

## Inside Stevens

Tuesday, December 04, 2007

### Early Season on the Mountain

Our desire is that all guests who come to Stevens Pass enjoy the experience. Safety is an important part of that experience.

When opening for the season, we strive to have the best possible snow surface on our groomed runs. The reality of each season's opening, however, is something we call "early season snow conditions." What that means is: creek holes, openings, and voids in the snow pack that are common in the early season (and the late spring, as well). Additionally, there are natural obstacles such as rocks, bushes, downed trees, and stumps. The type of snow we receive also has an effect - deep, dry snow does not cushion or protect the rocks and other hazards below as well as a heavier, wet snow. Brush does not lay down out of the way as readily with dry snow, nor do voids between rocks fill as well.

Early season snow conditions create unique hazards on the Mountain, so the Patrol marks, signs, and/or closes off various areas. As our season progresses and conditions change, so does our response. Some signs put out early in the season are pulled as the snow accumulates and covers existing natural objects and hazards. The nature of the snow and the depth of coverage also dictate our actions and the communication to guests.

Typical early season warnings include:

1. **LOW SNOW COVER/ SKI WITH CAUTION**—reminds guests that they should be more alert for hazards on the trail. You'll see these signs at the bottom and top of lifts as well as being posted on our web site and in printed snow reports distributed throughout the resort.
2. **UNMARKED OBSTACLES EXIST**— skiers and riders need to be aware that objects may be just under the snow and off-piste, use caution and pay attention to the snow surface. Typically you see these at the bottom and top of a lift and/or top of a trail.
3. **!WARNING! CREEK HOLES**—the heat from flowing water can prevent the snow from filling in and covering creeks. These signs will be posted on affected trails.
4. **USE GROOMED RUNS ONLY**— this sign is used when many off-piste hazards exist. You'll see these at the tops of lifts as well as posted on our web site snow report page and on printed snow reports placed around the resort.
5. **USE LIGHTED RUNS ONLY**—many hazards are not visible at night. This sign is placed at the top of lifts.
6. **STOP CLOSED AREA**—closes off an entire area containing hazards. Those violating this sign will lose their ticket or season pass for the day (or season?).

Other Hill Markings:

1. "Lollipop"—an orange plastic disk on top of a stick of bamboo indicates a hazard that is significant, which must be negotiated with care.
2. Lath & Flagging—a short piece of thin wood and orange tape that alerts the guest to a smaller hazard where caution must be used.
3. Bamboo & Rope/Banner Guard—strung in a line to border a significant hazard or indicate a closure. This creates a virtual wall to stop any passage into the area

beyond. Those violating this marking will lose their ticket or season pass for the day (or season?).

Every guest should be aware that the mountain environment has natural hazards, and there are inherent risks in skiing and snowboarding. Everyone is responsible for his or her own well being. However, we make every effort to identify and communicate potential hazards to increase the safety-awareness for our guests.

As stated in Your Responsibility Code, everyone should “Observe all signs and warnings. Keep off closed trails and out of closed areas.” This is for your protection, and for the protection of those who may have to come to your aid.

Ryan Forbes  
Pro Patrol Manager.