

Avalanche danger high in parts of NCW

by Christine Pratt | Feb. 9, 2017, 4:52 p.m.

Public Safety



Photo provided

An avalanche hit the garage of this Lake Wenatchee home Thursday morning forcing a man and two young boys to flee, unharmed from inside the garage. Photo provided/Kent Sisson, Chelan County Sheriff's Office.



LAKE WENATCHEE — A garage ping-pong game between a dad and two young boys was interrupted Thursday when an avalanche swept four feet of snow through the closed garage door, forcing the three to flee, unharmed, through a small side door.

"It was a significant slide. It could have done a lot more damage," said Sgt. Kent Sisson, with the Chelan County Sheriff's Office. "They're lucky it kind of tapered off at the garage wall."

The Northwest Avalanche Center in Seattle has issued a warning for high avalanche danger through Thursday evening for the Stevens Pass and the central Eastern slopes of the North Cascades, including mountainous areas of Chelan County.

A decreasing chance of precipitation should reduce the danger by tomorrow, despite forecasted warming temperatures, Garth Ferber, avalanche meteorologist, said Thursday.

Recreationists should avoid the backcountry, the warning says.

The warning doesn't apply to ski areas where avalanche-mitigation work is performed, the warning said. Avalanche-mitigation is performed at Mission Ridge Ski and Board Resort, spokesman Tony Hickok said Thursday.

The impacted home is in the 23200 block of Lake Wenatchee Highway as it runs along the lake's north shore, Sisson said. The home is across the highway from the lake. Sisson declined to release the family's names.

The slide came down from the high on the southern aspect of Dirty Face Mountain, wrapped around and entered the west-facing garage door, which was closed, Sisson said. It was reported at about 11:30 a.m.

The slide knocked the door off its tracks and pushed a pickup and SUV, which were parked in the driveway, into each other, Sisson said.

