Wicked weather creates slushy mess throughout Lake Tahoe

Updated Dec. 20 9:52am:

Six inches of fluffy snow fell overnight in South Lake Tahoe and it hasn't stopped.

"Most of the roads in the county, both up there at the lake and down here in the valley, have ice on them. So far this morning we have had eight multi-vehicle traffic accidents – luckily none with serious injury – and numerous vehicles that have slid off the roadway," Jim Halsey with the Douglas County sheriff's department said.

By Susan Wood and Kathryn Reed

If this is what fall in Lake Tahoe is like, who knows what winter will bring when it starts tomorrow.

The La Nina tropical weather phenomenon is shaping up to be a doozy for the West Coast. With more than half the United States weather map covered with snow, the Weather Channel reports the Sierra Nevada beating a 30-year record with 300 inches of snow accumulating from November through December.

This latest storm series declared an "atmospheric river" of blustery weather is predicted to bring up to 15 feet of snow in some spots of the mountain range running up and down the spine of California. As a gauge, a basketball hoop sits at 10 feet.



Slushy roads were the norm throughout Lake Tahoe during the weekend. Photos/Kathryn Reed

But it’s the high winds with heavy rain that captured the headlines this weekend.

The National Weather Service in Reno reported a 155mph gust at Alpine Meadows Ski Resort on Sunday. A 67mph gust was reported at Lake Tahoe Airport in South Lake Tahoe.

Take that with the Weather Service reports of at least 3 inches of rain at the lake in a three-day period, and emergency crews have the makings of a major weather event including flooding, downed trees and power lines. The Lake Tahoe region remains in a winter storm warning period until 4pm today.

Downed power lines west of Sierra-at-Tahoe closed Highway 50 near Tamarack Pines Sunday afternoon. In the morning the South Shore ski resort was evacuating skiers and riders after a tree landed on a chairlift cable. This highway incident came hours after snow slid off the cliff onto the eastbound lanes of 50 on the east side of Echo Summit, California Highway Patrol reported.

“Luckily, and I knock on wood, there have been no injury

accidents," CHP Sgt. Terry Lowther reported Sunday afternoon. "But if this rain and slush freezes tonight, it will all be ice."

Temperatures were supposed to plummet to a low of 22 degrees overnight, making for slick, dangerous conditions for late-travel and this morning's commute.

For people coming to the mountains, it was an interesting drive with restrictions on most of the roads in and out of the basin. That is likely to be the scenario for the better part of the week as storms keep rolling in. Be sure to check the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* to know the road conditions.

South Lake Tahoe police Sgt. Josh Adler said officers are finding people driving way too fast for the conditions. Officers were contending with tons of spinouts and accidents throughout the weekend. No injury accidents were reported through Sunday afternoon.

"One guy said he skidded for 100 feet. I told him you are driving too fast," Adler said of the motorist who hit the backend of a BlueGo bus.

Douglas County sheriff's dispatch said nothing out of the ordinary was going on.

Lake Valley Fire was hopping Sunday afternoon with engines at incidents of two downed trees – one at North Upper Truckee that closed the road at Shoshone and another plunging into a home at the 1300 block of Glen Eagles, north of Pioneer Trail.

"When you have the high winds with the ground saturated, we're going to have some trees come down," fire Battalion Chief Gareth Harris said.

Sierra Pacific Power was busy Sunday as well. One minor outage was reported at the Skyland area, with another 30 households

in the Glenbrook area without power for several hours Sunday. The 80 customers in the North Upper Truckee by Meyers were to have lights back on Sunday night.

In Tahoe City, 500 customers were in the dark, while 1,000 in Incline Village lost power. Those areas are not expected to have power until this morning.

“We heard the crash and we knew that was not a pine cone hitting the roof. And then the power went out,” Tracy Owen Chapman said of the tree in the middle of the street in the Skyland area.

