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MONTANA'S SNOWMOBILE HANDBOOK!



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Basic Snowmobile Safety Code

1. Do not consume alcohol or take drugs prior to or during your snowmobile trip.
2. Know your ability to snowmobile on slopes, trails, or other areas.
3. Slow down and don't cut to the inside of trail corners.
4. Maintain control of your speed and course at all times.
5. Heed all posted warnings.
6. If you snowmobile at night, don't override your lights.
7. Always use the buddy system. Never ride off alone or unaccompanied.
8. Whenever possible, avoid the ice.
9. Wear sensible, protective clothing designed for snowmobiling.
10. Use a full-size helmet, goggles, or visor to prevent injuries from twigs, stones, ice chips, and flying debris.
11. Never wear any loose clothing which could get caught in moving parts of the snowmobile.
12. Know the terrain where you are going to ride.
13. Know the weather forecast, especially the ice and snow conditions in the area.
14. Be sure your snowmobile is in top-notch mechanical condition throughout the months of use.
15. Familiarize yourself with the snowmobile you are driving by reading the owner's manual.
16. Do not pursue domestic or wild animals.

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Table of Contents

It's the Law!

Montana's Snowmobile Defined.....	3	Nonresident Permits.....	4
Snowmobiling in Montana.....	3	Where To Register.....	5
What Is a Snowmobile.....	3	Understanding Operator Requirements.....	5
Montana's Snowmobile Program.....	3	Responding After an Accident.....	5
National Forest Land.....	3	Operating Your Snowmobile Legally.....	6
Snowmobile Clubs.....	3	Minimizing Your Impact on Wildlife.....	6
Riding Legally in Montana.....	4		
Montana Residents Permanent Registration and Trail Pass...	4		

Snowmobile Basics

Before You Ride	7	Riding Your Snowmobile ...	12
Learning About Your Snowmobile.....	7	Positioning Yourself for Safer Riding.....	12
Common Snowmobile Parts.....	7	Beginning to Ride	14
Operating a Clean, Quiet Machine	8	Trail Etiquette.....	15
Protecting the Environment	8	Dealing With Special Situations.....	16
Wearing the Proper Clothing	9	Riding at Night	17
Dressing for Cold Weather	11	Be Prepared.....	18
		What To Bring Along	18
		Alcohol and Drugs	19
		If You Break Through Ice.....	19
		Hypothermia	20
Snowmobile Trail Signs	21		
Montana's Snowmobile Clubs.....	21		

Montana's Snowmobile Defined

Snowmobiling in Montana

What Is a Snowmobile

According to Montana law, a snowmobile is a self-propelled vehicle that:

- Has an overall width of 48 inches or less, excluding accessories *and ...*
- Is designed for travel on snow or ice *and ...*
- May be steered by skis or runners *and ...*
- Is not otherwise registered or licensed under the laws of the state of Montana.

Montana's Snowmobile Program

Montana has over 4,000 miles of groomed snowmobile trails that are maintained by local clubs and Chambers of Commerce using grant money provided by Montana State Parks, a division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). Snowmobile gas tax refund, decal fees, and the Resident Trail Pass provide funding for trail grooming.

National Forest Land

Many acres of national forest land in Montana are open for unrestricted winter travel.

- In some areas, these routes are shared by skiers, hikers on snowshoes, and snowmobilers.
- Check with the U.S. Forest service, the local ranger, or the local snowmobile club for specific restrictions.

Snowmobile Clubs

Many local snowmobile clubs exist in Montana.

- Most of them are members of the Montana Snowmobile Association (MSA).
- To find a club, locate others to ride with, ask about riding areas, or get involved in preserving the sport, contact the MSA at www.m-s-a.org.

Riding Legally in Montana

Montana Residents Permanent Registration and Trail Pass

To operate a snowmobile on public land legally, you must register your snowmobile and display the registration decal.

- Registration of personal snowmobiles is permanent and remains valid until the machine is sold.
- The white registration decal with “PERMANENT” on it must be affixed to the left side of the cowl.
- To operate a snowmobile, fat tire bicycle, and a motorized snow bike on a groomed snowmobile trail a Montana resident must purchase a Trail Pass decal. The Trail Passes are valid for 3 seasons and must be clearly visible.

Nonresident Permits

- For any snowmobile not registered in Montana, you must have a current nonresident permit to operate your machine legally on Montana public lands.
- Permits expire on June 30.



