

2/6/92 Forecast

Hello, this is Mark Yates with the US Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center, bringing you information on mountain weather, avalanche, snow and road conditions for the La Sal Mountains. This is the report for Friday, February 7th, recorded at 6:15 Thursday evening.

Current snowpack totals are 31" at 9,600 feet, with 43" in Gold Basin and 45" on Geysers Pass. The water content of our snowpack has dropped to 64% of the past 30 year average, at the SCS Snotel site.

In the mountain weather forecast, things are looking a little better, as the Pacific storm system that's moving into southern California, may have more effect on our range than expected. The high pressure will gobble up and push most of the storm energy south of us, but at least we have a chance of some snowshower activity getting up to us. Tonight we'll see increasing cloudiness, with mostly cloudy skies Friday, though the cover will be variable. There's a chance of snowshowers developing late in the day. The low temperature at 10,000 feet will be in the lower 20's, with the high on Friday in the mid to upper 30's. Ridgetop winds will be southerly and increase some during the period. Saturday, considerable cloudiness and a chance for light snow are predicted.

Regarding avalanche concerns, we continue to have mostly stable conditions and the range has an overall low or isolated potential for human triggered slides. Where your most likely to find a tender slope is on steep above timberline, NW to E facing terrain. Wind loaded pockets, near the ridges and over 35 degrees, present the greatest potential. With the predicted weather, there will be very little chance for surface wet snow slides. Remember that we have a very weak old snowpack with lots of depth hoar and crusty surfaces. New snow and wind will change the hazard rapidly, so stay tuned.

Regarding snow conditions, we still have some good ski turning in select areas. The most reliable and still quite good skiing is on below timberline, northerly aspects, where you'll have old settled powder and depth hoar. I keep finding areas that are supportable most of the run, but how much you punch through varies from place to place. Some lower elevation, southerly exposures may still manage to warm and soften up for a period of the day, but unless you hit it just right, expect primarily breakable sun crusts. There are stretches that have supportable frozen crusts. Most of the above timberline slopes continue to have difficult and variable crusts, hit or miss. It's a wonderful time to do some exploring and there's lots of ski track routes already broke into spectacular places. The ski skating, diagonal stride and snowmobiling, all continue to be very good on the groomed trails.

The southern Loop road is plowed to the Sand Flats turnoff, as well as 4 1/2 miles of the Geysers Pass road to the trailhead. On the east side of the range, 10 miles are plowed out of Old La Sal to the Dark Canyon Trailhead. Check out the back side if you haven't yet, there's great views, a variety of terrain and it has a whole different feel.

If you need more information or have anything to report to me, call 259-7155 or 259-8964. Enjoy and thanks for calling.

2/7/92 Forecast

Hello, this is Mark Yates with the US Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center, bringing you information on mountain weather, avalanche, snow and road conditions for the La Sal Mountains. This is the report for Saturday, February 8th, recorded at 8:00 Friday evening.

Light snowshowers started this afternoon and a half inch dusting is on the ground as of 6:00 this evening. Current snowpack totals are 32" at the Geysers trailhead, with 41" in Gold Basin and 44" on Geysers Pass. The water content of our snowpack is now 63% of the past 30 year average at 9,500 feet.

Regarding mountain weather, we see this weak Pacific storm system, which is tracking to the south of us, managing to have an effect on our range. Our first new snow in exactly one month. Tonight we will have cloudy skies with periods of light snow continuing. 1" to 3" are possible by morning. Saturday morning should be mostly cloudy, with partial clearing as the day progresses. We could see another trace to 2", but the chance of snowshowers will decrease through the day. The low temperature at 10,000 feet will be in the upper teens, with the high on Saturday in the upper 20's, maybe lower 30's. Ridge-top winds will be mostly light in the 10 to 20 mph range, from the SSW tonight, becoming westerly, then northwesterly through the day. Sunday, fair to partly cloudy skies are expected and another small storm should effect us on Monday.

The predicted snow amounts and wind will not significantly change the avalanche concerns. We will continue to have mostly stable conditions, with an overall low or isolated potential for human triggered slides. Where your most likely to find a tender slope is on steep above timberline, NW to E facing terrain. Old wind loaded pockets, near the ridges and over 35 degrees, present the greatest potential and these will be the same areas to get some fresh wind loading. Remember that we have a very weak old snowpack with lotsa of depth hoar and crusty surfaces, so if we get surprised with amounts over 6", the hazard will be rising, especially if there's much wind.

