision Making in the Backcountry" workshops will be offered 1/6/10 and 2/10/10. These are offered at the old Federal Building in Sandpoint and are ***Free to the public***. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 752-5130. In Avery contact Ed Odegaard at 245-6209.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686 and Ed Odegaard in Avery by calling (208) 245-6209.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.