



Coconino County Sheriff's Office

Bill Pribil, Sheriff

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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San Francisco Peaks Backcountry Safety Awareness

*Flagstaff. AZ-*In light of many out of bond skier, and snowboarder rescues, during the months of January and February, the Coconino County Sheriff's Search and Rescue has partnered with other organizations to inform the skiing, and snowboarding public of hazards associated with the backcountry. As the weather in Northern Arizona changes suddenly, outdoor enthusiasts must be aware of the Avalanche potential, especially, in the San Francisco Peaks back country.

Coconino County Sheriff's Search and Rescue volunteers, United States Forest Service Volunteers, and members of the Arizona Snow Bowl Ski Patrol spent Saturday, February 23, 2008 conducting a safety, and awareness campaign. Two Search and Rescue Volunteers contacted fifty people who entered the back country in the area of the Agassiz chair lift. Ten of the individuals who were contacted had backcountry permits, eight people said they were carrying the ten essential supplies for backcountry survival, and six of them were in possession of an emergency beacon. After hearing the safety briefing; twenty people obtained backcountry permits, and 4 elected to stay within the boundaries of the Arizona Snow Bowl. In response to numerous calls from the public concerning the cost of large scale searches, and the danger to rescuers, we are researching possible legislation designed to discourage unauthorized backcountry travel. United States Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers were patrolling the area, and took appropriate enforcement action regarding out of bound skiers who did not have backcountry permits.

People venturing into mountainous terrain should carry avalanche rescue equipment such as: a shovel, avalanche rescue beacon, avalanche probe, and winter survival gear. Good wilderness navigation, and route finding skills are essential. Be prepared for travel, and emergencies, in the remote winter mountain environment where rescue is not immediate. Deep snow accumulations in the Northern Arizona backcountry can make over the snow travel difficult. Do not travel alone, and leave a detailed trip plan with a responsible person. It is important to review recent weather reports, and forecasts, as well, as driving conditions prior to, and during your trip. Carrying a cell phone is recommended; however, it may not always work in backcountry locations, and should not substitute for good judgment and preparation. It is recommended that people who use the mountain backcountry receive formal avalanche safety education, and winter survival skills. Free avalanche awareness clinics are offered by the Kachina Peaks Avalanche Center. More information about these clinics can be found at www.kachinapeaks.org.



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Winter backcountry travel into the Kachina Peaks Wilderness Area from Arizona Snowbowl requires a free annual backcountry permit. This includes the parking areas at FR 522 and Lamar Haines Wildlife Area. Backcountry permits are available in Flagstaff at the Peaks Ranger Station, 5075 N. Highway 89, and the Coconino National Forest Supervisor's Office, 1824 S Thompson St. Permits will also be available at Arizona Snowbowl's Agassiz Lodge weekend mornings when the ski area is open.