Permanent Decal



Resident Trail Pass



Nonresident Decal



Where To Register

- **Permanent Decal:** County Treasurer's office in county of residence
- **Resident Trail Pass:** Vendors, FWP offices, MSA, Snowmobile Clubs, or online at <http://stateparks.mt.gov>
- **Nonresident Decal:** Vendors, FWP offices, or online at <http://stateparks.mt.gov>

Understanding Operator Requirements

- Anyone wanting to ride on specially designated roads must have a driver's license or a snowmobile safety certificate.
 - **Adults** must have a motor vehicle driver's license.
 - **Minors** must have a Snowmobile Safety Education Course certificate and be accompanied by an adult who is within eyesight.
- To obtain a Snowmobile Safety Education Course certificate, you must:
 - Attend and successfully complete a Montana-approved snowmobile course. To find a class, contact your local snowmobile club or Montana's Snowmobile Program Manager at **406-444-3753**.
 - Complete the Montana online course if a classroom course is not available in your area. To take the online course go to the Montana State Parks website, or call **406-444-3753** for instructions regarding the online course.
- Montana State Parks will accept safety education certificates from other states.

Responding After an Accident

- If you are involved in an accident, you must report the accident to the nearest law enforcement agency.
- You must report the accident *immediately* if the accident resulted in the death or injury of a person.

Operating Your Snowmobile Legally

You must obey the following Montana laws when operating your snowmobile. Additional regulations may be found on the Montana State Parks website: <http://stateparks.mt.gov>.

- **Operating on Roads:** Snowmobiles may be operated on maintained streets, roads, or highways only if:
 - The roadway is covered by snow to the extent that travel is impossible by other motor vehicles
 - The local government allows snowmobiles to travel on plowed roads where wheeled vehicles operate
 - The operator has:
 - A motor vehicle driver's license *or* ...
 - A snowmobile safety certificate and operates under the visual supervision of an adult
- **Crossing Roads:** Be careful when crossing any type of road. You must:
 - Come to a complete stop.
 - Make sure no traffic is coming from any direction.
 - Cross at a right angle to the traffic.
- **Operating on Unfrozen Public Water** is illegal.
- **Operating at Night:** Snowmobiles that are operated between dusk and dawn must have a lighted headlight and a lighted taillight.
- **Discharging Firearms:** It is illegal to discharge a firearm from or upon a snowmobile.

Minimizing Your Impact on Wildlife

Snowmobiles travelling through wildlife's winter habitat can disturb or displace the animals. To minimize your impact on wintering animals:

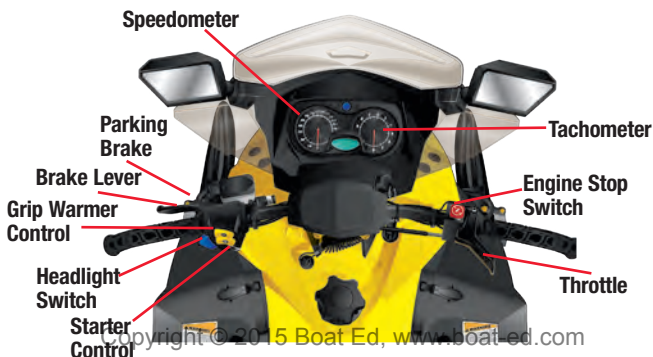
- Avoid winter habitats whenever possible.
- Do not linger around wildlife. Continue moving in a steady, deliberate fashion.
- Never chase, harass, or rally wildlife.
- Keep your snowmobile well-tuned to minimize noise and pollution.
- Avoid areas designated as "closed" for wildlife protection.

Before You Ride

Learning About Your Snowmobile

- Different types of snowmobiles have their own handling characteristics. Be sure you study your owner's manual and understand how to operate your particular model.
- Snowmobiling is a fun, safe sport; but it can be hazardous if you're reckless, inattentive, or uninformed about the snowmobile you're driving.
- A safe snowmobiler seeks out equipment with a label of certification from the Snowmobile Safety and Certification Committee.

