



West Slopes Central - Skagit River to South of I-90

Issued: 7:48 PM PST Saturday, March 18, 2017 by Dennis D'Amico

NWAC avalanche forecasts apply to backcountry avalanche terrain in the Olympics, Washington Cascades and Mt Hood area. These forecasts do not apply to developed ski areas, avalanche terrain affecting highways and higher terrain on the volcanic peaks above the Cascade crest level.

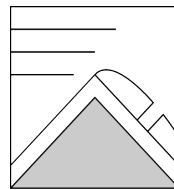
The Bottom Line: The avalanche danger should decrease Sunday as a wet snowpack refreezes. Fresh but shallow wind slab will mostly likely be found above treeline. Shallow loose wet slides are likely on steeper solar aspects in the afternoon. Continue to avoid unsupported slopes due to the low likelihood - high consequence threat of wet slab or glide avalanches for one more day.

Elevation	Sunday		Outlook for Monday
Above Treeline	Moderate	Heightened avalanche conditions on specific terrain features. Evaluate snow and terrain carefully; identify problem features.	Moderate
Near Treeline	Moderate	Heightened avalanche conditions on specific terrain features. Evaluate snow and terrain carefully; identify problem features.	Low
Below Treeline	Moderate	Heightened avalanche conditions on specific terrain features. Evaluate snow and terrain carefully; identify problem features.	Low

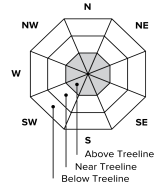
Avalanche Problems for Sunday

Wind Slab

Wind slabs can take up to a week to stabilize. They are confined to lee and cross-loaded terrain features and can be avoided by sticking to sheltered or wind scoured areas.



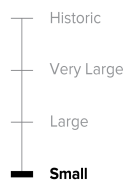
Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation



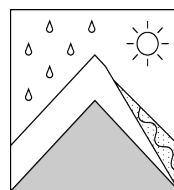
Likelihood



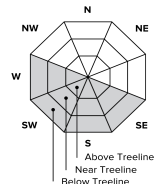
Size

Loose Wet

Loose wet avalanches occur where water is running through the snowpack, and release at or below the trigger point. Avoid terrain traps such as cliffs, gullies, or tree wells. Exit avalanche terrain when you see pinwheels, roller balls, a slushy surface, or during rain-on-snow events.



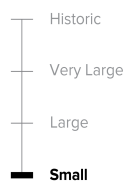
Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation



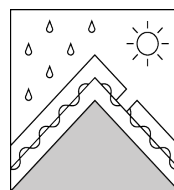
Likelihood



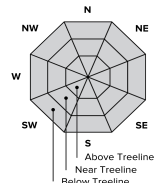
Size

Wet Slabs

Wet slabs occur when there is liquid water in the snowpack, and can release during the first few days of a warming period. Travel early in the day and avoiding avalanche paths when you see pinwheels, roller balls, loose wet avalanches, and during rain-on-snow events.



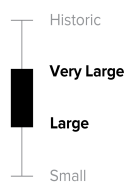
Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Avalanche Forecast for Sunday

Decreasing snow showers along with rapid cooling Saturday night through Sunday morning should transition to mostly sunny skies by Sunday afternoon. Freezing levels will be on the cool side Sunday but late March sunshine will help bump up temperatures to near or above freezing at lower and mid-elevations. Winds are forecast to be fairly light on Sunday.

The avalanche danger should decrease Sunday as a wet snowpack refreezes.

Fresh but shallow wind slabs have likely built on NW to SE aspects, mainly above treeline. Watch for firmer wind transported snow on other aspects, especially in areas of complex terrain. All aspects will be listed until more information is received on recent general loading patterns.

Generally small loose wet avalanches are likely at lower elevations and on solar slopes. Watch for surface wet snow deeper than a few inches, rollerballs or increasing small natural releases.

Although the likelihood of wet slab or glides avalanches has greatly decreased with the cooling trend, these avalanche problems may still occur 24 to 48 hours following a heavy rain event. Continue to avoid unsupported slopes, especially where you know there is a smooth underlying surface or slopes with glide cracks.

New snow accumulated with a cooling trend and diminishing winds, but small storm slabs may remain in isolated areas on Sunday.

It is always a good plan to travel well back from ridges, [suspected of cornice formation](#), or on steep slopes below cornices.

Avalanche Summary

Weather and Snowpack

The first week or so of March was very cool and snowy. NWAC stations along the west slopes of the Cascades piled up about 3 to 8 ft of snow with the most at Mt Baker.

The 2nd week of March was equally active with non-stop Pacific frontal systems pummeling the PNW. Unfortunately these systems delivered far more rain than snow. At least two regional avalanche cycles occurred during the stretch. Significant snowpack consolidation occurred over this period due to rainfall and warmer temperatures.

