

Visit the Metolius Preserve for off-season hiking

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

The Deschutes Land Trust is the steward of several important sites in our region. While many people are familiar with the Land Trust’s role in preserving key ecological features in Central Oregon, it is easy to forget that Trust lands also provide some excellent recreational opportunities.

At this time of the year, many hikers put their trail aspirations to rest or turn to other interests; but that needn’t be the case when there are fine trail options readily available at such places as the Trust’s Metolius Preserve, which is largely outside the snow zone.

Some time ago, my hiking partner and I took the Lake Creek Trail from Suttle Lake to Camp Sherman. Since a significant portion of the trail passes through the Metolius Preserve, we spent a little time exploring tributary trails near the Preserve’s North Trailhead. Impressed with what we discovered, we resolved to come back and explore more of the preserve. For various reasons, it took us until now to actually do that.

In the area of the preserve, Lake Creek splits into multiple channels as it flows toward the Metolius

River. The Lake Creek Trail hugs the North Fork of Lake Creek at its western end, but a side trail near the North Trailhead kiosk splits off and crosses the North Fork. From that very fine trail bridge, it is only a few yards to a two-mile loop that twice crosses the Middle Fork. This area features many scenic spots and plenty of western larch or tamarack trees. Bright green in spring and summer, these trees turn a brilliant yellow in the fall and are the only deciduous conifers that shed their needles in the fall.

There’s a story, and I don’t know if it’s true; but I’ve heard it so many times that it might be. Two foresters, one from the west and one from the east, traded jobs — and houses — for a year. One day, the easterner, living in the west, contacted his counterpart and told him that he was sorry to report that the nice conifer tree at the western house had died. Not to worry, though, he told him, for he had taken the dead tree down and cut it into firewood.

The “dead” tree, of course, was a western larch; and that is how the barren tamaracks appear on the Metolius Preserve at this time of the year. Indeed, the entire forest here is carpeted with fallen yellow tamarack needles. Some of the biggest tamarack trees I’ve ever

seen can be found in this area. Curiously, the bark of very large tamaracks resembles that of ponderosa pine, although the limbs and character of the tree trunks are quite different. Depending on which portion of the preserve you enter, beautiful ponderosa and fir forests are also there to be enjoyed.

From the Middle Fork Loop, still other options are available. For example, a connector trail at the southwest corner of the loop leads to another 6-8 miles of hiking opportunity. Much of the route is over former forest roads; so there is plenty of room along these wide and comfortable trails.

Of particular note, all these trails are flat. Very flat. No elevation gains or losses. No rough going. Just flat and easy; so it’s a great place for families with kids or anyone who just wants an easy, relaxing stroll in the woods. And, if the snow finally sets in, it’s also a great place for very easy — and flat — cross-country ski touring.

The Metolius Preserve’s trails were completed principally by volunteers with the Deschutes Land Trust and in cooperation with the Forest Service, whose lands surround the preserve and connect to other Forest Service trails.

Maps and information are available at the previously



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Several excellent trail bridges cross the various forks of Lake Creek on the trail system of the Deschutes Land Trust’s Metolius Preserve.

noted North Trailhead kiosk and at a similar South Trailhead kiosk, a short distance southwest of the two-mile Middle Fork Loop. Both kiosks are accessible by road and can be easily reached by regular passenger vehicles. Trail and access maps, and rules, are also available online at <https://www.deschuteslandtrust.org/files/driving-directions/>

metolius_preserve_south_trailhead_driving_directions. The preserve is open to free use by the public, but access is predicated on certain rules of use. Specifically, dogs must be kept on a leash at all times; commercial use, private events, smoking, and campfires are prohibited. Also prohibited are any

See **METOLIUS** on page 28

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