

Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center

Annual Report 2005-2006



VOLUME 9

SPRING 2006

Operations

The Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center issued its first avalanche information on November 4th, with daily advisories beginning on December 3rd. A total of 113 advisories were posted until early April when funding ran out and user interest decreased. The winter of 2005-06 will be remembered as a fantastic snow year. User numbers increased dramatically with over 88,000 advisory accesses and 1,070 avalanche program participants.

A new advisory format with enhanced graphics, a pop up glossary, improved weather station displays, digital audio forecasts on the web, a direct observation e-mail link and an interactive forecast area map were among the improvements this season. A daily 60 second avalanche spot on KECH radio and numerous newspaper articles brought avalanche awareness and information to the forefront of the local community.

Educational Programs

Educational programs reached a record number of participants. Classes were offered in Ketchum, Hailey, Twin Falls, Stanley, and Pine. In addition to all types of individual back-country users, participation included groups like local snowmobile clubs, SNRA forest personnel, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Power linemen, Ketchum Fire Department and different Search and Rescue groups. Janet Kellam and Doug Abromeit also taught at the National Avalanche School held at Snowbird and Jackson Hole.

2.2.2006
Listed online

This is Chris Lundy of the Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center with your Backcountry Avalanche Advisory and Weather Forecast for Thursday, February 2, 2006 at 7 am.

City of Ketchum (www.ketchumfire.org) & the Friends of the Sawtooth Avalanche Center bring you this advisory.

Bottom Line:

Today the avalanche danger is estimated to be MODERATE. Additional caution should be used on recently wind loaded slopes. Wind slabs that were sensitive yesterday likely gained some strength overnight, but continued moderate winds may keep these touchy in some locations. In terrain sheltered from the wind the snowpack is generally stable, but weak interfaces in within the recent storm snow could produce an avalanche in very steep terrain.

Primary Avalanche Concern:

Strong westerly winds made for very active loading during the day yesterday. Wind slabs are most sensitive while they are forming and I was able to easily drill out several soft wind pillows on steep slopes in the Galena Summit area. These were breaking out 8 to 12 inches deep. I also observed several natural avalanches that occurred during or after Wednesday night's storm. Most of these were small, but a few were large enough to have buried a skier or rider.

Improved advisory format with graphics showing expected avalanche type, probability and size.



SNFAC Avalanche Class on Galena Summit. Photo courtesy Matt Furber.

New for 2005-06, Avalanche Awareness Week offered several 1 hour awareness programs in Ketchum and Hailey, accompanied by news articles and the Friends of the Avalanche Center annual fundraiser, "The Best of Banff" Film Festival.

The Avalanche Rescue Training Park proved to be an exciting and well-used facility for snow goers and safety workers of all types. A generous grant from

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Special points of interest:

- Advisory use increases 20%
- Class numbers increase by 75%
- Avalanche Rescue Training Park a big success.



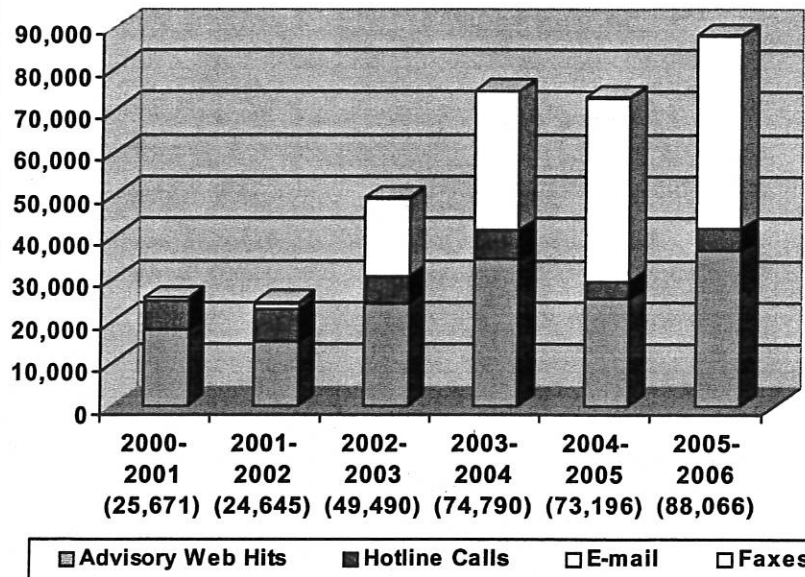
the Wattis-Dumke Foundation enabled the purchase of a solar powered "Easy Searcher". An automated control panel and four transceiver signal burial units.

