

# US FOREST SERVICE NORTHWEST MONTANA BACKCOUNTRY AVALANCHE ADVISORY

FOR THE GLACIER PARK AND FLATHEAD & KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST AREAS

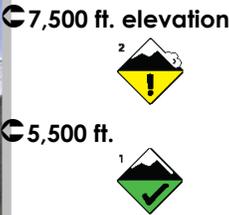
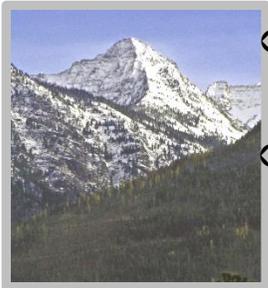
*Avalanche advisory does not apply to developed ski areas*

**Issue Date:**  
**Valid Until:**  
**Next Update:**  
**Issued by:**

**5:30 AM, Friday, December 9, 2011**  
Midnight, Friday, December 9, 2011  
Friday, December 16, 2011  
Stan Bones

This advisory is a product of the US Forest Service, US Dept. of Agriculture. Along with other snow and avalanche information, it is originally posted at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/flathead>. An audio summary is available via telephone at 406-257-8402

**All Mountain Ranges**



**Avalanche Danger Summary**

**2 - Moderate : 5,500 to 7,500 ft. elevation on steep, open terrain**

**1 - Low : below 5,500 ft. elevation**

**AVALANCHE – INSTABILITY DESCRIPTION**

**All Mountain Ranges - 5,500 to 7,500 ft. elevation**

<b>Danger Level</b>	<b>2 - MODERATE</b>
<b>Confidence</b>	Good
<b>Travel Advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heightened avalanche conditions on steep, open slopes and gullies</li> <li>• Evaluate snow and terrain carefully</li> </ul>
<b>Likelihood of Avalanches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural avalanche <b>unlikely</b></li> <li>• Human triggered avalanches <b>possible</b></li> </ul>
<b>Avalanche Size &amp; Distribution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small avalanches in specific areas or</li> <li>• Larger avalanches in isolated areas</li> <li>• <b>Concern is steep, open slopes and gullies lacking vegetative and terrain anchors</b></li> </ul>

**AVALANCHE – INSTABILITY DESCRIPTION**

**All Mountain Ranges - below 5,500 ft. elevation**

<b>Danger Level</b>	<b>1 - LOW</b>
<b>Confidence</b>	Good
<b>Travel Advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally safe avalanche conditions exist</li> <li>• Watch for unstable snow on isolated terrain features</li> </ul>
<b>Likelihood of Avalanches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both natural and human triggered avalanche <b>unlikely</b></li> </ul>
<b>Avalanche Size &amp; Distribution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very small avalanches in widespread areas or</li> <li>• Small avalanche in isolated areas</li> </ul>

*Because of the general nature of this advisory message, each backcountry party will always need to make their own time and site specific avalanche hazard evaluations. This advisory best describes conditions at the time of its issuance. As time passes avalanche and snow conditions may change, sometimes quite rapidly. Elevation and geographic distinctions used are approximate and transition zones between hazards exist.*

### Recent Mountain Weather

<b>Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Saturday –Thursday</u> ---Persisting high pressure and a mostly dry air mass stalled over the region</li> </ul>
<b>Precipitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry at most all locations</li> <li>• Only trace amounts of very light, new, snowfall at a few sites</li> </ul>
<b>Temperature</b>	Flathead Area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Sunday/Monday night and Thursday morning</u> - Clear nighttime skies produced low temps of 10 to 0°F at many locations</li> <li>• Weak temperature inversions</li> </ul>
	Kootenai Area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temps approx. 10°F warmer than the Flathead</li> </ul>
<b>Wind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winds have been very light – 0-5MPH, Friday through Wednesday</li> <li>• Thursday increased to approx. 15 MPH, W'erly</li> <li>• Little to no snow available for wind transport however</li> </ul>