Common Snowmobile Parts



Operating a Clean, Quiet Machine

- An improperly adjusted track system hurts performance and increases emissions and noise. Consult your owner's manual before you attempt any adjustments or repairs. Taking your machine to a licensed snowmobile mechanic may be best.
- Beyond a pre-season check-up and regular maintenance, there are additional things you can do to make sure your snowmobile runs cleaner and quieter.
 - Use high-grade oil and gasoline.
 - Tune the engine for your altitude, including the proper carburetor jet setting.
 - Change the spark plugs at least once during the season.
 - Avoid opening and closing the throttle continuously.
 - Don't tamper with your exhaust pipes to increase the noise of your machine.

Protecting the Environment

- Snowmobiles have a minimal environmental impact when operated properly and when at least four inches of snow cover the underlying vegetation.
- A snowmobile's ground pressure (weight per square inch) is less than that of a person walking.
- Snowmobiles are built to federally mandated noise control standards. Engine noise has little or no effect on humans when trails are properly located away from residential or business areas.
- Scientific studies indicate that compaction of snow by snowmobile traffic has no negative effect on crops, such as winter wheat or alfalfa. Compaction often eliminates snow mold, increases yields, and may decrease soil erosion.
- To keep wild lands beautiful:
 - Stay on established trails and keep away from tree farms, nurseries, and orchards. Plants and young trees are vulnerable to severe damage from snowmobiles.
 - Avoid disturbing or harassing wildlife. If you encounter animals on the trail, stay seated and either continue slowly or stop until the animals depart.

Wearing the Proper Clothing

Nothing can protect you completely, but knowing what to wear can reduce the chance of injury, as well as make your ride more comfortable. Never operate a snowmobile without these essential items.

■ **Helmet**

- Snowmobile helmets are designed to protect your head and face in collisions or falls, from tree branches while riding, from the cold, and from loud noise.
- Unlike motorcycle helmets, snowmobile helmets have vents that you can open or close to prevent fogging.
- Snowmobile face shields have a double lens to resist fogging. Some face shields have built-in defrosters that plug into an outlet on the snowmobile.
- To get the most benefit from your helmet:
 - Make sure your helmet fits snugly, fastens securely, and doesn't move or feel loose. Try on helmets over riding headgear.
 - Replace your helmet every five years. Made of fiberglass or plastic, helmets become brittle over time.
 - Place a strip of reflective tape on your helmet for extra visibility after dark.
 - Don't paint your helmet. Solvents in the paint can weaken the shell.
 - Select a helmet with a safety-approval label from the Department of Transportation (DOT).

■ **Goggles or Face Shield**

- Branches, falling snow, and road debris can impair your vision and jeopardize your safety.
- By shading your eyes, goggles or a face shield minimizes glare and distorted vision in bright sunlight. ***Neither the snowmobile windshield nor sunglasses protect adequately.***
- Eye protection should be scratch-free, shatter-resistant, securely fastened, and well-ventilated to avoid fogging.

- When selecting eye protection:
 - Ideally, combine sunglasses and a helmet-mounted face shield, which also widens the field of vision and keeps your face warmer. Sunglasses reduce glare, enhance contrast for better vision, and reduce harmful ultraviolet rays from sunlight reflecting off snow.
 - Purchase goggles with prescription lenses if necessary.
 - Wear lenses tinted for your lighting conditions: gray for bright days, yellow for overcast days, and clear for nights.
 - Choose products marked VESC-8 (or V-8) or Z87.1, or made of hard-coated polycarbonate.

■ Gloves

- Gloves protect your hands from cold, as well as from injury during a fall or scrape.
- For the best protection, always choose gloves with:
 - Padding to protect your knuckles
 - Gauntlets to prevent cold air from entering your sleeves

■ Boots

- Heels prevent your feet from slipping off the footrests.
- Snowmobile boots protect the feet as well as the ankles and lower legs.
- Some boots have liners that you can remove for quicker drying.



Dressing for Cold Weather

As with any outdoor winter recreation, you need clothing that will keep you warm and dry.