The training park was assembled on the City of Sun Valley 5 Acre Parcel for two months, moving up to the Baker Creek trailhead for the second half of the winter. Anyone with a transceiver and a probe could operate the control panel, activate one to four buried units at once and have a recorded time upon locating and probing the buried transmitters. (Cont'd page 2)



Snowmobile triggered avalanche in early January.

Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center Advisory Use Comparison



Snow Stability & Avalanche Conditions 2005-2006

The winter of 2005-06 the drought ended. It was a banner year for snow conditions and snowpack stability. Snotel sites showed 120-145% of average in early April with an ongoing wet southwest weather pattern. Mid winter, people safely accessed big high mountain slopes. Hitting epic powder and steep lines, which in most years are inaccessible and dangerous

Early November storms began an early powder season at upper elevations. Typical, cold dry weather alternated with a few storms to develop what appeared to be a long-term unstable snowpack. Late December, unusually warm and heavy snowfall alleviated most concerns for weak layers and faceted snow. Snow storms routinely rolled through until early February with short spells of instability and a few spells of triggered slides but no accidents.

A three week dry spell in February and record cold temperatures left a very scary and weak faceted snowpack, particularly at lower elevations. Once again, a perfectly timed warm and heavy storm (2 inches water equivalent) wiped out the weak snow problem. Numerous wet sluffs ran at lower elevations and a slab cycle occurred up high. Unfortunately, a fatality occurred right after the storm when a snowmobiler triggered a wind slab while high marking in the Pioneer Mtns northeast of Carey. A second snowmobile avalanche death occurred northwest of Fairfield in the Trinity Lakes area of the Boise Forest on April 8th when a cornice broke beneath him.

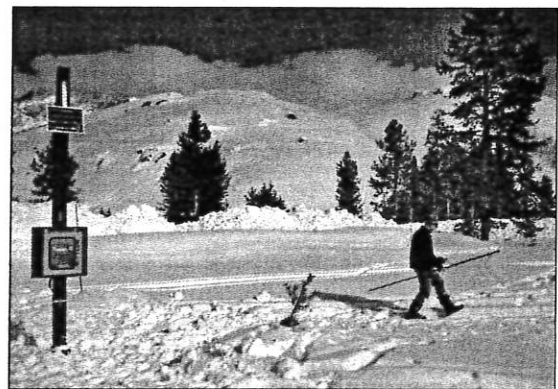
An absence of widespread weak layers made for a healthy snowpack heading into spring. By the end of the forecast season on April 1st, only a few glimpses of corn snow had occurred and a winter-like snowpack remained up high. Saturated, lower elevation snow remained on the hillsides without sliding, waiting for a good freeze. It became clear with



Educational Programs- continued

Recovery time is of the essence for live recoveries of avalanche burials. The training park gave people a fun, easy way to practice and develop their skills.

Local shops, Baldy skiers, Community School groups, firemen, policemen, city workers, Search and Rescue, backcountry skiers and snowmobilers, yurt goers, heli skiers, all utilized the training park and gave it a double thumbs up. We will be able to purchase more burial units to provide even more training options if enough interest and funding is generated.



SNFAC avalanche forecaster Matt Lutz tests the new Avalanche Rescue Training Park

a lineup of spring storms, backcountry skiers and sledgers would tire before old man winter did.



