



SKI REPORT

Spout Springs Tollgate, Ore.
New snow: None
Open Fridays from noon to 9 p.m., Saturday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Anthony Lakes North Powder, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 45"
Conditions: Light winds, groomed runs in good condition.

Ski Bluewood Dayton, Wash.
New snow: None
Base depth: 53"
Conditions: Smooth corduroy, two terrain parks open.

Ski Fergi Joseph, Ore.
Base depth: 15"
Open Jan. 9-10, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., groomed runs.

Mt. Hood Meadows Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 78"
Conditions: Combo of packed powder and hardpack on the groom. Skier-packed powder over crust, moguls, and hardpack off the groom.

Oregon’s biggest sled dog race starts Jan. 20

By KATHLEEN ELLYN
EO Media Group

It’s almost time for the 2016 Eagle Cap Extreme sled dog races, scheduled this year from Jan. 20-23 and we’re letting you know about it early so you can volunteer or make your participation plans.

The race is Oregon’s only qualifier for the Iditarod and Yukon Quest and some of these mushers and their faithful canine partners have been coming to the county for more than a decade and they’re friends by now.

It takes an army to make this race a success and Wallowa County has provided that army year after year, making this a musher’s favorite event.

Visit <http://www.eaglecapextreme.com/> to volunteer.

There are some new features this year: the 200-mile course has been redesigned and a 62-mile pot race will be held. It’s also the second year for the 22-mile Junior Division race.

All events are free and open to the public except the Awards Banquet. You’ll have lots of chances to purchase ECX fan gear this year as well.

Race Central will be set up in the Joseph Community Center beginning at 8 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20.

Here is where you will find at Race Central: the latest race information, treats and hot drinks, information on sled dogs and mushing, DVDs, and kids’ corner with activities, books, and scheduled kids’ events. The



Rich Rautenstrauch/The Chieftain
Maria Weer and her daughter Lilly, of Enterprise, visit the downtown vetrinarian dog checks the day before last year’s Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog Race.

Kids’ Corner is always open with self-guided activities.

The vet checks also will be held on Wednesday, January 20. The dogs and mushers will be in Joseph on Main Street at 9 a.m. and in Enterprise on Main Street at 1 p.m. The ECX veterinary team will be happy to answer questions when they are not examining dogs and talking to mushers. ECX gear will be available. Please leave personal pets at home.

Later that evening, 6:30 p.m. at the Joseph Community Center, you can gather with mushers for the potluck dinner. Mushers will draw for their bib numbers and meet the

community.

Bring a dish to share with everyone. Paper goods, plasticware and drinks will be provided.

On Thursday the races start at the Ferguson Ridge Ski Area. Again, no pets please.

The first stage of the 62-mile pot race and the departure of 100- and 200-milers begins at noon. Snowshoers and cross-country skiers should be up at the Snow Park at Salt Creek Summit by 1 p.m. if they want to watch the racers go by from a different vantage point. Remember a Snow Park Pass is required to park here. Passes are available for



Courtesy photo
This photo was taken at the Clear Creek Cabin near Fish Lake. Pictured left to right: Justin Harold, Dustin James and Cody James.

Engines revved for Wallowa County snowmobile club

By KATHLEEN ELLYN
EO Media Group

The snowmobile season has more than begun; it’s been going for several weeks.

In fact, the Wallowa County Gamblers snowmobile club already has finished grooming more than 200 miles of trail from Salt Creek Summit to the Hells Canyon overlook and on to connect with trails groomed by the Halfway Panhandlers.

They’ll keep on grooming “full bore, right on until the Eagle Cap Extreme sled dog races start,” said member Randy James of Enterprise.

Grooming trails for the sled dog race will entail creating a new route out to the Hells Canyon side for the 200-mile contest.

The first organized event of the year, the annual 30-mile Poker Run, is scheduled for Jan. 16 with dinner and auction to follow from 5-10 p.m. at Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise. The dinner will be catered by Randy Garnett.

The following Sunday the club will host a memorial ride for longtime member Sam Bowman. More details will be announced before the event.

Meet for the Poker Run at Salt Creek Summit. Last year the club sold 175 poker hands and the winner took home \$600. As usual, 10 percent of the take will go to maintenance on the Salt

Creek Cabin and grooming shed, the Coverdale Cabin Guard Station in the Imnaha high country and Clear Creek Cabin on the Halfway side of the mountains.

Other events planned include avalanche classes, to be announced soon.

The busy club boasts about 40 members and is always looking for more playmates. A membership in the Gambler’s includes membership in the Oregon State Snowmobile Association (OSSA) and costs \$40 for the season.

OSSA encompasses 30 snowmobile clubs, 25 of which are grooming clubs which operate under and agreement with ODOT. Last season volunteers maintained a 6,000-mile trail system. All clubs participate in trail clearing and trail maintenance. The Gamblers clear trail and do maintenance on emergency cabins year round, going out on ATVs in the summer.

Individuals interested in taking the avalanche class or purchasing rescue beacons and other necessary safety items for backcountry snowmobiling should contact Outlaw Motor Sports in Enterprise at 541-426-3491. Snowmobilers are advised to check conditions before heading out to play. Visit <http://snowmobilewallowacounty.com/> for links to SNOTEL, Wallowa Avalanche Center and more.

Government to cull up to 900 Yellowstone bison

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Government agencies aim to kill or remove up to 900 wild bison from Yellowstone National Park this winter as part of an ongoing effort to reduce the animals’ annual migration by driving down their population.