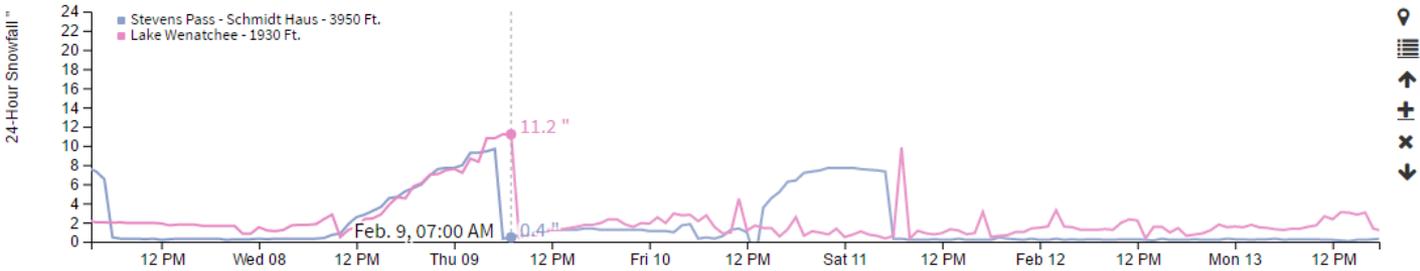
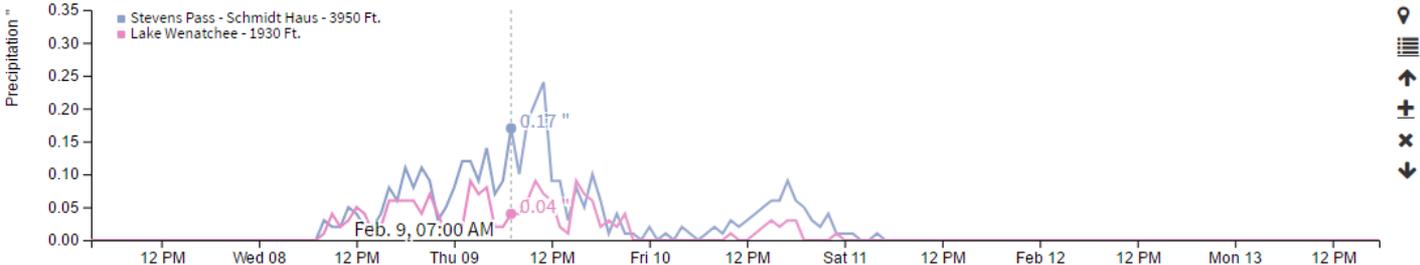
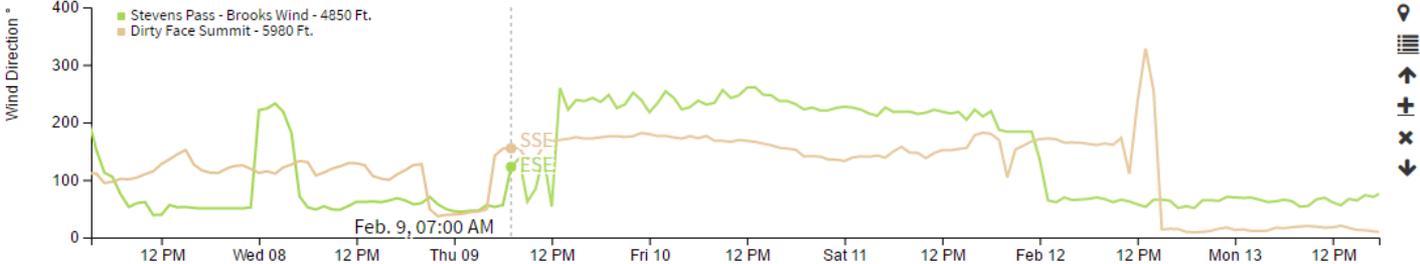
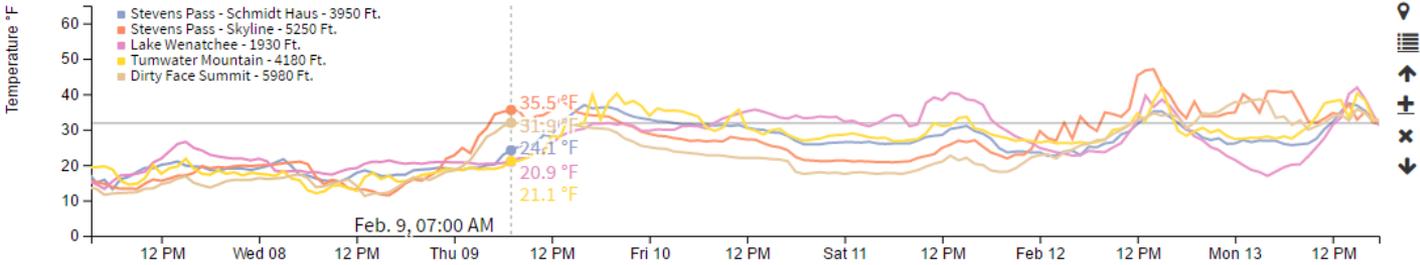
By Thursday afternoon, Sisson said neighbors had arrived with an excavator, backhoe, small dozer and shovels to help clear the slide.

"If you live below a slope, that's what we're worried about," Sisson said. "These folks did."

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Weather station data for the Stevens Pass – Lake Wenatchee area shows a strong warming trend at the higher elevation stations along with periods of heavy precipitation leading up to the natural avalanche from Dirty Face Mt that hit the house on the north shore of L. Wenatchee.

US 2 over Stevens Pass was closed for avalanche danger Thursday morning with many large avalanches reported between 5-7 am on 2/9/17.

East Slopes Central - Lake Chelan to South of I-90

Issued: 7:26 PM PST Wednesday, February 8, 2017 by Garth Ferber

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.

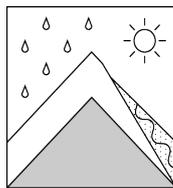
The Bottom Line: A mixed bag of avalanche problems should be expected on Thursday. Back country travel in avalanche terrain is not recommended through Thursday morning.

