MOUNT WASHINGTON AVALANCHE CENTER

Avalanche Forecast for Monday, February 17, 2020

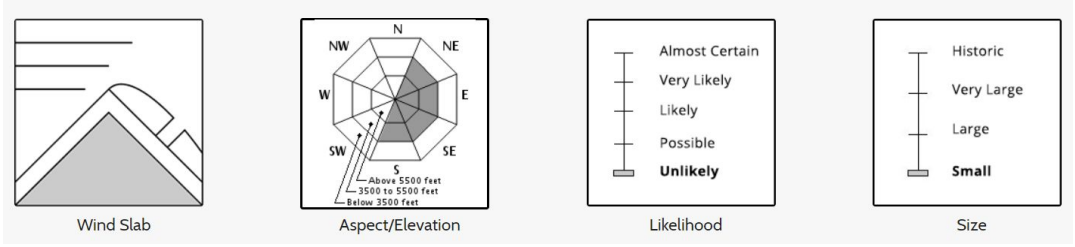
The Bottom Line

Largely firm and unreactive wind slabs are widespread through northeast to south facing aspects at mid and upper elevations. Some areas of softer snow exist here as well but are small and easily managed or avoided. The icy, unbreakable crust that lies below this past week's snowfall makes crampons useful in wind scoured areas at the tops of gullies. Avalanche danger is **LOW** today with human triggered and natural avalanches unlikely. Wind packed snow has created generally safe avalanche conditions.

Mountain Weather

Yesterday, the summit received 1.2" of 13% snow from a quick round of light and moderate snow showers in the morning ending at around 9am. During the time of snow shower activity, wind was from the W at 65-80 mph, and later dropped to the 30-40 mph range with blowing snow recorded every hour until 5pm. High temperature was 12 °F.
Today, high temperatures in the lower single digits, with W wind shifting to NW 50-70 mph and dropping to 40-55 mph. A slight chance of snow showers in the morning and clearing in the afternoon. The 6am hourly record from the summit reports light snow showers.
Tomorrow, 4 to 8 inches of snow is forecast and avalanche danger will increase. Snow is expected to begin in the morning with a 20-35 mph S wind. The heaviest snow falls mid-day coinciding with the S wind ramping up to 55-75 mph. Snow intensity will diminish overnight as wind shifts to the W and increases 75-95 mph. Snow showers may continue into Wednesday. At this time, models suggest precipitation from this system will be all snow, with no rain or mixed precipitation expected.

Primary Avalanche Problem



Most of our prime avalanche terrain was tested over the weekend. Finger and pencil hardness wind slabs allowed boot penetration over the ankle where the snow had accumulated over the stout rain/sleet crust. Ski penetration varied from essentially none on the supportable but easily carved wind packed areas to 10-15cm in more sheltered areas of finger hardness snow. Despite moderate shears, the layers above the ice crust have been proven to be unreactive. Some pockets of softer (4F) snow exist but these areas are very isolated and easily managed or avoided. Lower elevation areas in Crawford Notch are likely well settled though no observations create uncertainty.

Forecast Discussion

If we had rain or a large storm in the forecast, the existing upper snowpack would be a concern. The fracture planes between the multiple layers of wind slab which developed in the past week are quite obvious in snow pits. The upside down nature of the snow is evident when booting or poking hard into the snow with a pole handle. Heat in the form of heavy rain would be the only foreseeable trigger that could move the existing wind slab in a big way. The snow on it's way tomorrow will create its own avalanche problem and it remains to be seen if new avalanche activity will be enough to step down and pull in the existing slab. My money is on that happening in some of the larger slopes and longer gullies.

Additional Information: The Sherburne and Gulf of Slides ski trails are snow covered to Pinkham.

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