One person on the street could not get out because the live wires were directly in front of their house. No injuries occurred, and the tree did not hit a house or a vehicle.

The Reno-Tahoe International Airport experienced delays with the first storm in the series Friday, but reported no affects on Sunday afternoon, airport authority spokeswoman Heidi Berthold noted.

Flooding was a problem on Highway 89 for one Caltrans crew dealing with a pond about a block west of 15th Street in the westbound lane. Those men reported up to a foot of runoff water at the road there.

John Greenhut, director of Public Works for South Lake Tahoe, said minor flooding in low lying areas started on Sunday, but nothing serious.

“… we are equipped for either snow or rain. We don’t like to have an excess of either,” Greenhut said.

With this being the fourth winter after the devastating Angora Fire, Greenhut said everything in that area is stabilized, but his crews still have an eye on the area.

It has been slush on the roads and in driveways. People don’t know if they should be shoveling or using a broom to clear the

muck.

“At 6,600 (feet) I cleaned up about a foot of heavy, wet snow this morning. It is back to rain again at about 34 degrees. We are praying for the temps to drop again so that the storm continues on a cold note,” Chris Nelson of Tahoe Donner said late Sunday morning.

Kaycee Odom of Charlotte, N.C., was awed by seeing snowplows for the first time. She and her friend came to ski, but the weather has not cooperated. Instead, they found their way to the Beacon restaurant for food and drinks on Sunday.

All this weather has been a mixed blessing for people who play in the snow. While the ski resorts are rejoicing about the amount of snow dumping on them, the wind is making the freshies inaccessible.

Most resorts around Lake Tahoe closed early Sunday because wind made operating the lifts hazardous. Sierra-at-Tahoe had the most notable news Dec. 19 when a treetop fell onto the West Bowl lift. Five people sustained minor injuries that did not require hospitalization.

Heavenly closed early except for the Boulder area. Mount Rose and Squaw closed.

“La Nina continues to deliver massive storms to the region – after opening on 100-plus inches of snow, we are now over 200 inches for the season and it’s still just December. This storm, while a bit heavier than the Thanksgiving storm, is helping build our base depths and fill in all the nooks and crannies in the trees. Once the temps drop and the snow gets lighter, we’ll be looking forward to some big powder days,” said Kirstin Cattell, spokeswoman at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Backcountry enthusiasts will want to keep a close eye on reports from the Sierra Avalanche Center because the conditions have been precarious.

Hotels around the basin have rooms to rent because people are choosing to not come right now.

Jerry Bindel, who runs Lakeland Village in South Lake Tahoe, said his property's rule is reservations can be pushed back if people don't feel comfortable coming up in the weather, but refunds aren't possible unless the roads are all closed.

"Everyone I talk to is saying business levels are healthy right now," Bindel said. He anticipates all this snow will translate to heads in beds the entire winter.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)

Rahlves, Puckett to compete in Winter X

By Nicole Dreon, ESPN

After the 2010 Winter Olympics, both Daron Rahlves and Casey Puckett suggested that they may retire. And while each has greatly reduced his race schedule for 2010-11, both are returning to Winter X to compete in Skier X.

One of the favorites for gold at Winter X 2010, Rahlves' day was cut short in Skier X when he went down hard in the rhythm section during the quarterfinal and dislocated his right hip for the fourth time in his career. "I had a little more speed than I thought, and I tried to stay in the draft as long as possible," says Rahlves, now 37. "I was watching the terrain and not the person in front of me."



Daron Rahlves

When Rahlves was taken off the course in a sled and sent to the Aspen Valley Hospital, his chances of making a fourth Olympic appearance less than a month later seemed slim. But he remained positive that he would return for Vancouver.

With the assistance of a PRP shot, which used his own blood to help regenerate soft tissue, he was ready to go for the Olympics. “It is the best procedure ever,” says Rahlves. “It was like super juice. It was the only way I was able to recover so quickly.” The only thing that wasn’t easy about the procedure was getting it approved by the IOC in such a short amount of time.