Regarding snow conditions, we still have some good ski turning in select areas. The most reliable and quite good in areas, is on below timberline, northerly aspects, where you'll have old settled powder and depth hoar. We tried some again today and the open glades had several inches of recrystallized snow on a supportive surface. Sweet as could be, but when we dropped into the steep trees, the whole snowpack was sugar. Other places I've tried in the trees were mostly supportable, so you have to explore around a little. Maybe we'll have some new powder on those southerly suncrusts, it would be really fun on the stretches that are supportable, which are hard to find. Most of the above timberline slopes continue to have variable crusts, hit or miss. Don't expect the trails to be freshly groomed in the morning, but the hard old surface with a bit of new snow should still be nice.

Plowed roads are the southern Loop road to the Sand Flats turnoff, as well as 4 1/2 miles of the Geysers Pass road to the trailhead. On the east side of the range, 10 miles out of Old La Sal to the Dark Canyon Trailhead. All are in good shape now, but any new snow will not be plowed on Saturday.

If you need more information or have anything to report, call 259-7155. Hope for snow and thanks for calling.

2/8/92 Forecast

Hello, this is Craig Bigler reporting from the US Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center. This is the report for Sunday, February 9th, recorded at 7:30 Saturday evening.

At long last the spell has been broken. 3-4 inches of new snow fell overnight. I know this isn't much but it's the first we've seen in 31 long days. The clouds moved out rapidly this evening, and Sunday should be a pretty nice day, perhaps warm enough to soften the crust under the new snow on southern exposures. Avalanche hazard remains low almost everywhere. And driving up the access roads is not a problem. Stay on the line for details. Current snowpack totals are 34" at the Geyser trailhead, with 44" in Gold Basin and 47" on Geyser Pass. The water content is 63% of the 30 year average 9,500 feet.

We are now in a brief dry period with mostly clear skies tonite and Sunday, ~~with~~ increasing cloudiness in the afternoon. This may start a cycle of wet and dry periods with small amounts of moisture reaching us from the SW. Look for light showers again Monday. The temperature tonite will be in the low teens and tomorrow in the upper thirties. Winds will be light and variable.

The wind didn't blow today, and there wasn't enough new snow to accumulate into wind pockets anyway. Thus, we continue to have mostly stable conditions, with an overall low or isolated potential for human triggered slides. Old wind loaded pockets, over 35 degrees, on NW to E facing ridges present the remaining avalanche hazard. A lot of the old snowpack is weak, with lotsa depth hoar and crusty surfaces, so any amount of new snow over 6", would raise the hazard dramatically, but it just doesn't look like that's going to happen. On the other hand, if we get a bunch of small storms over several days, skiing would improve dramatically without raising the hazard much.

Looking at the skiing, you can still find old settled powder and depth hoar in northern trees and protected open glades. You have to look for the good places. In the trees, these places are not very steep, because the steepest have just depth hoar with no slab to hold you up. On the trails, the little bit of new snow on the old hard surface makes for great touring, and easy skating and turning.

The southern Loop road to the Sand Flats turnoff, as well as 4 1/2 miles of the Geyser Pass road to the trailhead, and the Dark Canyon Trailhead road remain in good shape.

If you need more information or have anything to report, call 259-7155. Hope for snow and thanks for calling.

2/9/92 Forecast

Hello, this is Craig Bigler reporting from the US Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center. This is the report for Monday, February 10th, recorded at 6:00 Saturday evening.

Well, the weather persons are sticking their necks out. Another round of light showers, they say, then the big one hits Monday afternoon or evening. Today's light shower dropped only one more inch of new snow. So, until the big one gets going the avalanche hazard remains low almost everywhere. Driving up the access roads should not be a problem Monday, if you have 4WD or use chains. Now, stay on the line for details. Current snowpack totals are 35" at the Geyser trailhead, and 45" in Gold Basin. The water content is 63% of the 30 year average 9,500 feet.

Today was a strange kind of day. Clouds hung over the mountains all day. From 9:30 am to about 2:pm it seemed to be snowing sincerely. But, total accumulation was only one inch. Snow flakes were fun to look at, stellar shaped and coated with rime because the clouds had lots of turbulence in them. Sometimes that turbulence would send a gust of wind to the ground, but not enough to transport the snow. We're likely to get another inch or 2 or 3 tonite and Monday am. It will be mostly cloudy with gusty SW winds at 10-15 mph. Temperature tonite and tomorrow will range from 15 to 25.

There is a lot of moisture in the air now, with deeper moisture coming. All it needs is enough energy to kick it uphill. A storm strong enough to do that could be here by noon Monday, or not long after. Or the lingering High Pressure could blow it apart, and we'll just continue with our series of mini-storms. If the storm prevails over the HP, it's likely to be very warm with strong SW winds.

