West Slopes South - South of I-90 to Columbia River

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by Dallas Glass

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.

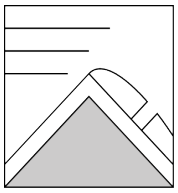
The Bottom Line: Weather factors across the area will drive the loose wet avalanche problem Saturday. Watch for clues such as big changes in the weather, pinwheels, and roller balls to indicate wet surface snow conditions are developing. Heavy snowfall has accumulated across the area this week and that deserves respect. Wind slabs and storm slabs are gaining strength, but this takes time.

Elevation	Saturday		Outlook for Sunday
Above Treeline	Considerable	Dangerous avalanche conditions. Careful snowpack evaluation, cautious route-finding and conservative decision-making essential.	Moderate
Near Treeline	Moderate	Heightened avalanche conditions on specific terrain features. Evaluate snow and terrain carefully; identify problem features.	Moderate
Below Treeline	Moderate	Heightened avalanche conditions on specific terrain features. Evaluate snow and terrain carefully; identify problem features.	Moderate

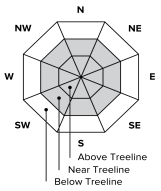
Avalanche Problems for Saturday

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.

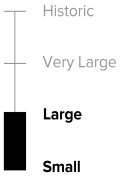


Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation

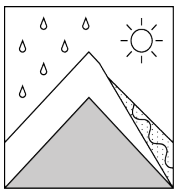
Likelihood



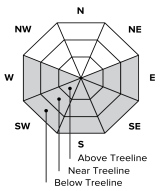
Size

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.

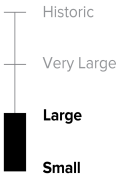


Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation

Likelihood



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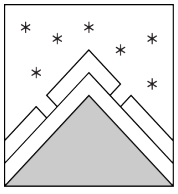
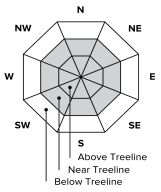
Storm Slabs

Storm slabs usually stabilize within a few days, and release at or below the trigger point. They exist throughout the terrain, and can be avoided by waiting for the storm snow to stabilize.

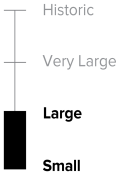


Avalanche Problem



Aspect/Elevation

Likelihood



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Avalanche Summary

Light rain Friday fell across the west slopes of the Cascades. Rain reached elevations of 5500 feet in the south and 4800 feet in the north. Moist to wet surface snow below treeline resulted in a natural loose wet avalanche cycle Thursday night and Friday morning.

Above the rain line, a series of storms Wednesday through Friday has deposited 2 or more feet of cold snow. Multiple weaklayers were found within the storm snow. A widespread natural storm slab cycle from Thursday has been reported from the Stevens, Snoqualmie, and Crystal backcountry areas. Observations show these weaknesses gaining strength, but this takes time.

Winds redistributed snow throughout the storm, depositing snow onto a variety of aspects. Limited information about above treeline terrain has been received due to poor visibility and difficult travel conditions. A high degree of uncertainty exists in the above treeline areas.

The recent storm snow sits on a thin 1/9 crust found up into the near treeline elevation band in most areas. A more supportable and thicker 1/5 crust from rain or freezing rain is easily identifiable in the upper snowpack.

Below the 1/5 interface, observations continue to indicate a strong snowpack with no notable layers of concern.

Observations:

North

Mt Baker Ski Patrol reported rain to 4800 feet at the ski area Friday. Recent loose wet avalanche activity was observed below treeline in surrounding terrain. Low visibility limited observations into the near and above treeline terrain outside the ski area.

Central

Snoqualmie Pass DOT reported rain reaching up to 5400 feet in the Alpental area Friday. A loose wet avalanche cycle occurred Thursday night below treeline. Some loose wet avalanches ran for 1000 feet and entrained significant snow.

Thursday was a very touchy and active avalanche day at Stevens Pass and Snoqualmie Pass. NWAC forecaster Dallas Glass observed numerous natural storm slab avalanches on all aspects near and below treeline in around the immediate Stevens Pass backcountry. Storm slabs released within new storm layers, occasionally stepping down deeper to a storm layer from Wednesday 1/10. Pro-patrol reported natural storm slabs released in the Alpental Back Bowls Thursday. Storm slabs were very touchy during control work at Alpental throughout the day with paths reloading quickly during heavy snowfall.

South

NWAC professional observer Jeremy Allyn traveled in the Crystal Mountain backcountry Friday. He observed rain to 5400 feet. In near treeline areas observations showed storm snow weaknesses gaining strength. Evidence from Thursday's natural storm slab cycle was evident on all aspects in the surrounding terrain.

Avalanche Forecast for Saturday

Local weather will drive avalanche problem development Saturday. In the south warm temperatures and clearing skies will allow loose surface snow to develop on sunny slopes. In the north, light rain will continue to create moist surface snow conditions near and below treeline. In the central Cascades and passes, rain in the morning and clearing in the afternoon will cause moist surface snow conditions. Pay attention to the weather. Note changes in precipitation and sky conditions, and anticipate how this will affect potential loose wet avalanches.

Near and above treeline lingering wind slabs and storms slabs area expected. Mild weather will continue to allow these problems to gain strength, but this takes time.

The west slopes and passes have received a substantial amount of snow this week. Any avalanche may entrain significant new snow or step-down to deeper layers resulting in avalanches that area larger than anticipated.

Ease into terrain on Saturday. Significant precipitation, recent natural avalanche cycles, and limited observations all warrant stepping out with caution.

Mountain Weather Synopsis for Saturday & Sunday

An upper level ridge positioned over the west coast is building Saturday afternoon. Residual light precipitation persisted over the Olympics and central WA Cascade west slopes Saturday morning but has ended in all areas by Saturday afternoon under strengthening high pressure. Temperatures have climbed rapidly Saturday as high pressure aloft builds, with low to mid 40's common both east and west of the crest, on the volcanoes and over the Olympics. Clear skies over the Mt Hood area will continue with a further clearing trend across the WA Cascades and Olympics Saturday night into Sunday as the high pressure ridge begins moving inland. The strong upper level ridge will shift into eastern Washington on Sunday and the Pacific Northwest should enjoy a sunny and mild day. However, offshore flow will begin to increase late Sunday night, with cooler easterly flow muting temperatures a bit in the Cascade Passes and for the lower/mid mountain of Mt. Hood on Sunday. A weak Pacific frontal system will begin to spread mid and high clouds into the region Sunday night.

24 Hour Quantitative Precipitation ending at 4 am

Location	Sun	Mon
Hurricane Ridge	lt .10	0
Mt Baker Ski Area	0	0
Washington Pass	.10	0
Stevens Pass	lt .10	0
Snoqualmie Pass	lt .25	0
Mission Ridge	0	0
Crystal Mt	lt .10	0
Paradise	.25	0
White Pass	lt .10	0
Mt Hood Meadows	0	0
Timberline	0	0

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.

Snow Level/Freezing Level in feet

Day	Olympics	Northwest Cascades	Northeast Cascades	Central Cascades	South Cascades	Easterly Flow in Passes
Saturday Morning	7500'	5500'	4500'	7000'	8000'	
Saturday Afternoon	9500'	8500'	7500'	10000'	10500'	
Saturday Night	11000'	10000'	9000'	10500'	11500'	*
Sunday	11000'	10000'	9500'	11000'	11500'	*
Sunday Morning	None'	None'	None'	None'	None'	
Sunday Night	10000'	10000'	9000'	10000'	11000'	*

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.