“Once you get within three weeks of the Olympics, things like that get tough,” said Rahlves. “Luckily, a doctor in South Lake Tahoe helped me get it authorized and helped deal with all the bureaucracy.”

Read the whole story

Mammoth racer lands on top of podium in skicross

By Freddy Perryman, U.S. Ski Team

INNICHEN, Italy – American John Teller of Mammoth raced his

way onto the podium Sunday with third in the skicross World Cup in Innichen. Australia's Scott Kneller won the race.

Teller, a former University of Colorado Ski Team captain, marked a career best on the World Cup stage. He qualified for the finals in 11th and made the most of it finishing second in each heat to advance to the four man final race.

Sunday's finish was the best showing for Teller in all competitions since February 2010, where he finished second in the NorAm Cup race at Sugar Bowl. He followed in Casey Puckett's (Aspen) footsteps, making it the second consecutive year an American has placed third in Innichen. He is also the first American to stand on a World Cup skicross podium since Daron Rahlves of Sugar Bowl finished second in St. Johann, Austria, last January.

Teller was one of only two athletes from the U.S. who competed. He was joined by Pat Duran of Vermont in 34th. There were no women competitors from the U.S.

The next World Cup skicross is scheduled for Jan. 7 in St. Johann, Austria.

Official results, FIS Freestyle World Cup,Innichen, Italy, Skicross

Men

1. Scott Kneller, Australia

2. Alex Fiva, Switzerland

3. John Teller, Mammoth, CA

4. Tomas Kraus, Czech Republic

5. Christopher Delbosco, Canada

—

34. Pat Duran, N. Fayston, VT

Women

1. Fanny Smith, Switzerland

2. Ashleigh Mcivor, Canada

3. Heidi Zacher, Germany

4. Anna Homelund, Sweden

5. Andrea Limbacher, Austria

Tree falls onto chairlift cable, no serious injuries at Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

A treetop fell onto the cable of the West Bowl chairlift at Sierra-at-Tahoe this morning, bouncing a handful of people out of the chair and onto the slope.



No one was seriously injured. The skiers were treated by ski patrol and the doctor at the resort on Highway 50 on the outskirts of the Lake Tahoe Basin. No one was transported to the hospital. The five injured people left the resort on their own.

The people who tumbled out of the chair fell between 5 and 15 feet.

“There was no real damage to the chair so we ran it until all the people on it were off,” Kirstin Cattell, resort spokeswoman said. “We shuttled the rest of the people out of West Bowl. At 11am we closed the whole resort for the day.”

Cattell doesn’t know the last time Sierra was closed because of winds. This resort near the top of Echo Summit is considered one of the better places to ski when it is windy.

However, the National Weather Service is calling for wind gusts this afternoon at the lake being 50mph, with ridgetops hitting 100mph.

About 150 had to be escorted out of the West Bowl area either on snowcats or snowmobiles.

Cattell said everyone evacuated in an orderly manner, with no one panicking.

Resort officials are spending the afternoon inspecting the towers, cables and chairs to ensure the lift will be functioning on Monday. Ski patrollers are examining the terrain for precarious trees.

The tree that toppled today had been loaded with snow, temperatures warmed up, then the winds picked up which caused it to break from the top.

Cattell said, “We have a robust hazardous tree removal plan in place.”

The resort takes out about 100 trees a year that could be a danger to guests.

For people who skied on Sunday, they can bring their ticket with Dec. 19 on it back any day to trade it in for a full day lift ticket at Sierra, Cattell said.

‘Race to Nowhere’ coming to LTCC

“Race to Nowhere” will be shown at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 7-8 at 6:30pm.

The film focuses on the saturation point many students, teachers, and parents have reached in the high-stakes, high pressure culture of the current educational system. It highlights the mounting pressures and stresses children experience – from elementary school through high school – in an effort to gain admission to top colleges.