Until a big storm does hit, we'll continue to have mostly stable conditions, with an overall low or isolated potential for human triggered avalanche. Old wind loaded pockets, over 35 degrees, on NW to E facing ridges are the only remaining hazard. But, a lot of the old snowpack is weak. Much depth hoar in the mid-pack on most aspects. In some places it is slabbing up, while only a few feet away the pack has no integrity at all. In other places the new snow has fallen on hard crusts. Any significant amount of new snow or high winds will raise the hazard dramatically almost everywhere. The problem is that after 31 days without precip, conditions vary considerably every few feet. So, if the storm does come, I'm going to be very conservative about where I go.

Looking at the skiing, It is still out there. Today we skied Exxon's Folly. Fantastic turns in sugar snow on a supportable crust, and in the bottomless depth hoar. Some turns in breakable crust were not so fantastic.. The 3-4 inches that fell Friday nite and today make for fun, if wobbly turning on crust where there are old tracks. On the trails, the new snow on the old hard surface makes for great touring, and easy turning. But the skating won't measure up until there's enough new snow to warrant grooming.

The southern Loop road to the Sand Flats turnoff, and up the Geyser Pass road to the trailhead, and the Dark Canyon Trailhead road remain in good shape, at least for 4WD or chains.

If you need more information or have anything to report, call 259-7155. Hope for snow and thanks for calling.

2/10/92 Forecast

Hello, this is Mark Yates with the US Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center, bringing you information on mountain weather, avalanche, snow and road condition for the La Sal Mountains. This is the report for tuesday, February 11th, recorded at 8:45 monday evening.

As of 6:00 this evening, we had received another 2" of new snow at the Geyser trailhead, with more falling at the higher elevations. This is from the storm system that arrived in the afternoon and it was still snowing. Combined with the disturbances over the weekend, 7" of powder has come down in 3 days. Current snowpack totals are 37" at the trailhead, with 48" in Gold Basin. This new snow has pushed the water content of our snowpack back up to 69% of the 30 year average, at the SCS Snotel site.

In the mountain weather forecast, we see a massive low pressure center off the coast of southern California, spinning a moist southwesterly flow into our area. Embedded in this flow are small storms or disturbances, with breaks in between. This unsettled pattern may last for a few days, finally bringing us some snow. The current disturbance will keep the range under mostly cloudy skies tonight and into tuesday morning, with partial clearing later in the day. Periods of snowfall will continue, decreasing on tuesday. Another 2" to 5" are likely through the period. The low temperature at 10,000 feet will be in the upper teens, with the high on tuesday in the upper 20's. Ridgetop winds will continue to be out of the southwest and moderate, in the 15 to 25 mph range, though periods of stronger gusts are likely. They may become WNWesterly as the day progresses.

Regarding avalanche concerns, conditions are beginning to deteriorate. The winds are transporting our new snow onto leeward slopes, causing both wind slabs and pockets of greater deposition. These are now sitting on old windcrusts or several inches of sugary recrystallized snow on a slab. Neither are good scenerios. We now have a moderate potential for human triggerd slides, at and above timberline, on northerly and easterly facing terrain, 35 degrees and steeper. You may find a few loaded pockets on the south and west aspects, on the downwind side of terrain features. These also have a moderate hazard rating. At this point all other areas and lesser angles have a low or isolated potential, but the new snow is loading up our widespread depth hoar and crusts. At some point the new soft slabs may come off the southerly exposures, and far worse, the new snow load will be to much for the weak depth hoar to support on the other aspects. Depending on where you are, failure could occur on upper, mid pack or even base depth hoar. So, you need to check with me daily, to see if I'm finding an aspect getting close to the stress out point and you need to monitor this loading right were you plan to ski. It won't take much more snow for the hazard to increase and if we get more than 5 new inches, I'd be more conservative tuesday.

Well, powder skiing is the word for tuesday, though I expect you'll still feel those old surfaces with this amount of new snow. Should be great in alot of areas. We'll try and get the trails groomed tuesday or ASAP.

Don't plan on the access roads being plowed tuesday morning, but you shouldn't have a problem with 4WD or chains. They'll be plowed as soon as these little amounts add up enough to warrent it.

If you need more information or have anything to report to me, especially avalanche activity or incident, call 259-7155 or 259-8964. Think snow and thanks for calling.

2/11/92 Forecast

Hello, this is Mark Yates with the US Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center, bringing you information on mountain weather, avalanche, snow and road condition for the La Sal Mountains. This is the report for wednesday, February 12th, recorded at 7:30 tuesday evening.

As of 5:00 this evening, we had received another 1 1/2" of new snow at the Geyser trailhead, with more falling at the higher elevations. Current snowpack totals are 38" at the trailhead, with 50" in Gold Basin. This new snow has pushed the water content of our snowpack back up to 71% of the 30 year average, at the SCS Snotel site.

