

US FOREST SERVICE NORTHWEST MONTANA
BACKCOUNTRY AVALANCHE ADVISORY


FOR THE GLACIER PARK AND FLATHEAD & KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST AREAS

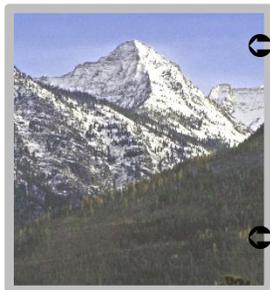
Avalanche advisory does not apply to developed ski areas

**SPECIAL
 BACKCOUNTRY AVALANCHE WARNING**

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

Issue Date:	5:30 AM, Sunday, February 26, 2012
Next Update:	Tuesday, February 28, 2012
Issued by:	Stan Bones

Mission, Swan, Whitefish, Flathead, Lewis, and Continental Divide Mountain Ranges



7,500 ft. elevation



4,500 ft. elevation


Avalanche Danger Summary

4 -HIGH : Between 4,500 and 7,500 ft. elevation on all steep, open slopes and gullies

AVALANCHE – INSTABILITY DESCRIPTION



Danger Level	4 – HIGH
Confidence	Fair
Travel Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very dangerous avalanche conditions exist Travel in avalanche terrain NOT recommended
Likelihood of Avalanches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural avalanches likely Human triggered avalanches very likely
Avalanche Size & Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large avalanches in many areas Very large avalanches in specific areas

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.

A moist Pacific air mass is moving east and pushing against a cold Canadian system along the Rocky Mtn Front. This is producing locally heavy snowfall in the eastern mountain ranges of Northwest Montana. The Whitefish and northern Swan Ranges are particularly being impacted. New snowfall amounts of 15-20-inches, equating to over 2.5-inches of snow water equivalent were registered at several locations over the 24-hrs of Saturday.

Accompanying the snowfall has been strong winds. While the Whitefish and Swan Ranges have seen S to W winds, the Continental Divide and the wind favored valleys just west of the Divide are experiencing gusty winds from the E.

At the beginning of the day Saturday most mountain locations were feeling air temperatures in the high 20's ° F. By midnight these had generally fallen into the teens at most locations or even single digits along and east of the Divide.

The combination of deep new snowfall, wind, and rapidly cooling temperatures is creating very unstable snow conditions over the mountains of the Continental Divide westward to a line from Eureka through Kalispell and onward to St. Ignatius. Concern is not only for the new snow loading, but also the stress it is producing on buried weaknesses associated with depth hoar and buried layers of surface hoar and melt-freeze ice. Backcountry recreationists and travelers should avoid all travel in avalanche terrain until snow conditions have the opportunity to settle and strengthen.

Northwest Montana experienced its third avalanche fatality Saturday when two riders of snow bikes were caught in an avalanche in the Skyland Creek area just west of Marias Pass and south of Hwy 2. Both riders were partially buried, one more deeply than the other. The least buried was able to dig himself free. A search located his companion with at least one foot protruding from the snow. Unfortunately when uncovered, the companion could not be revived.