

Sports+Outdoors

WINTER ON THE WAY

Another predicted La Niña has skiers and snowboarders excited for upcoming season

BY MARK MORICAL • CO Media Group

If the snow this week in Central Oregon is not enough to get skiers and snowboarders excited for the coming season, then the long-term forecast should. Another La Niña is predicted, meaning cooler temperatures and more snow for ski areas through December and January.

"We're going into fairly similar conditions as last winter," said Larry O'Neill, director of Oregon Climate Services at Oregon State University in Corvallis. "It might be slightly weaker than last year, but probably not significantly different as far as La Niña goes. Right now we're in a weak La Niña, but it's just on the edge of being a moderate one. Last year we were barely into the moderate one."

El Niño — which usually makes for a warmer and drier Northwest winter — and La Niña are seasonal weather patterns driven by sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean.

Mt. Bachelor ski area, which typically attempts to open for winter operations on Thanksgiving weekend each year, plans to open on Nov. 25, provided there is enough snow to open its base areas.

With a base elevation of 6,300 feet, Bachelor can pretty much count on getting decent snow every winter. But that is no longer the case for smaller ski resorts like Willamette Pass (base elevation 5,128 feet) and Hoodoo (base elevation 4,668 feet). Those resorts typically try to open by early to mid-December, before the winter holidays.

The snow this week in Central Oregon are early signs of the La Niña, according to O'Neill.

"This year it's cooling off pretty quickly," he said. "So the outlook is actually fairly similar to what it was last year in that La Niñas tend to be cooler than normal with more precipitation than normal. For the most part that means better snowpack, on average."

While La Niñas make for cooler and snowier Northwest winters, they make for warmer and drier winters in the Southwest. The variable



Dean Guernsey/Bulletin file photo
Skiers and snowboarders ride the Pine Marten Express chairlift with Broken Top in the background at Mt. Bachelor ski area in December 2020.



Bulletin file
A snowboarder riding the powder bowls near Rainbow chair at Mt. Bachelor ski area.

is where that dividing line is. It is somewhere in Oregon, according to O'Neill.

"The way the La Niñas have gone over the last 10 years or so, it's a better probability that everything north of about Willamette Pass tends to get the better snowpack," O'Neill said. "Then the south Oregon Cascades have been quite a bit below normal. There's more confidence that the north Oregon Cascades and Washington Cascades will see an above average snowpack, and then it's always tricky with the south and Central Oregon Cascades, if they end up above or below normal."

The storm this week blasted all of Oregon, bringing with it wet, heavy snow that can be good for building bases at ski areas.

While Mount Bachelor is close to that dividing line of El Niño vs. La Niña, the ski area has several advantages. Aside from being at a higher elevation than most Oregon ski areas, it is also more inland, making for drier snow that can last longer. It also has a north-facing aspect, which also allows the snow to stick and last longer.

Willamette Pass ski area, by contrast, is located at the crest of the Cascades, making for wetter snow, and it has primarily south-facing slopes.

No matter where skiers and snowboarders venture this year, they can probably expect a big gap in the snowfall, as happened last winter. After significant snow dumps in late December and early January, high pressure from mid-January to late February made for limited fresh snow. Mother Nature then oddly made up for it in May with epic powder conditions in late spring.

"Every year has exceptions," O'Neill said. "The last couple of years we've had big gaps in the middle of the snow season. There's always a caveat that conditions can change. Things are a little bit more unpredictable because of climate change. What's happened historically during La Niñas is not what's happening now."

"But I'm pretty optimistic, I just went and bought a new pair of skis."

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Submitted photo
Emma Maaranen navigates a rock line on the Rock Stacker section of C.O.D. trail in Bend.

Yes, technical trails exist in Central Oregon

BY EMMA MAARANEN
For The Spokesman

"Central Oregon trails are not technical."

I hear this all the time. And, no, the green trails in Central Oregon are not technical. They shouldn't be. Many blue trails would be rated green at Whistler, British Columbia. We don't have 8-foot gap jumps, high-ball skinnies or 20-foot high, steep slab rides.

However, saying we don't have technical trails is a falsehood. Our tech lines look different than glossy photos in magazine ads, but there are plenty of areas that take advanced bike-handling skills to ride.

One of my favorite technical loops in Phil's (yes, Phil's) starts up C.O.D. from LOGE Bend. There are several rock ramps that take some commitment and balance to ride as the trail parallels Cascade Lakes Highway and a rock garden that I still put a foot down on now and then after riding it at least 100 times. I take the Rock Stacker option and really get to practice slow-speed bike handling. Twice I've ridden this trail clean in the uphill direction, and many times I've left a little blood.