- ◆ Remember that the “wind chill factor” can lower the temperature considerably. If the thermometer reads 30° F and you ride at 25 miles an hour, your exposed skin feels a wind chill temperature of 16° F.
- Dress in layers, which offer superior insulation. As the weather warms up, you can shed a layer at a time to stay comfortable. Three layers are recommended.
 - **A vapor transmission layer** (material such as polypropylene): Worn next to the body, it draws moisture from the skin while retaining warmth.
 - **An insulating layer:** Weightier or bulkier than the first layer, it holds warm air around you. Use wool in dry conditions, and synthetics or fleece in wet conditions.
 - **A protective outer layer:** Available in various weights and materials according to conditions, it protects the inner layers from water and wind.
- Wear a warm ski mask or other head covering under your helmet.
- Wear gloves with gauntlets to prevent cold air from blowing up your sleeves.
- Use a turtleneck shirt or dickey to keep your neck warm.
- In extremely cold weather, wear two layers of socks—a heavy wool pair over a light pair.
- Do **not** wear:
 - A scarf or loose clothing, which can get caught in the moving parts of your snowmobile or in branches and bushes
 - A bubble-type face guard, which may frost up

Riding Your Snowmobile

Positioning Yourself for Safer Riding

One of the skills required for snowmobiling is learning to position your body properly as you maneuver through various types of terrain. Mastering the basic riding positions is the key to safe snowmobiling.

- **Sitting:** Provides the lowest center of gravity for maximum stability and safety. This is the only position recommended for carrying passengers if the snowmobile is designed for that purpose. Keep your feet firmly on the running boards and in the foot wells.



- **Kneeling:** Lets you lean uphill or shift your body weight easily. It's a good position for crossing a road or moving around congested areas. While riding at low speeds, you can avoid fatigue by switching occasionally from sitting to kneeling. Novice riders should practice kneeling.



- **Standing:** Gives you maximum visibility. In areas containing obstructions, this position can help you look over an obstacle to see if another is behind it. At road crossings, this position provides the longest line of sight. Standing allows you to shift your weight quickly in any direction and change riding positions rapidly.



- **Posting:** Uses your feet and legs to absorb any shocks, which helps avoid uncomfortable bumps. This crouching position also is useful when climbing steep hills, crossing creeks and streams, and encountering other difficult situations. Since this is the most tiring position, use posting only when necessary and for short periods.



Beginning to Ride

■ Riding Uphill

- Use the kneeling position.
- Lean uphill.
- Increase the throttle to maintain your speed. The deeper the snow, the more speed you need.
- Don't stop until you get to the top. If you lose forward momentum, you may not be able to start climbing again.



■ Riding Downhill

- Use the sitting position.
- Sit as far back on the seat as possible.
- Stay focused and be prepared to stop—losing control is the greatest hazard.
- Do not release the clutch. Keep the clutch engaged to help you slow down.
- Pump the brake firmly every few seconds to maintain a slow speed or stop. Applying a hard brake abruptly can cause the snowmobile to slide.
- If you are at the top of a hill and other snowmobiles are coming up, allow them to pass you before going down.



■ Traversing a Hill

- Use the kneeling position with your uphill leg standing on the running board and your downhill leg on the seat.
- Lean your body uphill at all times, which keeps your weight on the uphill side of the track.
- On hard-packed snow, your snowmobile may slide. Try pointing the front at a steeper angle uphill, or look for more loosely packed snow.



■ Turning

- Lean into turns to gain more control while turning.
- Placing more body weight forward and into the turn puts more load on the inside ski and keeps it down on the snow, giving it a better bite.

■ Stopping

- Pull over to the extreme right.
- Stop on the right side of the trail.
- Don't stop on a curve or hill.

Trail Etiquette

- ◆ Ride only where permitted.
- ◆ Be courteous to others on the trail.
- ◆ Ride on the right side of the trail.
- ◆ Slow down when someone is passing you.
- ◆ Yield the right-of-way to skiers, horses, and hikers.
- ◆ Leave gates as you find them.
- ◆ Report downed trees and trail maintenance needs to land managers.
- ◆ Report illegal riding.
- ◆ Carry out what you carry in.

■ Crossing a Road

- Select a crossing point that offers good visibility in both directions.
- Before crossing, come to a complete stop on the shoulder of the road.
- Look both ways and yield to any traffic on the road.
- Drive forward slowly. A snowmobile is hard to handle on pavement.
- Drive straight across, not at an angle, to minimize the distance you need to travel.
- Large snow banks often line both sides of the road. To drive down a bank, post and lean toward the top of the bank as you descend. Never attempt this if a vehicle is approaching. To climb up a bank, lean toward the bank and apply the throttle.
- When traveling in a group, appoint a crossing guard who crosses the road first. The crossing guard then gets off his snowmobile, watches for traffic traveling in both directions, and signals for one snowmobile at a time to cross the road.

