

Preparing for your winter adventures!

Living in this special place where we have the San Juan National Forest and BLM lands in our backyards, we all want to go out into the snow and explore the winter wonderland. Be aware that venturing in winter on your public lands takes experience, skills and knowledge to enjoy it safely.

Avalanches are a major threat and there are so many variables in determining if the snow is unstable. It doesn't have to be a huge mountain that gets a person into trouble. Consider taking a basic "Avalanche Awareness Class" by groups like Hesperus Ski Patrol, Silverton Avalanche School, Telluride Avalanche School and the American Avalanche Association.

Whether you are snowshoeing, backcountry skiing, snowboarding, mountaineering or snowmobiling, please follow some basic guidelines:

- 1) Prepare for your experience which includes learning the topography of the area. A wide range of topographical or land management maps are available at the SJMA Bookstore in the San Juan Public lands Center (970-247-4874) or at www.sjma.org. Many trails and areas are managed for multiple uses – and all forms of recreation are allowed. But, in other areas, motorized and non-motorized recreation uses are segregated. Please respect closure signs. Also, the San Juan National Forest map sells for \$10.00 and shows the travel management areas for snowmobile use.
- 2) One should also prepare by checking the current weather, plan out your route, know your body and equipment limitations, learn the basics on how to avoid avalanche danger and check the Colorado Avalanche Information Center at <http://avalanche.state.co.us/> or by phoning 970-247-8187 (which is updated daily from November through April) to check if there are any high danger areas being reported.
- 3) Leave word with a friend or family member of your destination and expected time of return and don't go alone.
- 4) Keep track of the rate of snowfall, wind intensity & temperature changes because all three affect the potential for avalanches.
- 5) Avoid potential avalanche paths, such as slopes, cornices, wind-loaded leeward slopes, old slide paths, snow with cracks in it or that sounds hollow beneath you.
- 6) If you see evidence of recent avalanches, suspect dangerous conditions.

Some areas simply have higher avalanche danger due to the terrain (like La Plata Canyon and South Mineral Road), while other areas have lower risk. Regardless, you should always stay aware wherever you explore, know the weather and check the stability of the snow. Some clubs or organizations in Southwestern Colorado have permission from the Public lands Agencies to groom some of the trails for skiers. Some places you might consider exploring are the east side of Vallecito Reservoir in Bayfield, Molas Pass south of Silverton, West Fork Trail east of Pagosa Springs, or Chicken Creek north of Mancos... to name a few.

Stop by any of the Public Lands (San Juan National Forest & BLM) offices in Durango, Bayfield, Pagosa Springs or Dolores for a complete listing and/or additional information. Information is also available by phoning 970-247-4874 or by checking out our websites at www.sjma.org, www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan or www.co.blm.gov/sjra/sjra.html. Guidebooks and

maps, as well as free publications like *"Where to go in the Snow on San Juan Public Lands"* are available.

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970.247.4874 or 970.385.1258

www.sjma.org

Photo by Mark Winkworth, SJMA Visitor Services

(Caption for the photo)

Two skilled backcountry skiers explore the San Juan Mountains north of Durango. Remember that slopes of 25% or more can be very dangerous to explore and the stability of the snow-pack should be tested, before committing to a slope.