

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

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Good Morning, this is Kevin Davis with the IPNF avalanche advisory, valid for today, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, plus an outlook for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, January 8<sup>th</sup>. Special thanks to Idaho Parks and Recreation for sponsoring this morning's avalanche advisory. Check out their impressive lineup of snowmobile avalanche awareness course offerings this year (more information below).

**WEATHER**

It has been a rather tame week for the weather but I think you may all recognize a possible trend in our winter weather pattern. Cold – snow – warm, has recurred several times now with the effect of burying several significant weak layers of surface hoar and faceted snow. It is likely to happen again this weekend with the expected snow tonight. The Idaho Panhandle picked up several inches of new snow Monday through Tuesday evening and then very cold temperatures prevailed from Wednesday to today. What you will notice in the pack from this weather synopsis is settlement in the low density new snow about 1 foot in depth and then a firmer pack around 3 visible weak layers. The National Weather Service is calling for increasing clouds today with highs in the 30's and light winds out of the south. Tonight the first in a steady stream of snowfall is expected with accumulations of an inch or less. There is a hazardous weather outlook for the southern portion of our forecast region and this is mainly to warn travelers of freezing rain and sleet at lower elevations. The outlook for Saturday and Sunday calls for continued snow accumulations of snow tomorrow and into the evening with mountain temperatures staying fairly consistent around 30 and winds mainly SW. If we get the upper range of snowfall predictions the avalanche hazard will remain for the outlook period.

**Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.**

Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**.

**Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.**

Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**.

Snowpack

In the Cabinet Mountains yesterday Oly and I north of Moose Lake. On exposed slopes we encountered a windslab that was very unstable over the buried surface hoar. In our pit on a NE slope at 5,800 feet we found just over 5 feet of snow and 4 prominent layers with different degrees of weakness.

Today you are likely to find that the weakest layer is near surface facets about 8-10 inches deep residing on a NE aspect. Below this is the prominent surface hoar layer that formed just prior to New Year's and resides on all aspects and can vary from a few

inches deep on southerly aspects to over 1 foot on northerly aspects. The early December surface hoar layer is still recognizable near the base over the very faceted snow. Expect another buried surface hoar layer to exist this weekend as the pattern continues.



### Terrain

We are getting settlement in the new snow that fell this week. Check this upper layer for weakness in the near-surface facets mainly of northerly aspects. Be cautious of any areas of windslabbed snow in exposed areas or where snow has been heavily loaded. Oly and I triggered a small windslab on an E aspect. The possibility of propagating avalanches to deeper weak layers in the pack is a real possibility right now. The background in this picture shows convex terrain to be cautious around today and this weekend.



**Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as CONSIDERABLE on north and wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**.

### Snowpack

On Lookout Pass, Carole and Dan found their weakest layer at 1.5 feet deep at the most recently buried surface hoar layer. Shear test produced easy to moderate shears and all failed fast and clean. The faceted layer at the ground is still weak and only buried under about 4 feet of snow. Places where the snow is shallow around rock outcrops will be weak and slides could potentially pull out to the ground.

### Terrain

They did not observe any natural avalanches in the Basin but they did note that the easterly slopes look very wind-loaded. Avoid steep exposed slopes that are windslabbed as they will be sensitive to the weight of a person and a snowmobile. Be cautious in terrain that is connected to open slopes above. Windslabbed areas that are convex will be the weakest areas on a slope but also present a good opportunity to test the stability in low consequence terrain.

**Avalanche conditions for the St. Joe Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on north and wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**.

### Snowpack

Ed made it out to Twin Saddle to a NE aspect at 5,200'. He was getting two easy shears in the upper 1 foot of the pack which was very cold and thus undergoing the near-surface faceting process, getting weaker. The down near the bottom he got a clean release on the slight crust over the very faceted snow at the base. It shows similar layering as the snowpack to the north and thus the potential for propagating to deeper weak layers in the pack.

### Terrain

Ed's biggest concern was for leeward slopes that were windslabbed and heavily loaded. With new snow load this weekend watch for those areas to become weaker, especially if we get the upper end of the predicted snowfall.

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

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/>.

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 and 2/10/10. Oly had a great class on Wednesday. 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 783-2130. 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.

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.**