Dealing With Special Situations

- **Deep, Loosely Packed Snow:** In loosely packed snow, snowmobiles sink deeper and don't produce as much traction. Deep snow also may hide obstacles or other hazards. If you're on deep, loose snow, make a wide turn and move to harder-packed snow.
- **Hard-Packed Snow Drifts:** After the wind blows snow into drifts and the snow hardens, it may conceal bumps and dips. Back injuries can result from riding over these drifts at high speeds. Reduce your speed and be alert.
- **Whiteout Conditions:** When the sky is overcast and the ground is covered with snow, the landscape may appear entirely white, with no visible horizon.
 - Distances are difficult to judge, and variations in the terrain are not easy to recognize.

- Do not ride in a whiteout if you can avoid it, but if you must:
 - Be extremely cautious, and maintain a low speed.
 - Stay in familiar areas only, and watch for indications of hazards such as drop-offs beneath the snow.
- **Ice:** Ice presents many of the same handling problems as riding on pavement. Also, spins are common and fast stops are impossible.
 - Maintain a slow, steady speed. Don't speed up or apply the brakes abruptly.
 - To stop safely, release the throttle and coast to a stop.
 - Do not ride on frozen rivers and lakes if you can avoid it, but if you must:
 - Go up as high as possible and use binoculars to look for dark spots on the ice. This indicates slush, water, or deteriorating ice. Do not attempt to cross.
 - Watch for rivulets flowing on the ice or streams flowing under it. Typically, ice is thinner and weaker in these areas.

Riding at Night

- Accidents at night usually involve snowmobiles running into stationary objects, such as trees, that come into view unexpectedly.
- Drive slowly so that you have time to recognize danger and react.
- Never “overdrive your headlight.” Make sure you can stop within the length of your headlight beam. A snowmobile high beam is effective for about 200 feet. To avoid a collision, travel slower than 30 mph. The stopping distance at this speed is about 220 feet.
- Always take these safety precautions.
 - Make sure your lights work properly, are clean, and are free of snow.
 - Don't travel in unfamiliar areas.
 - Stay on established trails. Don't blaze a new trail in the dark.
 - Always carry a flare or flashlight for emergency signaling.
 - Always ride in a group of two or more—never alone.
 - If you stop, pull off the trail.
 - Be careful in freezing rain because your face shield may freeze over.

Be Prepared

Anytime you venture into snowmobile terrain, some risk is involved. You could be stranded due to mechanical problems; unexpected, severe weather; injury; or getting lost. It's best to be prepared for potential problems.

Before You Leave ...

Tell someone where you plan to travel and when you will be back.

What To Bring Along

- **Avalanche Gear:** Transceiver, shovel, probe, and airbag
- **Map and Compass:** Topographic maps are useful because they show the area in three dimensions. Buy a good orienteering compass, and learn how to use it with a topographic map.
- **SPOT Satellite Messenger:** Used in emergency situations.
- **First-Aid Kit:** Carry a first-aid kit, and take a first-aid course so that you'll know how to respond in an emergency.
- **Survival Kit:** You also should carry:
 - Emergency food and water (enough for one or two extra days)
 - Flashlight
 - Hand axe or saw
 - High-energy snacks such as candy bars
 - Signal flares
 - Tarpaulin
 - Waterproof matches
- **Other useful items:**
 - Mobile phone and GPS unit
 - Radio for weather updates



Alcohol and Drugs

- **Don't drink and ride.**
- Alcohol depresses the central nervous system, slows physical reaction time, and affects judgment. Most people become impaired after only one drink.
- Alcohol decreases your attention span, which is risky when you have only one task to perform. This especially complicates performing multiple tasks, such as steering your snowmobile while keeping track of others in the area.
- Most people become slightly intoxicated after only one drink.

If You Break Through Ice

- Don't panic. Your snowmobile suit and helmet may keep you afloat for several minutes.
- Swim to the closest edge, and stretch your arms out across the unbroken ice. Keep your gloves on.
- Jab a sharp object such as a knife or ice pick into the ice.
- Kick your feet hard. Pull yourself up with your forearms.
- If the edge breaks off, move to the next solid edge. Try again.
- Crawl up onto the ice. Then crawl or roll until you're on solid ice.
- Take action immediately to prevent hypothermia.



Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when your body loses heat faster than it can produce it, causing your core body temperature to fall. Hypothermia is often induced by cold, wet conditions, such as rain, snow, sleet, or immersion in water.

