

OUTDOORS

Ski or snowshoe through scar of Oregon wildfire



The northern route through the winter trails at Ray Benson Sno-Park features wooden Blowout Shelter, forest burned by the 2003 B&B Complex Fire and views of Three-Fingered Jack and Mount Washington. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

This year's Labor Day fires left an indelible mark on Oregon's outdoors, and many places we love to hike, fish and explore are likely to remain closed for one to three years.

In the Santiam Canyon, places impacted range from Shellburg Falls to Opal Creek, and when we're eventually allowed to return, those places will look a lot different than we remember.

But it won't be the first time a wildfire has transformed an area in the Central Cascades east of Salem, and there's no better evidence than exploring the scar of the 2003 B&B Complex on Santiam Pass.

Last week, I skied through an area burned by the B&B fire at Ray Benson Sno-Park on a 6.5-mile loop that also included a stop at North Blowout Shelter. It was the third installment of my series on the popular sno-park, as I rediscover cross-country skiing, an ideal activity for a pandemic.

This route, also open to snowshoers, was a step-up in terms of challenge, following the North Loop, Twin Buttes, Claypool Butte and South Loop trails on terrain that offered the greatest challenge yet.

There were two main highlights. First, stopping at Blowout Shelter, another of the sno-park's wooden shelters, while the second was observing how the forest has responded following



Blowout Shelter offers dramatic views of Three Fingered Jack and a place to rest and warm up from Ray Benson Sno-Park. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

the high-severity wildfire that burned almost 18 years ago.

A brief history of the B&B Complex Fire

President George W. Bush called it a "holocaust."

Wildfire experts called it a canary in the coal mine.

Those who saw it up close remember the speed and fury, and a smoke plume that rose 35,000 feet above Santiam Pass west of Sisters in a period between

Sept. 1 to 8, 2003.

"We'd never seen a fire behave like that — a fire that could eat square miles overnight and create its own weather patterns," Brad Peterson, a longtime wilderness ranger for Willamette National Forest, told the Statesman Journal for a 2018 story on the wildfire. "It felt like something new."

In some ways, it was.

The B&B Complex, which significantly altered large swaths of Santiam Pass and the Mount Jefferson Wilderness, marked the beginning of the megafire

era in Oregon. In combination with the 2002 Biscuit Fire, it heralded the beginning of larger and more powerful wildfires that reached an apex, in many ways, with this year's Labor Day fires.

Now after almost two decades, the forest burned is a fascinating place to explore, and it offers some sense of what to expect once we return to the places burned this year.

(For the full story of the B&B Complex, see StatesmanJournal.com.)

Dwarf forest on Ray Benson's North Loop

From the parking lot at Ray Benson, I headed out skiing the North Loop, a route rated "more difficult" on winter recreation maps because of steeper hills and such.

After a short stretch of intact forest, the trail transitions into the B&B Complex's burn scar. The landscape is marked by the old snags of trees killed in the wildfire, along with a dwarf forest of trees that have sprouted and grown in the past 18 years.

The green layer of new trees rises up between about knee and waist height and makes you feel as though you're a giant skiing through a land of Lilliputian-sized people for whom this constitutes a thick canopy.

Or maybe that's just my overactive imagination.

Anyway, the upside for us giants is

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Flex your artistic mettle with wildlife art competition



Henry Miller
Guest Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK

As the old line goes, "I don't know art, but I know what I like."

Or, in my case, as far as taste, it's all in my mouth.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has opened its annual 2022 stamp art competitions.

That's not a typo; the competition is for next year's offering of fish and wildlife-related collectors' stamps for the Habitat Conservation, Waterfowl and Upland Bird stamp competitions.

The winners each get a \$2,000 award, and their art is featured on stamps and other promotional materials, with money from the sales going to the relevant programs to benefit fish, wildlife and state-supported habitat projects.

I've actually scored in a competition,



Cinnamon teal by artist Guy Crittenden was the 2021 winner in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Waterfowl Stamp competition.

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receiving a 2012 Habitat Conservation Stamp ceramic mug for serving as a judge.

What's the old line? In the event of prizes, duplicate ties will be awarded. I digress. Make that divert.

My selection as a judge came as



The winning entry in the 2021 Upland Game Bird Stamp competition featuring the spruce grouse was artist Bruce Spencer.

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something of a surprise.

My taste in critter art runs to dogs playing poker, while fine art is comprised of framed renderings of Kenny Rogers in neon colors on black velvet.

Amazingly, I also served on several panels for upland game bird stamp

competitions.

I accepted the honor because of the stipend, a smoked quail dip during the judging that was prepared by Dave Budeau, the department's since-departed upland game bird coordinator.

While I'm no expert, there are members of the panel who are. And there are department biologists on-hand to advise and comment on the accuracy and authenticity of the fish, wildlife and habitats portrayed in the entries.

And those, in my experience, run the gamut from primitive to classical realism.

Anyway, give it a shot.

The conservation stamp offers the most variety open to depictions of everything from mammals, reptiles and amphibians to, no kidding, plants and algae.

Waterfowl and upland bird are species-specific annually. The 2022 competitions are for Northern Shoveler and Chukar partridge, respectively.

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