### Field Observation Locations

Thursday, 12-08-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allen Peak, East Cabinet Range, S of Libby</li> <li>• Kimmerly Basin, S'ern Whitefish Range, NW of Columbia Falls</li> </ul>
<b>Observer Report Locations</b>	
Tuesday, 12-06-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whitefish Mountain, Central Whitefish Range, NE of Olney near Red Meadow Lake</li> </ul>

<b>Avalanches Observed</b>	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None observed</li> <li>• Shallow snowpack with an abundance of vegetative and terrain anchors is currently found widespread over the region</li> </ul>
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Instability Concern / Avalanche Problem	Level of Concern	Most★★★    Less★★    Least ★		
New Storm or Near Surface Snow	★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant new snow loading since Tuesday, 11-29-11</li> </ul>		
Wind Loading	★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Below 7,500 ft. elevation Thursday, light to moderate ridge and mountain top winds</li> <li>• Very little new or loose surface snow available for transport however</li> </ul>		
Buried or Persistent Weak Layer	★★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recent cold, clear nights producing steep temperature gradients in the region's shallow snow packs</li> <li>• Weakly bonded, faceted snow frequently found at the surface</li> <li>• Weakly bonded decomposing melt freeze ice found at the base of some shallow snow packs on cold E'erly and N'erlys aspects</li> </ul>		
Spring Wet Snow or Melt-Freeze		Not applicable		
Rain-on-Snow		Not applicable		
Loose Snow		None observed		
Other Concerns				

**Weather Forecast**[Current NWS Backcountry Forecast](#)

<b>Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High pressure forecasted to strengthen into Saturday, supporting a drier, warmer air mass</li> <li>• A weak disturbance is expected to brush the region Sunday, but little precipitation is anticipated</li> </ul>
<b>Precipitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant precip forecasted</li> </ul>
<b>Temperature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daytime temperatures in the high 20's to low 30'sF</li> <li>• Nighttime temperature inversions with colder conditions in the valleys (mid 10's to mid 20's F) vs higher elevations (low to mid 20's F)</li> <li>• Warming forecasted Thursday</li> </ul>
<b>Wind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Light – 0-10MPH, mostly SW' erly</li> </ul>

**Avalanche Outlook**

<b>Trend</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Into next week the avalanche danger is expected to remain near current levels</li> </ul>
<b>Concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With an abundance of vegetative and terrain anchors coupled with a shallow, mostly stable snowpack</li> </ul>
<b>Comment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>In spite of the relative widespread stability currently always carry and know how to use avalanche safety equipment</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Watch for a possible rapid change in weather conditions beyond forecast amounts</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Be alert that if a slope is open enough to ski or highmark currently it is very likely an established avalanche path.</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Check out the site specific snow stability before jumping in or on</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>Know that shallow snowpacks are notorious for producing trauma injury and death, washing victims over cliffs and into rocks.</i></b></li> </ul>

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## Upcoming Events

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On Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup> Flathead Nat'l Forest will be hosting an avalanche safety workshop covering:

- Typical NW Montana winter mountain weather
- Last season's unusual weather
- How weather set the stage for the snowmobile fatality in January
- This season's new avalanche advisory format

Workshop location is Kalispell

- Flathead Supervisor and Tally Lake Ranger District Office
  - 650 Wolfpack Way
  - On Stillwater Rd, west of Glacier High School, and just north of Montana State DNRC office
  - Time 6:30 – 9:30 PM.
  - Program is free, just show at the door.
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Flathead Nat'l Forest will also be presenting our advanced public avalanche awareness safety training for skiers, snowshoers, snowboarders, and mountaineers over the first two weeks of January, 2012. The program is a four night lecture series with two Saturday field sessions. Lecture dates are Tuesdays and Thursdays, January 3,5,10,&12. The all-day Saturday field sessions are January 7&14. Lecture location and time is the same as the weather workshop above.