

RMBL Travel/Safety Plan for the Gothic Road (September 2009)

1. **Purpose.** The purpose of this plan is to eliminate unnecessary risk from avalanches while using the Gothic Road. This Plan recognizes that some small risk from avalanches to road users may exist whenever a snowcover is present on the slopes above the road but that this risk is minimal the majority of the time (during current land use patterns). The risk that does exist during a small percentage of the time can and should be minimized. It is further understood that any effective rescue of a person(s) buried by an avalanche must take place within 15-30 minutes of burial and must be accomplished by persons within the travel party. An organized rescue from an outside source is not an option.
2. **Applicability.** This plan applies to RMBL scientists, research assistants, staff, guests, and others using Laboratory facilities.
3. **Definitions.**
 - a. Gothic Road discussed in this plan: Road section considered starts at the gated “*trailhead*” parking area (mile 0.0) and ends north of the East River bridge, south of Gothic, a distance of approximately 3.3 miles (5.3km).
 - b. Avalanche Map: An ortho-photo entitled “Snodgrass Mountain Avalanches & Gothic Road” shows distances from the trailhead and avalanche areas affecting the road.
 - c. Avalanche Season: Generally, this is a 5-month period beginning in December and ending in May, however the season may begin earlier and/or end later, depending on the snow and avalanche season.
 - d. Avalanche danger scale: This has been established by the American Avalanche Association (AAA), and utilized in forecasts by avalanche centers within the United States, including the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) and the Crested Butte Avalanche Center (CBAC). Forecasts are available through the CBAC. The scale consists of 5 categories as follows:
 - Low – Natural avalanches very unlikely. Human triggered avalanches unlikely. Generally stable snow, isolated areas of instability. Travel is generally safe. Normal caution advised.
 - Moderate – Natural avalanches unlikely. Human triggered avalanches possible. Unstable slabs possible on steep terrain. Use caution in steeper terrain on certain aspects.
 - Considerable – Natural avalanches possible. Human triggered avalanches probable. Unstable slabs probable on steep terrain. Be more cautious in steeper terrain. Be aware of potentially dangerous areas of unstable snow.
 - High – Natural and human triggered avalanches likely. Unstable slabs likely on a variety of aspects and slope angles. Travel in

avalanche terrain not recommended. Safest travel on windward ridges or lower angle slopes without steeper terrain above.

Extreme – Widespread natural or human triggered avalanches certain. Extremely unstable slabs on most aspects and slope angles. Large destructive avalanche possible. Travel in avalanche terrain should be avoided and travel confined to low angle terrain well away from avalanche path runouts.

4. **Road-Use Restrictions.** During the “avalanche season” (see 3c, above) the following restrictions apply to use of the Gothic Road between the trailhead and Gothic:

- a. During “Low,” “Moderate,” and “Considerable” danger ratings no restrictions to the use of the Gothic Road apply. Although human-triggered avalanches will be possible on steeper terrain, users of the Gothic Road will not trigger avalanches and backcountry skier and snowboard use of the steep terrain above the road is relatively infrequent and sufficiently dispersed to minimize danger to road users from triggered avalanches. See #5, below.
- b. During “High” danger ratings the following restrictions apply:
 - Travel from and to Gothic must begin by 1PM.
 - An alternate route must be taken between miles 2.9 and 2.2 (approximately) well east of the Gothic Road, away from the most frequent avalanche runouts of the larger paths. To be most effective, this alternate route should be used and packed during the Low, Moderate, and Considerable danger periods. Refer to the “Snodgrass Mountain Avalanches & Gothic Road” map.
 - Travelers must be familiar with the likely locations of avalanches that can reach the road (refer to map).
 - Each travel group must have a minimum of 2 people and should move one at a time through avalanche terrain.
 - Each member of a travel group must carry standard avalanche search and rescue equipment (avalanche rescue transceiver, probes, shovel) and have training in search and rescue procedures.
- c. During “Extreme” danger ratings the road will be closed to RMBL scientists, research assistants, staff, guests, and others using Laboratory facilities. There will be no exceptions during extreme ratings.

5 **Limitations.** This plan recognizes that avalanche danger cannot be precisely forecast even by experienced avalanche technicians; avalanches may reach the road at unexpected times. Furthermore the plan was developed assuming current levels of backcountry and snowboard use of the avalanche terrain on the northeast-facing slopes above the Gothic Road.