After a short respite from the active weather pattern on Thursday, another strong low pressure system brought several inches of rain to the west slopes of the Cascades outside the Cascade Passes Friday night. 2.5 to 4 inches of water has been seen at Paradise, Crystal and Mt. Baker respectively over the last 24 hours ending at 5 PM PDT Saturday, mainly in the form of rain. The Cascade Passes picked up 6-8 inches of new snow Friday night before changing to rain later Saturday morning. Rapid cooling with the frontal passage produced about 8 inches of snow to accumulate at Mt. Baker with lesser amounts seen elsewhere along the west slopes of the Cascades.

Recent Observations

North

NWAC observer Lee Lazarra was in the Mt Baker backcountry prior to the storm on Friday and reported a well settled snowpack with a stout crust. The recent snow ranged from 4 to 8 inches of recent dry snow depending upon wind distribution. There were some shallow wind slabs noted on lee slopes in higher terrain.

Early Saturday morning, Mt. Baker pro-patrol reported widespread natural loose wet activity that had occurred Friday night off of Table Mt, Mt. Herman and Shuskan Arm. Very heavy rain overnight had increased the potential for wet slab/glide avalanches in the Mt. Baker area.

Central

Alpental pro-patrol reported easy and widespread ski triggered 6-8" storm slabs on the upper half of Alpental Saturday morning with rain reaching the summit. Stevens Pass pro-patrol had similar results Saturday morning with widespread sensitive loose wet slides, up to size 2, natural and human triggered during the warming and switch to rain.

South

Prior to the storm, NWAC pro-observer Jeremy Allyn was out in Bullion Basin in the Crystal area Friday and found little to no avalanche problems due to the re-freeze and stout crust. Very thin wind slabs were possible on steep lee or cross-loaded features above treeline.

Crystal patrol reported a natural cycle Friday night, presumably loose wet, but little to no results during avalanche control work Saturday morning.

Mountain Weather Synopsis for Sunday & Monday

Cool upper level troughing is over the area today but sunshine, a rarity this winter, has come out in force this afternoon as isolated morning showers have ended. There is still some daytime cumulus over most mountain locations, with the exception of the north Cascades where slightly more moisture and cloud cover is hanging tough. Northerly surface gradients on Sunday will become offshore easterly gradients on Monday as high pressure builds east of the Cascades. A moderate easterly breeze should be seen in the Cascade Passes and down around Mt. Hood later tonight through Monday. A weak system off the California coast will rotate up bands of light precipitation on Monday. The low levels will be quite dry such that the main affect for the Washington Cascades will

be increasing high clouds from the south through the day with slightly lowering ceilings while light precipitation develops for Mt. Hood in the afternoon. Light bands of rain and snow should develop for all areas Monday night.

24 Hour Quantitative Precipitation ending at 4 am			Snow Level/Freezing Level in feet						
Location	Mon	Tue	Day	Olympics	Northwest Cascades	Northeast Cascades	Central Cascades	South Cascades	Easterly Flow in Passes
Hurricane Ridge	lt .25	lt .25							
Mt Baker Ski Area	lt .10	lt .10	Monday Morning	3500'	2500'	1000'	2000'	3500'	*
Washington Pass	0	lt .10	Monday Afternoon - Monday Night	4000'	4000'	4000'	3500'	4000'	*
Stevens Pass	0	lt .10	Cascade Snow / Freezing Levels noted above refer to the north (approximately Mt Baker and Washington Pass), central (approximately Stevens to White Pass) and south (near Mt Hood). Freezing Level is when no precipitation is forecast.						
Snoqualmie Pass	0	lt .10	* Note that surface snow levels are common near the passes during easterly pass flow and may result in multiple snow / freezing levels.						
Mission Ridge	0	lt .10							
Crystal Mt	0	lt .25							
Paradise	0	.25							
White Pass	0	lt .25							
Mt Hood Meadows	0	.25 - .50							
Timberline	0	.25 - .50							

LT = less than; WE or Water equivalent is the liquid water equivalent of melted snow in hundredths of inches. As a rough approximation 1 inch of snow = about .10 inches WE, or 10 inches of snow = about 1 inch WE.

USE AT YOUR OWN RISK

This Backcountry Avalanche Forecast is provided in conjunction with the US Forest Service, and is intended for personal and recreational purposes only. Safe backcountry travel requires preparation and planning, and this information may be used for planning purposes but does not provide all the information necessary for backcountry travel. Advanced avalanche education is strongly encouraged.

The user acknowledges that it is impossible to accurately predict natural events such as avalanches in every instance, and the accuracy or reliability of the data provided here is not guaranteed in any way. This forecast describes general avalanche conditions and local variations will always occur. This forecast expires 24 hours after the posted time unless noted otherwise.