

West Central Montana Avalanche Center 2012-2013 Season Summary

The West Central Montana Avalanche Center (WCMAC) enjoyed a successful winter characterized by better than usual stability, very good skiing and riding conditions and great community support.

In early 2012, the center lost a \$20,000 grant that has been an integral funding component for our education and advisory programs. The Lolo National Forest, our host agency, eliminated a \$5000 avalanche center operating budget due to continued loss of recreation program monies. We were initially concerned that much of our education effort and advisory days would have to be cut severely to meet this funding shortfall.

Our friends organization, the West Central Montana Avalanche Foundation (WCMAF aka missoulaavalanche.org), stepped up and contributed \$20,000 to cover this shortfall.

This allowed us to continue offering free public avalanche awareness, companion rescue and other avalanche safety programs as well as a basic avalanche awareness program in local middle to high school science classes.

Early season snowfall was nearly nonexistent in western Montana valleys but exceptional above 6000 feet. Warm, wet early storms and continued moderate temperatures gave us the most stable conditions we've seen in a long time.

An early January cold dry period allowed surface hoar and near surface facets to set the stage for our first and only avalanche warning issued on January 9 after a warm, wet storm dropped up to 20 inches of storm snow on this weak layer.

This was soon followed by the first and only avalanche accident (that we are aware of) which occurred on January 14 near Snowbowl Ski Area in a backcountry area easily accessed from the resort. The individual triggered a storm slab in a small opening on a steep, treed slope, was strained through trees and completely buried against a large spruce tree. His partner found him within a couple of minutes, dug his head free and

assured that he was able to breath on his own. He sustained a minor injury to his leg and was able to skin out of the area under his own power. (see attached photos)

The rest of the winter was mostly uneventful and we stayed busy providing avalanche safety classes to a variety of groups. Our season ended on April 5 with 85-90% of average total snowpack in the western Montana mountains.

2012-2013 Season Accomplishments

Education:

- 22 public classes
- 14 one to three hour awareness classes
- 3 sixteen hour advanced awareness classes with a field component
- 4 Level 1 classes
- 403 participants
- 124 snowmobilers attended 5 classes tailored for snowmobilers
- 412 middle to high school students attended an avalanche awareness class this winter
- 939 western Montana residents attended an avalanche class this winter.

Avalanche Advisory:

- 34 advisories issued - Started December 14, 2012, and ended April 5, 2013
- 3 early season and 1 post season information updates posted
- 1 avalanche warning issued (January 9-10, 2013)
- 25,433 advisory page visits (Nov 1 - April 15)
- 748 average number of advisory viewers
- 298 email subscribers
- 121 Twitter followers
- 250 average number of Facebook viewers of each post
- 12 YouTube videos uploaded, viewed 1,905 times

Funding:

- Friends group funds Avalanche Center operations \$20,000
- In-kind agency contributions estimated at \$35,000 (11 Forest Service employees contributed 16 days each)

- NOAA Missoula Weather in-kind contributions estimated at \$15,000 (110 backcountry weather forecasts requiring 4hrs of prep time for 1 GS 12 Forecaster)
- Friends group in-kind contributions \$5500 (instructor services and misc education expenses)
- Pray for Snow Party at Caras Park in early October raised over \$7000 for the WCMAF
- The Kettlehouse Brewery Community Unite Pint Nite benefit netted over \$2000 for WCMAF
- Montana Snowbowl Ski Patrol (National Ski Patrol System) donated \$1000 of their license plate earnings to WCMAF
- WCMAF received a \$12,000 Recreation Trails Program Grant from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for avalanche safety information and education programs which will be used to support avalanche safety education during the 2014 season

Accidents/Incidents:

- 1 full burial w/minor injury - Jan 14 on Point Six
- 2 minor incidents with potential (caught but not buried) reported to the center

Point Six Avalanche Incident
January 14, 2013

45 degrees at crown



View down slide path



Burial site



Pt. Six 7950'

Crown

Burial site

Terminus of slide

Overview of avalanche site

