

Storms cut power in Washington state mountain towns



People navigate the snow-covered Oak Street zig-zag ramp that scales the bluff over downtown Port Angeles on Wednesday after heavy snow blanketed the city overnight.

Associated Press

SKYKOMISH, Wash. — Rural mountain communities outside Seattle that have been without power for days and cut off from the outside world by a series of winter storms saw some relief as convoys brought in food and other supplies.

The storms have dumped several feet of unusual snow on parts of western Washington state. As they moved south Thursday, heavy rain and strong winds battered parts of Northern California, while the Lake Tahoe area braced for heavy snow.

Crews in Washington state cleared snow, power lines and trees that had fallen across a highway leading to small towns including Skykomish and Baring, allowing some residents who had been without power for nearly a week to leave and for supplies to be brought in Wednesday. On Thursday afternoon, U.S. Highway 2 fully reopened to all travelers.

Authorities had warned it could be several more days before power is fully restored for hundreds of people in an area along that highway about 60 miles northeast of Seattle in the Cascade Range.

“Realistically, I’m not expecting power here for another three or four days,” Skykomish Mayor Henry Sladek told the Seattle Times.

The problem that crews are facing is that as soon as one downed power line is repaired, “another tree comes down and takes it out again because of the heavy snow,” Puget Sound Energy spokesman Andrew Padula said.

The Washington State Patrol said it was working with sheriff’s deputies to check on people in those communities and that the Masonic Temple in Skykomish was providing hot food, supplies and water to residents.

Garry Vire of nearby Gold Bar, Washington, helped organize a convoy of SUVs and four-wheel drive vehicles that dropped off supplies to people in need.

“These are my neighbors, my

family. When the call went out for help, that’s what we did,” Vire told the Times.

Sarah Sadler headed to Vire’s town when the highway reopened Wednesday for “bread, peanut butter, water. And restocking on gas, primarily for the generator and snowmobiles.”

With power out in the tiny town of Index, she told the Times that she had been taking food out of her refrigerator and putting it in the snow.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said the state Emergency Management Division brought food, water and fuel to the area and also were offering voluntary evacuations.

“We will work to provide whatever these communities need,” he tweeted.

Farther south, snow also fell heavily on Snoqualmie Pass, a mountain pass that carries Interstate 90 through the Cascade Range. The state Department of Transportation said 80 inches of snow has fallen since last week, forcing several closures of Interstate 90, a major east-west freeway in the U.S.

The Seattle metro area didn’t see much new snow, but on the Olympic Peninsula northwest of the city, people were digging out after getting hit with several feet of snow. Reports from the coastal city of Port Angeles were up to 20 inches. North of Seattle, Mount Vernon got 8 inches, while Anacortes recorded 12 inches.

After several days of freezing temperatures, warmer weather will arrive by Saturday, melting snow but increasing the threat of flooding, forecasters said.

Heavy, wet snow caused about 18,000 customers on the Oregon-California border to lose power Thursday, according to Pacific Power. In northern California, residents were advised to stay off roads and check in on vulnerable family and neighbors. Highways and streets in San Francisco, Oakland and Marin County were flooded.

Just east of the California-Nevada line, schools closed on the north shore of Lake Tahoe as the area faced a winter storm warning until late Thursday.



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