



Northwest
Avalanche
Center



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Olympics

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by Kenny Kramer

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.

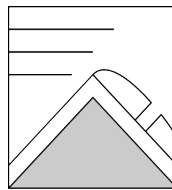
The Bottom Line: An overnight refreeze will limit but not eliminate avalanche hazards Sunday. A lingering wind slab was triggered by a backcountry traveler Saturday reminds us that slab avalanches are still possible near and above treeline. Identify and avoid locations where avalanches are likely to trigger, such as convex rolls and near rocks.

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	Low	Generally safe, watch for unstable snow on isolated terrain features.	Low

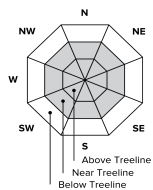
Avalanche Problems for Sunday

Wind Slab

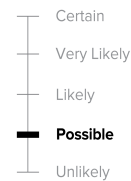
Wind slabs can take up to a week to stabilize. They are confined to lee and cross-loaded terrain features and can be avoided by sticking to sheltered or wind scoured areas.



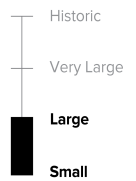
Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation



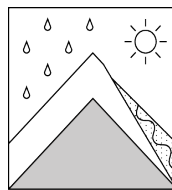
Likelihood



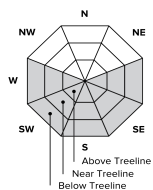
Size

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.



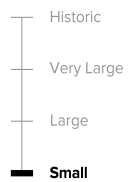
Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Avalanche Summary

Light rain at Hurricane Ridge tapered off Saturday morning giving way to clearing skies and warm temperatures. Moist to wet surface snow developed near and below treeline. Clear skies Saturday night should allow surface snow to refreeze creating a new surface crust on most slopes.

Ridge top winds Thursday through early Saturday morning formed wind slabs on a variety of aspects.

About a foot of recent snow is bonding to the most recent rain crust. Below this rain crust, no notable layers of concern have been identified within the snowpack.

The height of snow across the terrain is quite variable with little snow in many areas below treeline. Numerous obstacles still exist at all elevations.

Observations

NPS rangers reported a skier triggered avalanche from the Hurricane Ridge area Saturday morning. The avalanche occurred as the skier was traversing across a steep convex rollover locally known as Avalanche Run near Poma Bowl (SW aspect around 5300 feet). The avalanche was estimated to be 12 inches deep, about 100 feet wide, and ran down slope for 300-400 feet. The skier was caught and carried but did not sustain any injuries.

Skier triggered wet snow avalanche 1/13, releasing on traverse (upper right). photo: NPS ranger

A separate natural, loose-wet avalanche occurred on Saturday in a known avalanche path named 20th of June. The avalanche occurred around 10am and ran for 300-400'.

Rangers also noted several glide cracks on steep smooth rock slabs.

NWAC pro-observer, Matt Schonwald was at Hurricane Ridge on Thursday 1/11. Matt found despite the significant storm snow, below the treeline elevation band had quite variable snow cover. Winds actively transported new snow near and especially above treeline, but the loading pattern was variable.

Avalanche Forecast for Sunday

Clear skies Saturday night should allow for snow surfaces to refreeze. Surface crusts will delay but not remove avalanche hazard on Sunday.

Near and above treeline lingering wind slabs can still be found. The recent skier triggered avalanche is a reminder that slab avalanches are still possible. The upper snowpack is gaining strength, but this takes time. Identify and avoid areas in the terrain where avalanches are more likely to be triggered such as convex rolls, below cliffs, and shallow spots within the snowpack.

Warm air temperatures and mostly sunny skies will break down the new surface crust Sunday. This will take time and limit loose wet avalanche activity. Monitor changes in surface snow conditions. It only takes a few inches of wet surface snow to avalanche.

Despite the recent snow, early season hazards still exist. Many creek beds have still not filled in for the winter.

Mountain Weather Synopsis for Sunday & Monday

A strong upper ridge of high pressure is slowly moving east of the Cascade crest Sunday afternoon. The ridge is providing beautifully sunny skies and very warm mid winter temperatures over most areas Sunday afternoon. The exception is the lower elevation east slopes and Cascade passes where low clouds and fog prevail under moderate easterly winds. Away from the passes many NWAC stations are seeing temperatures in the low to mid 50'S, while Camp Muir at 10,000 feet on Mt Rainier has been well above freezing. A few high clouds are beginning to drift over the area as the next approaching disturbance approaches from the SW. The ridge continues to move eastward Sunday night and early Monday as a weakening upper trough approaches from the west. This will cause another mild day Monday with increasing high clouds Sunday night, becoming mostly cloudy by Monday afternoon. The next approaching system will split apart with most of the energy either moving towards northern CA or inland well to the north. This will leave weak southerly flow aloft and a few showers as the disturbance passes across the area late Monday night. Freezing levels will lower as the trough passes Monday night, however precipitation amounts should be very light.

24 Hour Quantitative Precipitation ending at 4 am			Snow Level/Freezing Level in feet						
Location	Mon	Tue	Day	Northwest	Northeast	Central	South	Easterly	
				Olympics	Cascades	Cascades	Cascades	Cascades	Flow in Passes
Hurricane Ridge	0	lt .25	Sunday Morning	10500'	10500'	9000'	10500'	10500'	*
Mt Baker Ski Area	0	lt .25	Sunday Afternoon	10000'	10000'	9000'	10000'	10000'	*
Washington Pass	0	lt .25	Sunday Night	9500'	10000'	9000'	10000'	10000'	*
Stevens Pass	0	lt .25	Monday Morning	9000'	9000'	8000'	9000'	9500'	*
Snoqualmie Pass	0	lt .25	Monday Afternoon	8000'	8000'	6500'	8000'	8000'	*
Mission Ridge	0	lt .25	Monday Night	6000'	5500'	4500'	5500'	6000'	*
Crystal Mt	0	lt .25							
Paradise	0	lt .25							
White Pass	0	lt .25							
Mt Hood Meadows	0	lt .25							
Timberline	0	.25							

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.

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.

* Note that surface snow levels are common near the passes during easterly pass flow and may result in multiple snow / freezing levels.

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.