Next is the new-ish C.O.D. reroute to the Welcome Center with some spicy step-ups to keep me honest. I then continue up Upper C.O.D. through some rock gardens that take finesse (don't take the ride-around option on the rock ramp) to the junction with Ticket to Ride (TTR) south. Cruise TTR and Voodoo Child to Voodoo. Heading down Voodoo, you encounter old-school tech where managing your momentum over boulders and tight turns is an act of responding to wherever the trail tosses you. I turn onto Grand Slam at the junction, where sighting through keeper holes and over log rides is essential to keep it rubber side down. I return to LOGE via K.G.B. and the Tetherow trail. There are a few fun alt-line launches on K.G.B. as you descend to Tetherow to finish off the tech ride sampler.

This loop is not steep. It's not fast riding. But it is an accomplishment to ride it without putting a foot down or taking a ride around. When you have the skills to do this loop, you have developed a complete checklist of skills needed to ride the most technical of features on black cross-country trails around the country. Central Oregon has produced some insanely good technical riders from Red Bull Rampage finalists to Enduro World Series contenders. They learned their craft here, learning the foundation of piloting a mountain bike on our trails, and took that to a bigger stage.

Have you ridden the wood features at 66 Trails area? Practiced drops at East Hills? Found the slab-rock rides on Larsens? Turned pale scouting the lines on Trail 2 at Cline Butte? Found your flow at The Lair?

There is technical riding among the flowy 500-plus miles of single track in the area. If you are not challenged with your ride loops, try mine. I think you'll sing another tune when someone tells you there's no technical riding here.

Emma Maaranen is a professional mountain bike rider, coach, and the Bend Chapter representative on the Central Oregon Trail Alliance board of directors.



Bulletin file
Snowboarders at Hoodoo ski area on Santiam Pass last season.

Falling snow means Mt. Bachelor expects to open season on Nov. 25

BY JOE SIESS
CO Media Group

With all the snow falling on Mount Bachelor, this week, the ski area expects to open the 2022-23 season on Nov. 25, the day after Thanksgiving.

The Skyliner chairlift is also expected to be running by the time Mt. Bachelor opens to skiers and snowboarders. Skyliner was shut down in December and remained closed for the rest of last season. One of the Skyliner's 14-foot-wide bull wheels recently underwent repairs, and returned to the mountain on Saturday, Johnny Sereni, spokesman for Mt. Bachelor told The Bulletin on Tuesday.

"The bull wheel arrived, a little bit delayed because of the ice on the road. The crew got it up and into place the same day it arrived. They are just finishing up some of the mechanics

around it now, and we are going to start testing it and spinning it in the next few days," Sereni said. "We will get it inspected and it will be up and running in time." Skyliner will be dismantled and replaced with a brand new six-person lift, which is expected to open for the 2023-24 ski season.

The anticipated start to the season this winter is earlier than in the past couple of seasons. Last season, the resort opened in a limited capacity on Dec. 13, and in 2020, it opened on Dec. 7 with 40 inches of snow recorded on the mountain. However, a mid- to late-November start to the season has been relatively common over the years.

This year, snow came later than usual, but Sereni said so far it is packing down nicely and more snow is expected in the near future.

"We are getting good snowfalls,

one after the other. They are not huge amounts of snow, but they are packing down to a nice base which is freezing to the ground," he said. "We start making snow today as well. And there are more cold fronts coming in the next week or so, and we are expecting a little more."

At this point, the mountain expects two more cold fronts to bring snow in the coming days, Sereni said. He said if the weather keeps up, the resort will open on schedule. However, gauging how much snow is needed to open properly is the key question.

"It is kind of the million-dollar question: How much snow do you need? It is a lot about where the snow falls, how much is in certain areas, and what kind of snow," Sereni said. "So, it really does depend on the snow at that given time. But if we can get at least one run open from top to bottom and groomed with



Mt. Bachelor ski area

One of the Skyliner chairlift's 14-foot-wide bull wheels recently underwent repairs, and returned to Mt. Bachelor ski area last week.

no obstacles, just good snow cover, we'll open a lift"

Although the lifts are not running quite yet, Sereni encouraged people to come up to the mountain and en-

joy the snow. He was pleased to see a cross-country skier slide past his office window on Tuesday.

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