



NEWS RELEASE

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland

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Avalanche danger is high on Routt National Forest

(Steamboat Springs, Jan. 7, 2009) -- Every year hundreds of avalanches occur in the Rocky Mountain Region's mountainous areas.

On average, 28 people die annually in the United States from avalanches, and 95 percent of those accidents involved people engaged in recreational activities such as skiing, snowmobiling, snowboarding, and climbing. In nearly all of avalanche accidents, the victim or a companion triggered the slide.

Routt National Forest Snow Ranger Janet Faller advises people to learn to identify the conditions that lead to avalanches to avoid triggering them. She said avalanche basics (see sidebar) are a must for anyone planning to enjoy winter recreation in the mountains.

"The ski patrol at the Steamboat Ski Area (which is mostly on the Routt National Forest) conducts avalanche control work within the ski area boundary," Faller said. "These areas are accessed through gates that are open or closed depending on the danger in the area." The gates are closed when conducting avalanche control work. The gates at the top of the Morningside lift to areas known as the Chutes, East Face and Morningside Bowl are examples of these areas, Faller said. "For your own safety and the safety of other recreationists, please respect these closures."

There are several locations along the ski area boundary that provide access to the National Forest and backcountry. These "Access Points" are signed to remind the public they are leaving the care of the ski area and entering the backcountry.

Avalanche control work is not conducted beyond the ski area boundary. Users should be aware of the hazards beyond the ski area boundary which include cliffs, steep terrain and possible unstable snow conditions.

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For more avalanche information, go to the U.S. Forest Service [National Avalanche Center Web site](#) or the [Colorado Avalanche Information Center Web site](#)..

Keep the following in mind when traveling in the winter backcountry:

- Recent avalanches are the best indicator of avalanche danger.
- Most avalanches occur on slopes from 30-45 degrees.
- Sustained winds increase the danger of an avalanche on leeward slopes.
- Rapid accumulation of snow, rapid temperature changes, or rain on new snow will increase the avalanche danger.
- “Whoompfing” sounds or shooting cracks are other avalanche-danger clues.
- When in suspect terrain, travel one at a time from one island of safety to another.
- It is safer to travel on the windward side of ridges away from cornices or on low-angle slopes without steeper slopes directly above you.
- Carry, know how to use, and practice with the backcountry essentials: avalanche transceiver, shovel, and probe.

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