

Oregon's Santiam Pass is a winter wonderland

By Zach Urness
(Salem) Statesman Journal

SANTIAM PASS (AP) — Winter has arrived in Oregon's mountains.

As such, it's time for skiers, snowshoers, snowmobilers and sledders to find powdery fun at Santiam Pass' collection of sno-parks.

A seasonal permit of \$25 will give you access to 11 different parks east of Salem, along with the miles of trails they provide access to.

Each park is different. Some, like McCoy, are havens for snowmobilers. Others, like Maxwell, cater to snowshoers looking for scenery. Santiam is the place for sledding, while Ray Benson can't be beat for cross-county skiing.

There is, in a nutshell, something for everyone, reports the *(Salem) Statesman Journal*.

Here's a short breakdown, ranked from lowest to highest elevation, of what each sno-park offers. The best way to navigate sno-parks' numerous trails is to stop at Detroit Ranger Station and pick up a Santiam Pass winter recreation map. Call ahead to check hours: 503-854-3366.

The directions below are from Salem; the area can also be reached from other cities on the west side of the Cascade Range, and on the east side, from Bend.

(Always be prepared for winter conditions when driving in the mountains.)

Maxwell Sno-Park

In a nutshell: A favorite for snowshoers and cross-country skiers, with 360-degree mountain views, two snow shelters and a wide collection of well-marked trails ranging in difficulty.

Elevation: 3,700 feet

Activities: Skiing, snowshoeing

Trails: Seven trails totaling 22.8 miles

Difficulty: Easy to most difficult

Shelters: Mountain View Shelter (on Mountain View

Loop) and South Maxwell Shelter (on South Maxwell Loop)

Amenities: Bathrooms

Usage: Medium to heavy

Directions: From Salem, drive east on Highway 22 for 81 miles (3 miles before Santiam Junction). Maxwell Sno-Park is on the left and has a narrow entrance to a large parking area hidden behind a stand of trees (across from Big Springs Sno-Park).

Big Springs Sno-Park

In a nutshell: Wooded snowshoe routes that lead all the way to Lava Lake, with snowmobile access to a 40-mile network of trails.

Elevation: 3,700 feet

Activities: Skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling

Trails: Five trails of 15.8 miles for skis/snowshoes; 40 miles of snowmobile trail access

Difficulty: Easy to most difficult

Shelters: None

Amenities: Bathrooms

Usage: Light

Directions: From Salem, take Highway 22 east for about 81 miles (3 miles before Santiam Junction). Big Springs is on right side of highway (just across from Maxwell Sno-Park).

Potato Hill Sno-Park

In a nutshell: Old-growth forest and panoramic views of Three Fingering Jack and Mount Washington near the top of namesake hill, on a popular and fairly easy snowshoeing route.

Elevation: 4,200 feet

Activities: Skiing, snowshoeing

Trails: Two trails totaling 6.2 miles

Difficulty: Easy to more difficult

Shelters: None

Amenities: None

Usage: Light

Directions: From Salem, take Highway 22 east 84 miles to the Highway 20/Highway 126 Santiam Junction. Continue east on Highway 20 another mile to parking area on right side of road.

Santiam Sno-Park

In a nutshell: Best-known for the "snow play" area, which includes a sledding/tubing hill popular with families. Also provides access to Pacific Crest Trail and the backcountry area around Three Fingering Jack.

Elevation: 4,800 feet

Activities: Skiing, snowshoeing, tubing

Trails: One trail of 1.2 miles that connects to the Pacific Crest Trail into the Mount Jefferson Wilderness. Not marked beyond wilderness boundary.

Difficulty: Easy

Shelters: None

Amenities: Bathrooms

Usage: Heavy, mostly among sledders.

Directions: From Salem, take Highway 22 east 84 miles to the Highway 20/Highway 126 Santiam Junction. Continue east on Highway 20 for another 5 miles, passing the turnoff to Hoodoo Ski Area, to the parking area on the left.

Ray Benson Sno-Park

In a nutshell: The largest and best-known sno park on Santiam Pass, with views of the surrounding mountains and a large network of trails. The favorite destination of cross-county skiers.

Elevation: 4,800 feet

Activities: Skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, mushing (sled dogs)

Trails: Eight trails totaling 67.7 miles, with snowshoeing/skiing (six), snowmobiling (three), mushing (one)

Difficulty: Easy to most difficult

Shelters: North Blowout Shelter and South Blowout Shelter

Amenities: Two restrooms, warming hut, orientation maps, staging area with snub posts for sled dogs

Usage: Heavy

Directions: From Salem, take Highway 22 east 84 miles to the Highway 20/Highway 126 Santiam Junction. Continue east on Highway 20 for another 5 miles. Turn right on Forest Road 2690, which is the

entrance of Ray Benson Sno-Park and Hoodoo Ski Area. Continue past Hoodoo another half a mile into the Ray Benson parking lot.

Ikenick Sno-Park

One of the least-known snowshoe routes on Santiam Pass begins at this park.

Ikenick Sno-Park, just off Highway 126, sits at the fairly low elevation of 3,200 feet. Because of that, it hasn't gotten much snow since 2011 and consequently hasn't had many visitors.

That finally changed last year and has continued into this season — the snowiest since 2001.

The Isaac Nickerson Loop is 4.4 miles and climbs 472 feet, passing multiple viewpoints of the Cascade Range and dipping into snowy forest. It's well-marked and easy to follow.

Directions: From Salem, head east on Highway 22, past Detroit, to Santiam Junction. Turn right onto Highway 20/126 and then continue straight on Highway 126 toward Eugene. At milepost 3 on Highway 126, turn right at signs for Ikenick Sno-Park. Coordinates: N44 22.422' W122 00.249'

Other Santiam Pass Sno-Parks

Corbett Sno-Park: Nine ski/snowshoe trails, located east of Santiam Pass and Hoodoo Ski Area in Deschutes National Forest off Highways 22/20; elevation 4,200

Obama expands National Monument

ASHLAND (AP) — President Barack Obama has expanded the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in southwestern Oregon to protect its rich biodiversity.

The expansion announced Thursday adds about 48,000 acres to a landscape of rich forests, grasslands and shrubs that was established as a monument in 2000. It includes about 5,000 acres in northern California.

Obama said in his proclamation that the expansion will create a landscape that will connect vital habitat, protect the watershed and preserve the area's extraordinary biodiversity. The monument, originally 65,000 acres, is home to rare plant and animal species.

Conservation groups and Oregon's Democratic U.S. senators praised the decision.

Oregon Public Broadcasting says detractors have expressed concern that a larger monument would hurt the region's economy with limits on logging and grazing. The Oregon Cattleman's Association said in a news release that the decision will have a rippling effect on ranchers, farmers and outdoor enthusiasts.

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