Loaner sleds from Woodside Motorsports and Polaris allow better access to popular backcountry snowmobile areas.



Countless local individuals contribute to the Friends and the Sawtooth Avalanche Center with financial donations, hours of promotional and educational work and endless enthusiasm. We are proud to be a community-based service that is so warmly received and supported.

Funding & Partnerships

The Sawtooth NF Avalanche Center would not be able to provide daily advisories or all the educational programs if not for the fundraising efforts of the Friends of the Avalanche Center. Annually, the Friends raise close to 30,000 dollars through local donations, grants and advisory sponsorships. In addition, the Wattis-Dumke Foundation has helped to identify and support some key projects such as the Avalanche Rescue Training Park.

Woodside Motorsports and Polaris have generously donated the use of two RMK 700 snowmobiles the past two winters, allowing forecasters to work more closely with the snowmobile community. Sun Valley Ski Patrol provides us with observations, maintains the Bald Mtn. weather station and allows us to run communications to connect with our Upper and Lower Titus weather stations. Soldier Mtn. maintains a weather station and provides us with observations. Sun Valley Heli-Ski and local outfitters Sun Valley Trekking and Sawtooth Mtn Guides also send in valuable snowpack observations.

In addition, the Pocatello National Weather Service and NRCS Snotel programs work closely with forecasters to share weather forecasts and snow data. Special thanks go

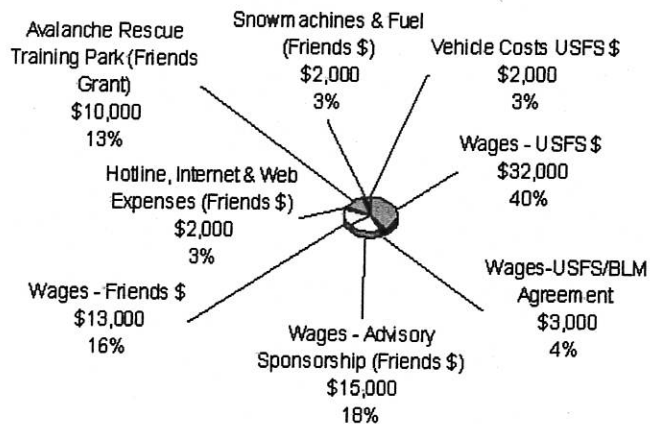
Staff 2006

Chris Lundy returned for his second season as Lead Forecaster and played a key role in upgrading the website and forecast standards. Matthew Lutz, a long time avalanche worker, brought his skills and experience to the part time forecasting and teaching position. Matt's background includes working as a Canadian and American heli-ski guide, and with Snowbird ski patrol. Janet Kellam returned as Director for her tenth winter with the avalanche center.

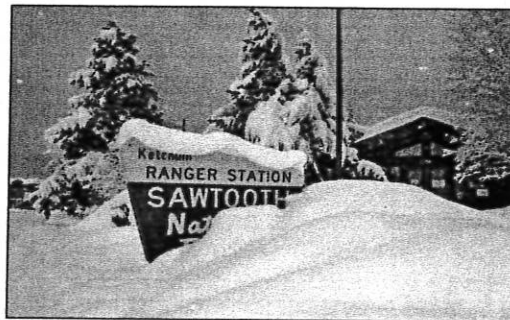
Sadly, we lost the skills of Jeff Halligan as a part time forecaster as he moves into the position of Snow Ranger on the Cascade Ranger District near Tamarack Resort outside of McCall. Doug Abromeit of the FS National Avalanche Center and Joe Miczulski, the Ketchum Ranger District Recreation Specialist and Snow Ranger continue to provide valuable input and oversight. Due to funding limitations and losing Jeff, Monday and Tuesday advisories were combined on Mondays.

Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center Budget 2005-2006

Total Expenditures: \$79,000



to Rick Winther and all the forecasters with the NWS and to Ron Abramovich and Phil Morrissey with the NRCS in Boise.



