



Feb.1, 2008
02-037-R2

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Mt. Bachelor Ski Patrol helps ODOT reopen U.S. 20

SANTIAM PASS – Three professional ski patrollers from Mt. Bachelor skied to the community's rescue Friday morning by providing expert avalanche control work for the unstable snow pack in the Hogg Rock area of U.S. 20, just west of Santiam Summit.

A series of snow slides closed the highway at about 6:30 a.m. Thursday from milepost 75 to milepost 80. The slides ranged from 5 feet to 15 feet in depth and covered about three-fourths of a mile of the highway.

Given the unstable snowpack above the highway, blizzard conditions, gusting wind and the high risk for additional slides, ODOT managers decided to keep the highway closed overnight. ODOT officials on Thursday afternoon contacted Mt. Bachelor President Matt Janney and Pro Patrol Director Curtis Norsen, who immediately agreed to provide assistance.

Norsen, along with patrollers John Millslagle and Betsy Nelson, arrived at Santiam Summit before dawn Friday morning, and immediately skied up into the Hogg Rock area. The three set off 10 separate explosions in an effort to trigger slides and bring down the unstable snow so that ODOT could reopen the highway.

"We at ODOT are grateful for the expertise and assistance of Mt. Bachelor and the Mt. Bachelor Ski Patrol," said ODOT Director Matt Garrett. "Without their timely and unselfish help, we would not have been able to reopen the highway so quickly."

Following completion of the slide control work, ODOT crews from Santiam Junction spent about three hours clearing excess snow from the highway. The highway was reopened about 1 p.m. Friday.

Also providing invaluable assistance was Jim Morris, an employee of Hap Taylor & Sons/Knife River. Morris, a demolition expert who is licensed to transport explosives, took time from his job to drive the explosives from Sisters to Santiam Pass.

“These individuals and the companies that employ them exemplify the spirit of cooperation and community service that makes Oregon such a great place to live,” Garrett said.

Although the highway is open and the snowpack in the Hogg Rock area stable at this time, forecasts call for heavy snow, high winds and low visibility through the weekend. ODOT suggests that travel over mountain passes be undertaken with extreme caution.

Winter driving tips online

ODOT offers winter driving tips online at <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/>. Check out the Winter Travel News Packet, a collection of stories, tips and figures about driving during winter weather conditions, at http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/docs/2007-2008_winterstory.pdf.

Before heading out on the road, motorists should check the latest road conditions by visiting www.tripcheck.com or calling 511.

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