

General Bulletin for Sunday, December 15, 2019

A new bulletin will be posted when conditions warrant and resources allow.

General Bulletins are issued when unstable snow may exist within our forecast areas but before conditions or available resources warrant 5-scale avalanche forecasts to begin. We will start 5-scale forecasts on Wednesday, January 15 or earlier, if possible. **Please remember that avalanches can and do occur before 5-scale avalanche forecasts are issued.**

Winter conditions return with a vengeance on Sunday with high winds and new snow turning things around after a significant warm-up and rain event. Extreme winds will make travel anywhere above treeline challenging to say the least, with falling temperatures and blowing snow further complicating matters. Wind will increase even further Sunday night with 140 mph gusts possible. Upslope snow showers could bring 3-6 inches of new snow. High winds will pound the new snow into stiff wind slab that may remain unstable through Monday. Flowing water will build ice again but beware of ice dams and undermining until a more thorough freeze.

The summer Lion Head Trail remains the safer choice for accessing the summit of Mount Washington from the east. As more snow falls and avalanche paths grow on the summer Lion Head trail, the Lion Head Winter Route will become the preferred route to the summit. (Using the Lion Head Winter Route too early causes significant erosion and damage to trees and roots.) The Sherburne ski trail no doubt received a beating by rain and warm temperatures. Be wary of rocks and open water bars when new snow arrives. Ice climbs are growing in size and pockets of unstable snow between ice pitches are notorious for causing problems. In addition to avalanche hazards, remember to take into account other early season hazards that exist in the terrain:

Undermined snow and ice - Two and a half inches of rain plus snowmelt brought near flood stage conditions to the alpine. Anticipate damage and undermining.

Terrain traps and cliffs make burial and significant injury a real possibility, even if you are only swept off your feet by a small avalanche.

Mountain Weather: Graupel (snow pellets) is falling again at Hermit Lake Sunday morning after the recent deluge dropped 2.4" (60mm) of rain at this location. Strong west winds will howl as the temperature plummets Sunday and into Monday with steady winds in the 80-100 mph range with gusts to 140mph! High winds will diminish through the day Monday. Low temperatures on the higher summits will reach below zero F before rising into the teens as another coastal Low pressure system approaches, bringing snow on Tuesday.

We've had several avalanche cycles this season in Tuckerman Ravine with some avalanche paths filling in to the floor. While the warm-up and rain did some damage to ice climbs and the snowpack, we only lost 5cm of snow at the stake at Hermit Lake. This is an indicator that the nooks and crannies between boulders and in the krumholz are still mostly filled in with snow which will allow most new snow arriving in the next few days to be transported by any westerly wind into east aspects. Though likely to be stubborn to triggering due to extreme wind action pounding the particles tightly, look for a layer of graupel that could serve as a weak layer. Another storm arrives Tuesday and will hopefully replenish our snowpack. Close to 2.4 inches (59.6mm) of rain fell at Hermit Lake Friday and Saturday. Expect this volume of water to undermine snow and ice.

Please Remember:

- Safe travel in avalanche terrain requires training and experience. This bulletin is just one tool to help you make your own decisions in avalanche terrain. You control your own risk by choosing where, when, and how you travel.
- Anticipate the avalanche danger to change when actual weather differs from the higher summits forecast. For more information contact the Forest Service Snow Rangers, the AMC at the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, or the caretakers at Hermit Lake Shelters.
- **Posted 7:35 a.m. December 15, 2019.**

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USDA Forest Service