Elevation	Thursday		Outlook for Friday
 Above Treeline	 High	Very dangerous avalanche conditions. Travel in avalanche terrain not recommended.	 Considerable
 Near Treeline	 High	Very dangerous avalanche conditions. Travel in avalanche terrain not recommended.	 Moderate
 Below Treeline	 High	Very dangerous avalanche conditions. Travel in avalanche terrain not recommended.	 Moderate

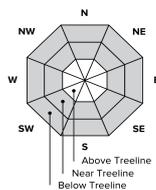
Avalanche Problems for Thursday

Loose Wet

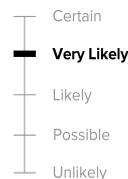
Loose wet avalanches occur where water is running through the snowpack, and release at or below the trigger point. Avoid terrain traps such as cliffs, gullies, or tree wells. Exit avalanche terrain when you see pinwheels, roller balls, a slushy surface, or during rain-on-snow events.



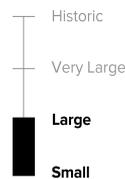
Avalanche
Problem



Aspect/Elevation



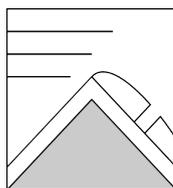
Likelihood



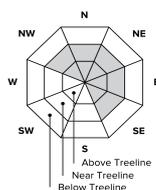
Size

Wind Slab

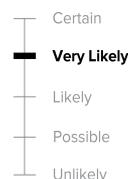
Wind slabs can take up to a week to stabilize. They are confined to lee and cross-loaded terrain features and can be avoided by sticking to sheltered or wind scoured areas.



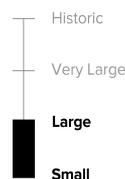
Avalanche
Problem



Aspect/Elevation



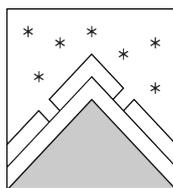
Likelihood



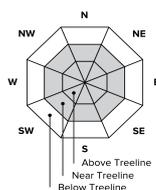
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Storm Slabs

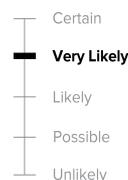
Storm slabs usually stabilize within a few days, and release at or below the trigger point. They exist throughout the terrain, and can be avoided by waiting for the storm snow to stabilize.



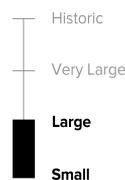
Avalanche
Problem



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Snowpack Analysis

Weather and Snowpack

A strong storm cycle was seen Friday through Monday with 2-3 feet of snow reported along the Cascade east slopes on average with lesser amounts at lower elevations and in the Mission Ridge/Blewett area. A slow warming trend affected all areas Saturday afternoon.

A nice day was seen Tuesday with light wind and sun or filtered sun and high clouds allowed for snowpack settlement and stabilization of the deep recent storm snow.

Increasing winds, snowfall and warming were generally seen on Wednesday as the next storm approached.

Recent Observations

North

A 5 cm layer of facets roughly 10 cm below the 1/17 crust may still be found in the Washington Pass zone and in areas further east. This reactive PWL has only been found in isolated locations in cold non-wind affected north facing terrain. No avalanche activity has been observed on this layer.

On Sunday NWAC pro-observer Jeff Ward and the NCHG observed debris from several small wind slab avalanches and one large wind slab avalanche, size D2.5, that ran from ridgeline over 2000 feet on a ENE aspect likely during peak precipitation and wind loading Saturday night. Storm slabs were not particularly sensitive in areas Jeff traveled, with evidence of a few previous natural storm slabs observed on steep solar aspects that likely ran on a 1/30 sun crust.

Reports of gradually settling storm snow from the Washington Pass area are providing excellent conditions on mid angled terrain as of Tuesday. However The NCHG report a 1 m X 100 m natural slab avalanche on a run near Harts Pass known as Dogs Bowl that possibly released Monday or Monday night on a faceted layer below the recent storm snow. Details are lacking regarding aspect or elevation.