In the mountain weather forecast, we see the same pattern continuing for several days to come. A large, nearly stationary low pressure center is off the coast of California and it's pumping a moist southwesterly flow into our region. Small storms are spinning off this center, so we'll see alternating periods of clouds and snowshowers and breaks with partial clearing. A moist, unsettled pattern with the new snow slowly accumulating. Tonight and wednesday, we'll have mostly cloudy conditions over the mountains, with periods of snowshower activity. Partial clearing may occur at times. The low temperature at 10,000 feet will be in the upper teens, with the high on wednesday again in the upper 20's. Ridgetop winds will vary in intensity from light to moderate and will be southwesterly most of the time.

Regarding avalanche concerns, conditions are deteriorating as we steadily load our predominately weak old snowpack. At present the main problem is the winds, which are transporting our new snow onto leeward slopes, causing both wind slabs and pockets of greater deposition. Most of these are sitting on old windcrusts or several inches of sugary recrystallized snow on a slab. Both are bad scenerios. These loaded pockets now have a moderate potential for human triggered slides on slopes steeper than 30 degrees. You'll find them primarily on northerly and easterly facing, at and above timberline terrain, with a few deposition areas on the downwind side of terrain features on south and west aspects. Right near the ridgelines, expect the hazard to be high over 35 degrees. At this point, most of the below timberline terrain continues to have a low or isolated potential for failure, but the new snow is loading up our widespread weak depth hoar. How much snow an area will hold, is going to vary considerably, with some spots being depth hoar top to bottom, others with this sugar only in the mid or upper pack, plus many spots have a bit of a slab high in the old snowpack or suncrusts. Collapsing is already occurring in places, but for the most part the new snow will have to be a significant soft slab, before the hazard is significant. Right now there is moderate potential on northerly facing open areas, steeper than 35 degrees, but much more snow and it will become widespread. So stay tuned.

Wednesday will offer some great powder turning on all aspects, though you'll still feel the old surfaces in places. Some south and west open areas will be windblown. The trails should get groomed on wednesday.

The Loop road and lower Geyser Pass road have very little snow, but the depth increases near the trailhead. With chains or 4WD you should get in without trouble and Grand County will plow it on thursday. I haven't got a report on the backside access.

If you need more information or have anything to report to me, especially avalanche activity or incident, call 259-7155 or 259-8964. Enjoy the new snow and thanks for calling.

2/13/92

Hello this is Brad Meiklejohn with the U.S. Forest Service La Sal Avalanche Forecast Center, with backcountry avalanche and mountain weather information on Thursday February 13th at 5:00 p.m.

It is with great sadness that I inform you that there has been a major avalanche accident in the La Sal mountains. On Wednesday February 12 a group of six backcountry skiers were caught in an avalanche at the head of Gold Basin. All six were buried, two people were able to dig themselves out, but the other for did not survive. Worsening weather and avalanche conditions since the time of the accident have prevented rescuers from reaching the site. With a break in the weather expected on Friday, rescuers hope to complete the recovery of the victims. For these reasons, the Geyser Pass access road will be closed from the la Sal Loop Road turn off on ~~Saturday~~ Friday. We appreciate your cooperation in this matter, and we would ask you to please avoid this area until the recovery is completed.

Heavy snow and strong winds moved into the mountains today, bringing another 6-12" of high ^{density} dusty snow to the La Sals. Storm totals since last Friday are from 10-20", with more snow expected tonight. This dense snow has been accompanied by Southwest winds at speeds of up to 60 m.p.h.; and as a result the avalanche hazard in the La Sal mountains is extreme. An avalanche warning has been issued for all of Utah's mountains above 8,000' ^{and} large and destructive avalanches are certain. The most dangerous slopes are east, north and west facing slopes steeper than 30 degrees, but avalanches can be expected to run out long distances on low angled terrain. Backcountry travel in and adjacent to any steep slopes is strongly discouraged at this time. This very hazardous situation will be slow to stabilize, and dangerous avalanche conditions will continue through the coming weekend.

The large storm will continue through the night, with an additional 6-8" of high density snow expected to fall. The winds will continue from the west to southwest at speed of 20-50 m.p.h.. Temperatures will remain mild, with lows tonight in the mid 20's at 8000' and the snow level at 6000'. The weather is expected to break some on Friday, with partly cloudy skier expected. Highs on Friday will be in 30-35 degrees at 8000'.

Again the Geyser Pass Road will be closed on Friday pending the completion of the recovery. Please do not plan travel to this area, and if you must travel into the mountains in the coming days use extreme caution and avoid all potential avalanche terrain.

This message will be updated on Friday evening. Thanks for calling.