

Deep cold descends upon Sisters Country

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Old Man Winter has sunk his icy claws into Sisters Country — and he’s not letting go.

Temperatures are expected to top out in the teens mid-week, with lows plunging below zero on Wednesday night before things “warm up” to right around freezing for the weekend.

Sisters got a fresh blanket of snow on Sunday night and Monday morning, adding to a substantial covering that has not melted off since before Christmas.

The new Sisters Cold Weather Shelter is open to serve those who need a place to sleep in the frigid conditions (*see story, page 1*).

With wintry conditions persisting, icy conditions for both pedestrians and motorists are the norm — and will be for many days to come.

Extreme caution is urged when venturing out on foot or in a vehicle. There are reports of Sisters residents suffering serious injuries from falls, and there has been a spate of fatal accidents on Central Oregon roadways, with 10 people losing their lives on the region’s roadways in a period of 11 days.

The key to safety in such conditions is simply to slow down, whether you’re on foot or in a car. Traction devices such as Yaktrax are a good way to make sure you stay on your feet when out and about on foot, and there is no shame in using a trekking pole to assist with balance.

Driving, especially when snow turns to ice on the roadways, is tricky. When

conditions are really bad, it’s best to avoid driving at all.

Cold temperatures and precipitation can cause problems for drivers, particularly in the early morning and late evening hours, when moisture on roadways freezes. Drivers should check their speed at these times and be especially alert in areas where roads are shaded for much of the day.

Sketchy conditions common to the season are likely to prevail on Santiam Pass in coming weeks, so travelers to the Willamette Valley should be alert and prepared.

The Oregon Department of Transportation advises travelers to use www.tripcheck.com to check on road conditions before traveling. ODOT also recommends the following winter driving tips:

- Plan ahead, give yourself plenty of time.
- Adjust your driving for the conditions if there is ice or snow on the road.
- Be ready to handle potentially dangerous situations.
- Look for signs indicating when chains or traction tires are required, and chain-up early when you are required to do so.
- If you lose traction, slow down gradually — DON’T slam on your brakes.
- Use extra caution when driving on bridges or concrete highways; ice forms first on these surfaces.
- Give snowplows and road-maintenance equipment extra room and don’t pass snowplows on the right (plow drivers will pull over to let you pass, so be patient).
- Don’t use cruise control in wet, icy, or snowy weather.

Oregon’s top weather stories of 2016

The June 8 supercell which produced a tornado, large hail, and damaging winds was 2016’s top regional weather-related event as voted by staff members of the National Weather Service in Pendleton. The supercell event received an average score of 9.8 on a scale of 1 to 11.

1. June supercell (9.8): On June 8, a thunderstorm over southern Wheeler County, Oregon rapidly developed into a supercell with golfball hail, damaging winds to 70 mph, and a brief tornado as it tracked northeast to near Monument and Ukiah.

2. December snow and cold (8.2): Widespread heavy snow was followed by arctic air during mid-December. Snowfall averaged between 5 and 10 inches across the Columbia Basin and eastern mountains, but ranged between 15 and 20 inches in Central Oregon. The arctic air following the snow dropped temperatures below zero in many areas. By the end of December, mountain snowpack had surged to 115 to 130 percent of normal.

3. Fire outbreak (7.4): Triple digit temperatures and humidity in the 5 to 10 percent range helped to spread an outbreak of fires at the end of July. The Weigh Station fire occurred east of Pendleton and shut down I-84. The Rail Fire near Unity, Oregon burned nearly 42 thousand acres in rugged terrain before being contained in early September. The Range 12 fire started on the Yakima Training Center and burned for a week on 176 thousand acres of mostly grass and sage on BLM, state, and private lands.

4. Wet October (6.4):

Rainfall was 1 to 3 inches above normal and ranked in the top 5 wettest Octobers across the region. It was the wettest October on record in Washington at Bickleton, Prosser, Selah, Mill Creek, and Whitman Mission. Trout Lake, Wash. at 14.58 inches beat their previous record by 3.62 inches.

4. TIE. Strong El Niño to weak La Niña (6.4): One of the strongest El Niño patterns on record last winter was reversed in a matter of months to a weak La Niña by mid-Summer.

6. TIE. Launch of GOES R (6.0): The next generation of weather satellites began with the launch of GOES R on November 19. GOES R reached geostationary orbit and was re-named GOES 16 at the end of the month. After sensor deployment, calibration, and checkout, it promises to revolutionize satellite imagery and data collection. It has four times the image resolution and can take an image every minute. It also has the capability to track thunderstorm lightning.

7. Tri-Cities tornado (6.0): An intense, but short-lived thunderstorm brought a brief EF0 tornado in Kennewick on the late evening of May 21. The thunderstorm also produced hail up to 3/4-inch, damaging winds which downed trees, and localized flash flooding.

8. Warm Dry April (4.4): It was the warmest April on record in Washington at Walla Walla, Ellensburg, Yakima, Cle Elum, Kennewick, Moxee City, and Richland. In Oregon, it was the warmest April on record at The Dalles, Hermiston, La Grande, and Pelton Dam. Ellensburg beat

their previous record warm April by nearly 5 degrees. Couple the unseasonable warmth with a drier-than-normal month and the mountain snowpack virtually disappeared.

9 TIE. Snowless January and February (4.2): Many stations in the southern Columbia Basin went through the entire months of January and February without measurable snowfall. In Washington, this included Dayton, Ice Harbor Dam, Walla Walla, and Whitman Mission. In Oregon, a snowless end of winter was observed at Heppner, Hermiston, Madras, Milton-Freewater, Pendleton, and Pilot Rock. Snowpack in the mountains also suffered decreases.

9 TIE. Drought Eased (4.2): Moderate to severe drought was diminished in March, made a comeback in June, and finally eased to just abnormally dry in December. The mid December rating was the least drought coverage for the area since November 2013.

11. November warmth (3.4): Indian Summer continued into November across eastern Washington and eastern Oregon. In Washington, it was the warmest November on record statewide and second warmest on record in Oregon. Individual stations in Washington which set records for warmest November include Walla Walla, Ellensburg, Pasco, Yakima, Easton, and Moxee City. In Oregon, record warmth was set at The Dalles, Hermiston, Pendleton, Antelope, Grizzly, La Grande, and Monument. Precipitation was below normal and mountain snowpack well behind normal.



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