2005-06 will be remembered as a banner snow year at the Sawtooth NFAC office.

This arrangement is workable, but it seemed as if most surprise storms occurred early Tuesday mornings! We hope to gain additional sponsorship to provide advisories 7 days a week next winter.

SNFAC is a program of the USFS Sawtooth National Forest. The SNFAC is only partly funded by National Forest dollars. Additional funding comes from the Friends of the Sawtooth Avalanche Center, state and local grants and partnerships.

Advisory Sponsors 2005-06

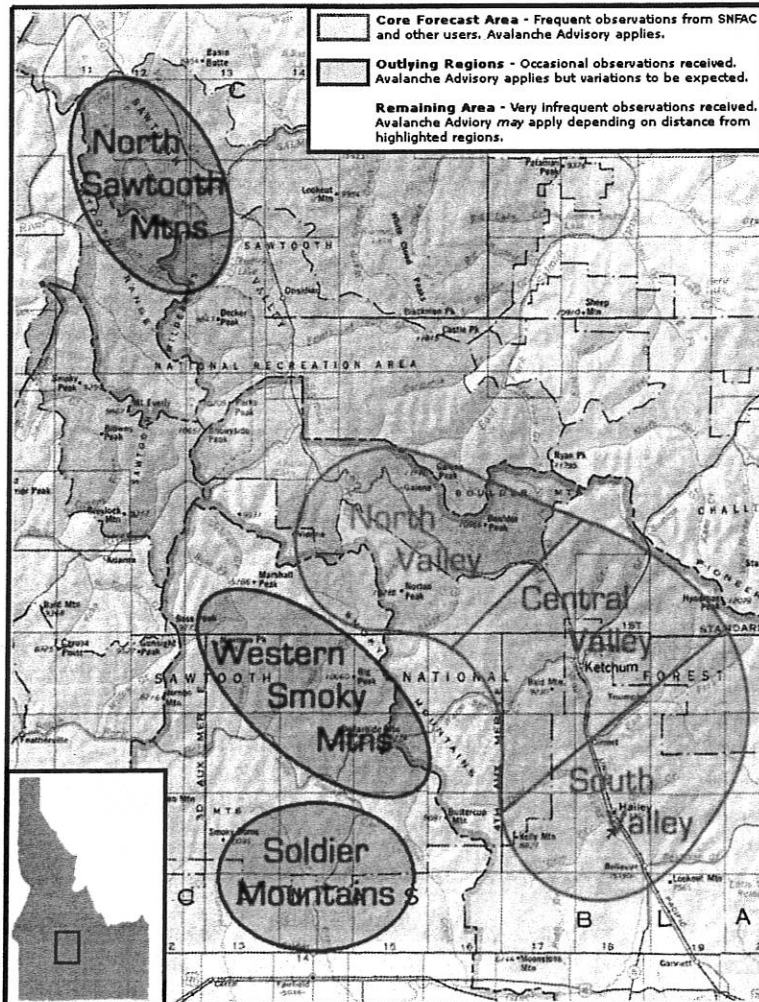
The City of Ketchum
 Blaine County Commissioners
 Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation-Snowmobile License Plates
 The Sawtooth Society- SNRA Mtn. Goat License Plates
 The Deer Creek Fund with the Idaho Community Foundation
 Bureau of Land Management- Twin Falls District

Additional support from:
 Bigwood Bread, Idaho Power, Sun Valley Telemark Series, Polaris and Woodside Motorsports, Backwoods Mtn Sports & The Elephants Perch.



The Avalanche Advisory

The Avalanche Center begins operations in November and ends in April. Early season general snow and weather updates are posted until there is enough snow for people to recreate in the backcountry. After that, daily advisories are produced (phone hotline, website, digital sound file and e-mail) by 7AM each morning until April 1st. General snow and weather information is posted until mid April, funding permitting.



Interactive forecast area map added to SNFAC website.

Avalanche Advisory & Mountain Weather
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www.avalanche.org

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