

RECREATION REPORT

SNOW BLAST SATURDAY AT ANTHONY LAKES

The annual Snow Blast event is set for Saturday, March 2, at Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

Events throughout the day include barrel races (on skis), dummy and cowboy downhill races, and chicken poop bingo.

There will be live music by the Green-neck Daredevils, and a tri-tip barbecue dinner.

The event concludes with fireworks at dark.

The ski area has had 19 inches of new snow this week and has an 85-inch base.



ROCK SLIDE CLOSES ROAD BELOW HELLS CANYON DAM

A rock slide earlier this week closed the road between Hells Canyon Dam and the Forest Service's Hells Canyon Visitor Center, and Idaho Power Company estimates the road might not re-open until March 8.

The road, which is managed by the Forest Service, will remain closed on the Idaho side of Hells Canyon Dam until the slide is cleared. Motorists planning to cross the dam should call Idaho Power's road status line, 541-785-7251, for updates before making the trip.

Anyone traveling on the road between Oxbow, Oregon, and Hells Canyon Dam should be aware of increased truck traffic as crews haul rock from the slide.

PHONE LINE AVAILABLE TO REPORT HUNT RESULTS

The deadline to report all 2018 big game and turkey tags has been extended until April 15, 2019, to give hunters more time to report under ODFW's new licensing system. In addition to applying online, you can now call the dedicated reporting phone line at 866-947-6339 to report your hunts.

PHILLIPS RESERVOIR

Current reservoir storage is at 10 percent of capacity. The reservoir is fully ice-covered and ice fishing is underway. Fishing through the ice has been very good for yellow perch, which are averaging about 9 inches. Rainbows range from 10 to 20 inches. Currently, best access for ice fishing is by Black Mountain Road as the Mason Dam launch access has not been plowed.

NATIVE PINES OF NORTHEAST OREGON

Here in Northeast Oregon, we claim as neighbors (and timber products) an impressive roster of conifer species: 15 or so, from rawbone junipers to skyscraping larches. Among them are five pines — a fairly piddling number compared to such not-far-away hotspots of pine diversity as Southwest Oregon and California, but noble trees nonetheless, and well-represented on our rugged landscape.

Pines grow all over the Northern Hemisphere (and slip a little bit into the Southern), from the boreal zone down to the mountain tropics. They hold court in all kinds of settings, but often dominate in hard country: dry, or lean, or flammable, or all of the above. Taxonomists divide pines into two basic categories: the “soft” (or “white”) and the “hard” (or “yellow”) pines, broadly separated by the number of needles in a bundle and the internal tubing of those needles. We host two hard pines — ponderosa and lodgepole — and three soft pines: western white, whitebark, and limber.

Ponderosa pine

We can't really start with any other pine than the ponderosa, emblematic tree of the American West and our only three-needled pine. It's easily one of the world's most all-around magnificent pines: bigger than any other save the sugar pine of the southern Cascades, Klamaths, Sierra Nevada, and some of California's coastal ranges; the tallest of all (rivalled only by the sugar pine); and armored in yellow-orange jigsaw bark as handsome a suit as any tree's. Just as distinctive as the look of that ponderosa bark is its vanilla-scented aroma (conjured by compounds called terpenes).

Ponderosas — named in the late 1820s by the great Northwest botanist-explorer David Douglas



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ETHAN SHAW

for their “ponderousness,” though Meriwether Lewis first scientifically described them (as “long-leafed pine”) a couple decades earlier — are among North America's most widespread conifers: They grow from the Great Plains to the Klamath Mountains, and from southern British Columbia to the Southern California mountains.

Within that huge territory, scientists divide ponderosas into several varieties or subspecies; our pines belong to the “Columbia” (or “North Plateau”) strain. Though “Pacific” ponderosas in Southwest Oregon and California are the largest expression of the species, the Columbia ponderosa is still an enormous pine, reaching heights above 200 feet and girths of 7 or 8 feet.

Big old ponderosas tend to have open, flattened crowns — frequently topped with deadwood spars — and pale, yellowed bark; many such veterans bear the brand of lightning. In our Blue Mountain Province, ponderosas are unmistakable, though the fiery, plated trunk of a fat larch (easily distinguished from the pine based on foliage) can look remarkably similar to that of a “yellow-belly” — the logger's name for a mature, commercially prized ponderosa.

Ponderosas and larches are (along with Douglas-fir) our most fire-resistant conifers, and surface fires — whether lightning-sparked or human-set — help maintain the “classic” ponderosa landscape of the Inland Northwest: the savanna or parkland, with its spaced-out pines or pine copses above a bunchgrass carpet (and maybe sparse low shrubs such as snowberry).

Thick bark and a self-pruning habit of dropping lower



Photo by Ethan Shaw

The whitebark pine is a tree of the alpine zone. They can live for more than a thousand years.

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branches allow mature ponderosas to resist the creeping fires that historically sparked frequently in these savannas and spread easily across their sward, thickly mulched with bark scales, needles (“pinestraw”), and pinecones. Prescribed underburns can help restore these ponderosa parks, which have generally become drastically overgrown because of past fire suppression.

Ponderosa outcompetes other conifers on the lower fringes of our forests and on dry midslopes not only because of its fire-resistance but also some champion-grade drought-tolerance, partly due to an impressively deep-boring taproot. (In the Lost Forest northeast of Christmas Valley in the Oregon High Desert, an ancient stand of ponderosa isolated amid sagebrush and dunes survives on less than 10 inches of yearly precipitation.)

Western white pine

Next-largest of our native pines is the western white pine, which grows in our scattered fashion in our wet-



Photo by Ethan Shaw

A distinctive feature of Northeast Oregon forests — the aromatic orange bark of the ponderosa pine.

ter forests but which not all that far away, in North Idaho, once formed some of the most productive timberland in the Mountain West. Logging of the Inland Empire's western white pines followed the older industry centered on its close relative the eastern white pine, whose titanic bores were prized for ship masts in colonial days.

Among the hallmark features of the western white pine are its corky, blocky-plated bark; its feathery boughs of soft, long, five-bundled needles; and its banana-shaped cones, which may be 10 inches long. These pines can be grand in proportion: the better part of 200 feet tall and 6 feet across.

Lodgepole pine

More conspicuous in Northeast Oregon is a pine that, like ponderosa, claims a vast geography: the shapeshifting, opportunistic lodgepole, the only regional pine with two needles per bundle. It's hard to believe the ramrod-straight lodgepole — named for its value in teepee-building — is the same species as the twisty, bonsai-like shore pine of the Northwest Coast. (The lodge-

pole's Latin name, *Pinus contorta*, references the “contorted” shore pine, and doesn't much fit our interior form.) Another variety, the Sierra lodgepole, a stockier tree than our Rocky Mountain lodgepole, grows in the alpine rocklands of the Sierra and Klamaths.

Fast-growing, shade-intolerant, and relatively short-lived, lodgepoles are transient members of many of our local forest communities. In select settings — some soggy or chronically cold pockets of the montane forest, or on certain lean, nutrient-poor soils — lodgepoles may persist where counterparts such as firs cannot. But elsewhere our lodgepoles mainly rely on flame to get an upper hand over such competitors. The cones of many (though not all) lodgepoles are serotinous: that is, they only open when the fierce heat of fire melts their sealing resin. When a wildfire roars through a subalpine forest, it can release great quantities of lodgepole seeds into the fertile ashbed from those latent cones, which may wait decades for a liberating inferno.



Photo by Ethan Shaw

The classic doghair lodgepole pine thicket.