■ Symptoms of Hypothermia

- Uncontrolled shivering—usually the first obvious symptom, but ceases as hypothermia progresses
- Slow, slurred speech
- Memory loss
- Irrational behavior, such as removing clothing
- Lack of body movement
- Sleepiness
- Unconsciousness, which could lead to death

■ Treatment of Hypothermia

- Find shelter from the cold for the victim.
- Avoid unnecessary movement. If you need to move the victim, do so slowly and gently. Do not allow the person to walk unless absolutely necessary.
- Remove wet clothing, and replace with dry clothing and other protective covering. If there is no dry clothing, use a fire to dry one layer at a time.
- Give warm liquids to re-hydrate and re-warm, but never give the victim alcohol to drink. Quick-energy foods also produce inner body heat.
- For mild cases, use fire, blankets, or another person's body heat to warm up the victim slowly.
- In more advanced stages, re-warm the victim slowly by placing one or more persons in body contact with the victim.
- If the victim is semiconscious, try to keep him or her awake. Do not immerse the victim in a warm bath or expose the individual to a large fire, which can lead to traumatic shock.
- Evacuate the victim to a hospital immediately for treatment.

SNOWMOBILE TRAIL SIGNS

Trail Markers



Blazer

Purpose: Informs riders that they are on a designated snowmobile trail.

Colors: Green for primary trails, orange for secondary.



Directional arrow

Purpose: Informs riders that the trail ahead makes significant changes in direction.

Colors: Orange with black border and arrow.

MONTANA'S SNOWMOBILE CLUBS

Anaconda Snowmobile Club

Anaconda

Beaverhead Sno-Riders

Dillon

Big Hole Snowmobile Club

Wisdom

Big Sky SnowRiders

Livingston

Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club

Hamilton

Cabinet Ridge Riders

Trout Creek

Deer Lodge Snowmobile Club

Deer Lodge

Flathead Snowmobile Association

Kalispell

Gallatin Valley Snowmobile Association

Bozeman

Helena Snowdrifters

Helena

Jack Pine Savages Snowmobile Club

Wise River

Kings Hill Grooming Association

Black Eagle

Lincoln County SnoKat Club

Libby

Little Belt Snowmobile Club

Hobson

Mining City Trail Riders, Inc.

Butte

Missoula Snowgoers Snowmobile Association

Missoula

Montana Nightriders Snowmobile Club

Haugan

Ponderosa Snow Warriors

Lincoln

Seeley Lake Driftriders, Inc.

Seeley Lake

Summit Snowgoers, Inc.

Cut Bank

Sweet Grass County Recreation Association

Big Timber

Ten Lakes Snowmobile Club Inc.

Eureka

Troy Snowmobile Club

Troy

Upper Yellowstone Snowmobile Club

Cooke City

Vigilante Snowmobilers

Virginia City

West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce

West Yellowstone

MONTANA SNOWMOBILE RESOURCES

Montana State Parks

1420 E. 6th Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Phone: 406-444-3750
www.stateparks.mt.gov

Montana Snowmobile Association

P.O. Box 56
Black Eagle, MT 59414
www.m-s-a.org

U.S. Forest Service Northern Region

Federal Building
200 E. Broadway
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807
Phone: 406-329-3511

Bureau of Land Management

5001 Southgate Dr.
Billings, MT 59101
Phone: 406-896-5013

International Snowmobile Manufacturers Assoc. (ISMA)

1640 Haslett Road, Suite 170
Haslett, MI 48840
Phone: 517-339-7788
Fax: 517-339-7798
www.snowmobile.org

Tread Lightly!®

353 E. 400 S., Suite 100
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
Phone: 1-800-966-9900
www.treadlightly.org

MONTANA AVALANCHE CENTERS

Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center

P.O. Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771
Phone: 406-587-6984
www.mtavalanche.com

Flathead Avalanche Center

10 Hungry Horse Dr.
Hungry Horse, MT 59919
Phone: 406-387-3835
www.flatheadavalanche.org

West Central Montana Avalanche Center

P.O. Box 72
Missoula, MT 59806
Phone: 406-530-9766
www.missoulaavalanche.org

AVALANCHE SAFETY

1. Get the Gear!
2. Get the Training!
3. Get the Forecast!
4. Get the Picture!
5. Get Out of Harm's Way!
6. One at a Time on the Slopes

– www.avalanche.org
– www.avalanche.ca

Scan for more information about the Montana Snowmobile Program.

