

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
Avalanche Advisory

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This is Kevin Davis with the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center. Today is November 22, 2010. We will begin issuing regular avalanche advisories by December 17th. The avalanche advisory will be issued every Friday at 7:30 AM with an outlook for Saturday and Sunday, same as always. As the snow accumulates and your adventures take you further into the backcountry send us your pit data, avalanche observations, or pictures. Good information goes a long way.

Winter began this year in late October with the first significant accumulation of snow in the high country. I spoke with one motivated snowmobiler that got up to Lunch Peak in the Cabinets and he found himself bottoming out in more than 2 feet of snow. Most of that snow melted in early November with mild temperatures and a lot of rain. What *is* left of that October snow remains as a crust layer at the ground. Since the middle of November we have seen a steady increase in the mountain snowpack. One storm that favored the Cabinet and Selkirk Mountains, dropped the equivalent of 2-3 inches of rain which added up to about 16 inches of new snow. Snow falling with these recent storms is adding lighter density snow on top. That is a more stable scenario than how we began last year with 5% powder as our base. The cold temperatures for the foreseeable future will be faceting the snowpack and this will result in weaker bonds between layers. This will be most pronounced in areas of thin snowpack. Keep in mind that north faces are being scoured now with the strong north winds. North faces tend to preserve weak layers, being colder, and this may not be a good start with thin coverage undergoing faceting of the base layers.

Overall, the Selkirks and Cabinets are slightly behind the average snow depth for this time of the year and the St. Joe's and Coeur d'Alene's are seeing about half the average depth. You'll find almost 4 feet in the mountains of the northern portion of our forecast region and about 2-3 feet in the mountains to the south. You could be getting out on some recon missions to test the snow coverage and base layer stability. Even though there is not a lot of snow don't let your guard down if you are in avalanche terrain. Windloaded snow could be unstable in steeper chutes and gullies or below ridgelines. There may not be enough snow to bury you but it could be enough to push you into some trees or rocks and bang you up. Don't start the season off with an injury. Stumps and rocks are still protruding so be careful where snow coverage is still thin.

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 December 3rd and January 14th and 15th, St. Maries January 28th and 29th, and in

Bonnors Ferry February 11th and 12th. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at 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 12/6/10. "What we can learn from ten years of avalanche accident review in North Idaho" workshops will be offered 1/5/11 and 2/9/11. These are offered at the new Forest Service 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.