Central

On Sunday the pro-patrol at Mission Ridge reported several collapses (whumpfs) on deeper weak layers. These occurred on an infrequently skied NE aspect about 6000 feet.

South

A report via the NWAC Observation page for Umptanum Ridge for Tuesday indicates a shallow 70 cm snow pack with whoomping due to buried hoar frost at 47 cm below the surface.

Detailed Avalanche Forecast for Thursday

A strong wet warm front will lift north over the Olympics and Cascades on Wednesday night to Thursday morning. Plan on rapid warming Wednesday night and heavy rain or snow with higher snow levels through Thursday morning. This should cause an avalanche cycle in the Olympics and Cascades which should test the snowpack. Small avalanches may step to deeper layers during the cycle.

A mixed bag of avalanche problems should be expected on Thursday with wind slab and storm slab very likely at times in the above treeline band and loose wet avalanches very likely in the below treeline band with some overlap in between in the near treeline band. Back country travel in avalanche terrain is not recommended through Thursday morning.

Although the northeast zone won't be listed separately most precipitation there will probably fall as snow and wind slab and storm slab should be the predominate avalanche problems there.

Due to the numerous other avalanche problems listed for the Cascade east slopes persistent slab won't be included in the list. Potential persistent slab layers should get good test during this avalanche cycle and this is another good reason to avoid avalanche terrain Thursday in case there are any dangerous results. A decision will need to be made on whether to relist persistent slab for the Cascade east slopes later partly based on what happens Thursday.

The cold front should cross the Cascades Thursday late morning or midday. This should cause a change to showers and lowering snow levels. The avalanche danger should begin to decrease following the cold front Thursday afternoon.

Mountain Weather Synopsis for Thursday & Friday

Strong southwest flow carried a major frontal system across the Northwest on Thursday. Moisture with this system was warm and deep and originated from near Hawaii. Rain was heavy by Thursday morning on the volcanoes along the Washington Cascade west slopes. Over 3 inches of water was seen overnight at Crystal and Paradise with over 2 inches at Mt Baker. Snow changed to with a mix of freezing rain or sleet in Cascade Passes and at low elevations along the Cascade east slopes Thursday morning. The air mass following the front will spread into the passes and east of the crest on Thursday afternoon. This should continue to cause strong alpine winds and light to moderate orographic showers. The main interstates or highways across Stevens, Snoqualmie and White Passes and the Mt Baker Highway 542 remain on Thursday afternoon. Decreasing orographic showers and further cooling should be seen Thursday night. An

upper short wave and weakening surface low pressure system should cross the Northwest on Friday. This should renew showers on Friday with further gradually lowering snow levels. Flow aloft stays very strong on Thursday and only very slowly decreases on Friday and alpine winds in the Olympics and Cascades should follow a similar trend.

24 Hour Quantitative Precipitation ending at 4 am			Snow Level/Freezing Level in feet					
Location	Fri	Sat	Day	Northwest	Northeast	Central	South	Easterly
				Olympics	Cascades	Cascades	Cascades	Cascades
Hurricane Ridge	1.00	.50	Thursday Afternoon	5500'	5000'	5000'	5500'	6000'
Mt Baker Ski Area	2.00 - 3.00	1.50	Thursday Night	3500'	3000'	3000'	3500'	4000'
Washington Pass	1.50	.75	Friday Morning	2500'	2500'	2500'	2500'	3000'
Stevens Pass	1.50 - 2.00	.75 - 1.00	Friday Afternoon	2000'	2000'	2000'	2000'	2500'
Snoqualmie Pass	2.00	1.00	Friday Night	1000'	1000'	1000'	1000'	1500'
Mission Ridge	.25	.25	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.					
Crystal Mt	2.00 - 3.00	.75	* Note that surface snow levels are common near the passes during easterly pass flow and may result in multiple snow / freezing levels.					
Paradise	2.00 - 3.00	1.00 - 1.50						
White Pass	1.00	.75						
Mt Hood Meadows	.75	.75 - 1.00						
Timberline	.75 - 1.00	1.00						

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.