The film is rated PG-13 and runs 1 hour, 25 minutes.

The first showing is sold-out. To reserve a seat to the free show, call (775) 750.0742.

Following both showings there will be a discussion led by Heidi Hill Drum of the Center for Collaborative Policy at CSU Sacramento.

Hight takes second in superpipe finals

Elena Hight of Zephyr Cove was second Saturday in the snowboard superpipe finals in the Winter Dew Tour’s Nike 6.0 open.

Olympians Louie Vito and Queralt Castellet won the competition in Breckenridge, Colo.

Vito, who is from Ohio, took the men's title with 90.25 points. Matt Ladley, from Steamboat Springs, was second at 75.00.

Castellet, from Spain, won the women's event at 85.25.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Ski report: It's dumping everywhere

All of the rain on Saturday at lake level has given way to snow today. The resorts as measuring the white stuff in feet at the higher elevations.



Even though it will be a powder day on the slopes, wind could wreak havoc with being able to get certain lifts spinning. Be sure to check with your resort of choice before heading to the slopes today.

The winter storm warning is in effect until 4pm Monday.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Sierra-at-Tahoe launched a new website this month.

• Julia Mancuso fans may be interested to see how she travels in her new van.

• The Tahoe Queen is offline for maintenance through Dec. 22. The M.S. Dixie paddle-wheeler is offering lunch as part of the scenic cruise ticket, as will the Queen when it resumes service.

• The League to Save Lake Tahoe has a new website.

• A team from the AVID Center in San Diego visited and observed South Tahoe High School’s AVID program this month and at the end of the day awarded the school a two-year term as an AVID National Demonstration School. This distinction is given to about 10 percent of schools nationwide.

Budget gifts: Lake Tahoe Shakespeare tickets



Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival is taking $5 off regular priced tickets for the summer 2011 production of “Twelfth Night” so people can buy for the holidays.

Gift certificates may be purchased in any denomination. Call (775) 832.1616 to purchase.

Tahoe Magic provides essentials to community members

To the community,

A single parent, struggling to keep her family safe and warm writes, “Thanks to the angel that helped me and my children. I do not know who you are, but if I ever meet you, I will give you the biggest hug of thanks.”

That hug goes out to each of you who has supported Tahoe Magic. Thank you so much.

We would like to share some startling statistics on just how much financial assistance was provided by Tahoe Magic to families through agency requests on behalf of their clients:

Uninsured children received emergency dental services $13,530.

Families received rental assistance $7,162.

Utilities paid for families with young children/gas, elect.

phone *1,365.82.

Car repair/car insurance $855.25.

Employee fingerprints, passport, clothing $260.18.

Education assistance $5,911.34.

Food and gas $350.

Annual holiday support to our nonprofits helping children $6,750.

Total giving this last year (our 18th year) *$ 36,184.59

*Tahoe Magic supported families this year to the greatest extent ever. What is hard to imagine is that for many families, a bill of less than $50 is more than they can pay when in crisis. One parent had a daughter who was burned when a stove exploded. This single parent needed to take two weeks off from the two minimum wage, part-time jobs she had so she could care for her daughter. She could not have done this without Tahoe Magic paying for a month of rent for her.

Tahoe Magic continues to be the nonprofit that agencies can count on for their families in crisis. We can fund emergency needs within hours when asked. Bridge funding means the difference of a home for a family, the ability to work and support a family, dental care for those without any other means, and the warmth of gas and electricity during the winter. This magic helps to make our home, our community, a true community of caring for each other.

Please support Tahoe Magic this year as part of your holiday giving – 100 percent of your donation goes to directly to families in need.

Please send your tax-deductible donation to Tahoe Magic, P.O. Box 13070, S. Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.

Our hearts are filled with gratitude to a community of “angels”.

Thank you.

Tahoe Magic board members