

Bicycling boosts Crook County economy

By Stephen Hamway
The (Bend) Bulletin

PRINEVILLE (AP) — Long known as a regional center for logging and agriculture, Crook County is trying to attract a different outdoor industry.

The county has a number of projects designed to make Prineville a regional hub for bicycle-related tourism, including the first Ochoco Gravel Roubaix, a bike race that drew 150 riders, and a 1.5-acre bike park in Prineville slated to open next spring.

Perhaps most importantly, several public and private parties are adding to the region's mountain biking trails, leveraging the city's proximity to the Ochoco Mountains and 66 acres of state land in southwest Prineville, known locally as the Lower 66. Central Oregon Trail Alliance is adding to the approximately 3 miles of non-motorized trails in the Lower 66, according to Darlene Henderson, COTA's Crook County chapter representative.

Casey Kaiser, executive director of the Prineville-Crook County Chamber of Commerce, said the addition, which is designed to extend trails to the top of the rim overlooking downtown Prineville, would add up to 15 miles of trails to the system within three to five years.

Additionally, Kaiser said Crook County wants to double the amount of single-track

trails in the Ochocos, to around 150 miles. These trails, which could be complete within five to 10 years with help from volunteers and various state and federal agencies, represent an opportunity to diversify the Crook County economy, Kaiser said.

"Prineville historically has been pretty dependent on industries that have had a lot of ebbs and flows," he said.

Crook County's economic recovery has lagged behind the rest of Central Oregon. In September, Crook County had a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate that was more than 3 percentage points higher than the rate in adjacent Deschutes County, according to the Oregon Employment Department. Woodgrain Millwork, once Crook County's third-largest employer, will be shuttering its remaining operations in Prineville at the beginning of 2016.

However, the leisure and hospitality sector has bounced back somewhat in recent years. In the second quarter of 2015, 633 jobs in Crook County were in leisure and hospitality, up from 589 during the same period in 2014. County Commissioner Seth Crawford said bike-related tourism is leading the charge.

"I've seen a lot more people coming into town and eating in town and staying in hotels here," Crawford said. "Outdoor tourism is really our

bread and butter."

Outdoor tourism in Prineville received a boost in October 2014, when Good Bike Co., the first retail bike shop in town, opened on NE Third Street.

"You need about three, four things for that (bicycle) industry to flourish, and I filled one of those gaps," said owner James Good. "It gives you more validity as an industry within the community."

Good said one advantage that Crook County has over other mountain biking destinations is its remote location. Unlike Bend or Hood River, it's easy to find relatively deserted biking trails near Prineville.

Kaiser added that the trails in the Ochocos tend to be more rugged and technically challenging, which attracts a different demographic. The only thing missing, Good said, is more trails.

"You talk to anyone in Bend, if they know the Ochocos, they'll say it's probably some of the best single-track riding in Central Oregon," he said.

Forest Service torches slash piles

Taking advantage of the cooler weather, fuels specialists will burn nearly 200 acres of slash piles this week within approximately one mile of Camp Sherman and within the Glaze Forest Restoration Area west of Sisters.

Through the week, fuels specialists are burning three units of piles totaling 44 acres within the Glaze Forest Restoration project area south of Highway 20 and west of Cold Springs Cutoff/Forest Road 1012.

An additional five units totaling 153 acres are slated for burning in the Metolius area within approximately one mile of Camp Sherman.

Piles may smolder, burn, and produce smoke for

several days after ignition, the Forest Service notes. While smoke may linger in the area, there is a real benefit to burning this type of vegetation, officials explain. The piles are concentrations of leftover materials associated with previous work intended to remove hazardous fuels that can burn during summer wildfires.

No closures are anticipated with these operations. However, if smoke drifts on to roads, motorists should slow down, turn on headlights, and proceed with care. Once ignited, units are monitored by firefighters until they are declared out.

For more information, visit www.fs.usda.gov/deschutes and follow Twitter @CentralORFire.

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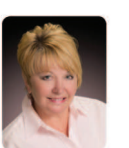
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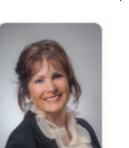
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