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Johnson Pass Avalanche Recovery Efforts Resume Today

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska) – Alaska State Troopers, the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and trained volunteer Search and Rescue organizations are currently working on mitigation and search plans to recover the body of Yancy Flair, 35, of Anchorage, who was buried in an avalanche in Johnson Pass on March 28, 2009.

Recovery efforts were suspended due to ash fall and a weather system that produced snow and higher winds in Turnagain and Johnson Pass areas. The area has high avalanche potential, which will require the mitigation of the avalanche danger before efforts for body recovery can resume. In the mitigation effort, explosives will be deployed to cause a deliberate avalanche to increase safety for responders. In this case, there is a chance that the body may be buried deeper underneath the snow or may move from his location. Trained search and rescue volunteers will help to locate and recover his body, if possible. Active searching will be conducted today and tomorrow if needed before a predicted weather system arrives in the area and hampers search efforts.

It is imperative that no one is in or near the area during to the recovery efforts. In addition, there is a possibility the explosives may trigger other avalanches, not just in the area where the body is located, but elsewhere, such as on the other side of the ridge. The area is still exhibiting a high avalanche potential, especially in the aftermath of additional snow and higher temperatures added to the steep terrain.

Those involved in the recovery plan are members of the Alaska State Troopers, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Alaska Mountain Rescue Group, Nordic Ski Patrol, Alaska Search and Rescue Dogs, Alaska Avalanche School, U.S. Forest Service, Snow Safaris and American Red Cross.

AST's main concern is for the safety of those involved in the recovery efforts and is continually weighing this against our desires to bring closure to the family. We never like leaving a body behind, but we also don't want to add to the number of families to console due to a death during recovery efforts.

Current weather warnings, watches and forecast for Alaska can be found at the following National Weather Service web site at www.arh.noaa.gov/

To view the avalanche forecast from the Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/glacier/snow.html>