

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
Avalanche Advisory

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This is Kevin Davis with the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center. This advisory is valid for today, December 17th, 2010, plus an outlook for the 18th and 19th. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and the hazard rating will remain valid through midnight, December 17th. Special thanks to Idaho Parks and Recreation for sponsoring this morning's avalanche advisory.

Yesterday out in the mountains around Lookout Pass Dan and Allen had good travel conditions. They dug pits on north and south aspects at about 6,000 feet. Snow depth varied from 4 feet on the south aspect to 6 feet on the north. They identified layers in the pack around crusts and changes in density but did not produce easy shears in their stress tests. They did not observe any previous avalanche activity from the bout of nasty weather we had earlier in the week nor did they find the surface hoar layer from last week to be problematic. In the Selkirks, Eric and I found a thick supportable crust on northerly aspects and two layers of graupel in about 10 inches of new snow that slid with easy to moderate force. This layering changed with the aspect with the crust varying from 6 inch bomber on the north, slightly less 3 inch on the west, and breakable on the east aspect. The graupel layers also varied with aspect. One thing was consistent, a weak faceted layer above and below the crust layer. We found the layer of surface hoar 3 feet deep and could not produce shears but it's something to be aware of. How will the incoming weather affect our snowpack? Today will be mostly sunny and cold, with a persistent east wind and no new snow. An increasing chance of snow develops for the weekend with cold temperatures and an easterly wind. The outlook for Saturday and Sunday calls for a good chance of moderate accumulations of snow across our forecast region and east winds blowing 6-10mph in the south and slightly stronger to the north. Look for westerly, SW-NW, aspects to receive some windloading. The avalanche danger will remain for the outlook period.

Avalanche conditions for the entire Idaho Panhandle National Forest Advisory Area are rated as MODERATE on all aspects greater than 30 degrees above 5,000 feet.

Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible.

Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW aspects less than 30 degrees. The next advisory will be issued on Christmas Day.

This is a good time to hone your avalanche skills by taking an avalanche course. There are two great resources in our area for avalanche education. Shep Snow offers certified courses out of Sandpoint and teaches the field sessions at Schweitzer Mountain. For more information go to, <http://thesnowschoo.com/>. Peak Adventures, in Cataldo, Idaho,

is offering an avalanche awareness course the first weekend after New Year's Eve. For more information see their website at <https://peaksnowcats.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 14th and 15th, St. Maries January 28th and 29th, and in Bonners 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 this winter. Our next course will be a day in the life of a backcountry powderhound, "What do you need to know, when, where, and how do I get the information I need, right now!" That will be offered 1/5/11 and is a slight change from what we have been advertising, but don't miss it. Then, "What we can learn from ten years of avalanche accident review in North Idaho", offered 2/9/11. These are offered at the new Forest Service Building in Sandpoint at 6PM and are **Free to the public**. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 752-5130. So far Dan has a workshop scheduled for January 22nd at 9AM and will be an interactive class focusing on avalanche dynamics. 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.