



Sierra Nevada Avalanche Advisory

May 14, 2008 - Spring Statement

Avalanche Danger

The avalanche danger in late spring and early summer is generally LOW early in the day and often becomes MODERATE or CONSIDERABLE in the afternoon. Early in the morning or during other periods with limited surface softening falls can present a serious danger. These can be hard to arrest and result in fast acceleration downhill. Later in the day with enough warming there can be an increased danger from wet slides as the surface layers melt and lose cohesion. Sinking deeper than your ankles when traveling on foot is one indication that the snow is getting too soft.

A variety of information on spring and summer avalanche dangers can be found in the Avalanche Center Education Center - <http://www.avalanche-center.org/Education/>

Snowpack

The Sierra snowpack is below average in general. While there were a few large and noteworthy storms earlier in the winter there has been very limited snowfall since late February or early March. The snow is also distributed in unusual ways as a result of the high winds that accompanied most storms. These winds stripped the higher elevations of snow in many locations, and distributed it in unusual ways at mid elevations. There have been numerous warm periods with good melt/freeze cycles and this has allowed meltwater to create channels and drain to the ground. There is very little likelihood of a cycle of deep wet snow avalanches at this point.

A variety of snow conditions have been reported in early May, many of them more typical of late May or June. Some slopes have lost most or all of their snow, primarily those that face south through west. Other slopes have sun cups, fins, and runnels; in some locations these are quite large. Many reports of these challenges are from slopes facing south through east. On the right slopes at the right times there have been reports of excellent corn snow. The best bets seem to be east early in the day and northeast through north in general.

Spring Avalanche Weather

Whether the avalanche danger increases and what time that occurs is dependent on the weather, in particular the radiation balance at the snow surface.

A high freezing level, cloud cover, or both can limit the amount of overnight refreezing and lead to an earlier rise in the danger during the day. A solid refreeze overnight, cool daytime temperatures with limited solar radiation, or both can result in the avalanche danger remaining low all day.

Make your plans based on the weather forecast, especially the freezing level and cloud cover.

You can learn more about spring avalanches at <http://www.avalanche-center.org/Education/>

This is only a general discussion of weather as it pertains to avalanche danger. For more complete weather information please check the National Weather Service forecasts which are usually updated several times daily.

The fine print: This review of current and anticipated avalanche conditions is intended as a starting point for trip planning and avalanche related decisions. Conditions will vary locally, sometimes significantly, and may change with time. The user of this product assumes responsibility for obtaining the training necessary to anticipate and recognize these changes, and for refining their analysis of the danger based on first hand observations. This is a commercial product and was prepared without government assistance or resources and without any fundraising.

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