

Life *in the* Valley

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASCADIA TRAIL CREW

Old trails are being improved and new trails are being built by the Cascadia Trail Crew for mountain biking at Shellburg Falls Recreation Area east of Salem.

Local group revitalizes mountain bike trails at Shellburg Falls area

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Ever so slowly, the dream of a top-level mountain biking system is coming together at Silver Falls State Park and Shellburg Falls Recreation Area.

The creation of Catamount Trail at Silver Falls, built by a group of volunteers in the Salem Area Trail Alliance, has gotten most of the publicity so far.

But there is another group of committed volunteers working in the backcountry at Shellburg Falls, where a wild collection of freeride trails are being transformed into a network intended for intermediate to advanced riders.

"We're not a destination yet — we don't have quite enough rideable miles to get guys from Portland to come out," said Raym Conkey, who leads the volunteer Cascadia Trail Crew with his friends Sean Connaghan and Josh Petersen. "But we're hoping that will change in the next couple of years."

The long-term goal is to link the trails at Silver Falls and Shellburg Falls to create a network featuring some of the best biking in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

The process of getting there, however, involves lots of work just beginning to take root.

Cascadia Trail Crew was created by Conkey and his friends to improve a system of "freeride" trails built in the 1990s in the northwest corner of Shellburg Falls' backcountry. The freeride trails, cluttered by old wooden jumps, weren't being maintained and had become a hazard, officials said.

"We saw an opportunity with those old trails," Conkey said. "We removed the rotting wooden structures and rebuilt the trails enough so they were rideable year-round."

CTC has cleaned up about 6 miles so far, Conkey said. The area is now known as the Shellburg Falls Mountain Bike Area.

"The trails we're working on don't have any man-made features or huge drops," Conkey said. "They are narrow and steep trails, intended for the intermediate to advanced rider, but they're pretty rideable now."

The Shellburg Falls area is managed by the Oregon Department of Forestry, which has worked closely with the group in planning, fixing and building the trails.

"I've been blown away by the dedi-



The Cascadia Trail Crew is restoring a collection of trails at the Shellburg Falls Recreation Area.

cation these guys have shown," said Cassie Bostrom, a recreation forester at ODF. "They all have families and jobs, but they are out there working all the time, often in really awful weather."

Bostrom said ODF offers some support and works to approve trail designs. But most of the money and equipment comes out of pocket from the group.

"We make sure they're following environmental standards for the trails for things like stream crossings," Bostrom said. "But they do all the work. They bring their own heavy equipment and power tools. It's pretty amazing."

The goal — the reason that Conkey, Connaghan and Petersen spend so much time and energy working on this project — is to create more rideable miles.

"We want to create a route so a person could ride 10, 15 or even 25 miles in a system where everything flows together," Conkey said. "Bottom line, we just want to see more people out here riding."

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