Park officials on Tuesday released details of plans for at least 600 to 900 bison to be killed by hunters or captured and sent to slaughter. That potentially would be the most in one winter since 2008, and it represents more than 18 percent of the current population of about 4,900

animals.

Bison migrate annually from the high country of Yellowstone to their historical winter grazing grounds at lower elevations in Montana. Since the 1980s, worry over the animal disease brucellosis has prompted the killing of about 8,200 park bison.

Yellowstone Superintendent Dan Wenk said in a statement that the National Park Service was uncomfortable with the practice and interested in alternatives, such as sending disease-free animals to other public, private or tribal lands.

Park on Fidalgo Island is a stormy gem

By BRIAN J. CANTWELL
The Seattle Times

FIDALGO ISLAND, Wash. — It was blowing like stink, as old salts say. Perfect stormwatching weather, on a late-November day.

I was near Deception Pass State Park, so aimed the car toward Rosario Beach. I was hoping for a close-up look at whitecapped rollers that were barreling in off the Strait of Juan de Fuca like a 100-car freight train bound for somewhere east of Sedro-Woolley.

But, ack, the beach entry was gated. Little did I know, that part of the park is closed in these colder months.

Serendipity possessed me to keep driving north on Rosario Road. Otherwise I’d never have discovered Sharpe Park, what Brian Adams, director of Skagit County Parks, calls a hidden gem: more than 110 acres of pristine second-growth forest and Fidalgo Island’s largest undeveloped shoreline, with wetlands and rocky balds threaded by a network of trails leading to soul-soothing views of the Olympics and the San Juan Islands.

On this day of bluster and blow, it also offered neck-craning, eagle-eye views of vast expanses of wild water.

Long, rocky shoreline

Kathleen Sharpe deeded the original land for Sharpe Park in 1977 in memory of her husband, Wallace J. Sharpe, and his father, Thomas J. Sharpe, who were settlers on the property. Today, the park’s full name is Sharpe Park and Montgomery-Duban Headlands, the latter addition coming in 2004 when public and private dollars helped add more acreage and almost a mile of rocky shoreline edging Rosario Strait.

Besides offering waterie views, the park is a haven for birdwatchers.

“The bird life out there is phenomenal,” says Rick Machin, a retiree who lives nearby and has devoted many volunteer hours eradicating invasive Scotch broom in the park, which now has an overlook named in his honor. “I’ve seen bald eagles and peregrine falcons, along with all the usual suspects of birds you’ll find in the low, grassy areas where we’ve cleared the broom — juncos, white-crowned sparrows and finches, which in turn attract Cooper’s hawks, sharp-shinned hawks and northern harriers.”

From a small parking lot, a wide and lightly graveled trail — thank you, Washington Trails Association volunteers — passes a picnic area and in a few hundred feet brings you to Fox Pond, a former beaver pond (presumably popular with some bushy-tailed fauna as well) that is gradually being filled in by cattails. A swooping kingfisher greeted me with its rat-a-tat chatter.

Here’s also where to watch for wood ducks, whose males sport spectacular plumage, Machin says, noting that Anacortes High School science students have placed wood-duck boxes in trees around the pond.

I followed the trail past nurse logs, sword ferns, salal and salmonberry under a canopy of Douglas fir, cedar, hemlock and alders toward Sares Head Viewpoint, the park’s highest vista.

Thunder or jets?

Be warned: Along with the whoosh of wind in the treetops I heard what



Brian J. Cantwell/The Seattle Times via AP
In this Nov. 16, 2015 photo, a hiker on the trail to Sares Head in the Sharpe Park and Montgomery/Duban Headlands complex near Anacortes, Wash.

“On a little bluff perched above the water on the Porpoise Point Trail visitors can almost always spot harbor prposes rising to the surface.”

— Brian Adams,
Director of Skagit County Parks

locals call the “sound of freedom” from fighter jets on practice sorties out of nearby Whidbey Island Naval Air Station. On this stormy day I was able to mentally dismiss it as the rumble of distant thunder.

At a fork in the trail, look carefully for tiny directional signs affixed high on an alder tree: left for Sharpe Park/ Sares Head, right for Montgomery Duban Headlands/Rocky Bluff. I went left, and soon another fork gave the choice of an upper trail or lower trail to Sares Head; I randomly chose the lower trail, which later seemed a good choice upon discovering that part of the upper trail had become a streambed on this rainy day.

The “chip, chip” of wrens from the underbrush accompanied me as the trail sloped gradually downward past a rocky mount thickly upholstered in small ferns. A few moss-coated, bigger firs, sometimes called “wolf trees,” towered overhead as the sloping forest opened to glimpses of the water.

There was a bit of upping and downing until I found a viewpoint with a well-used bench atop a rocky bald dropping steeply to the water, far below.

I rotated my head from right to left to take in the panorama.

It started with the succession of receding-into-mist San Juan island hilltops, then the endless swells — white as snow drifts — marching across Rosario Strait, to the bulge of Watmough Head on Lopez Island, the gray smear of clouds allowing peekaboo views of the Olympics, the entry islets just off Deception Pass, and, finally, the distant runways of the airfield on Whidbey’s buffeted bluffs.

purchase at Joseph Hardware, Sports Corral, Outlaw Motor Sports, or Enterprise DMV.

On Friday the Juniors Race and the second stage of the 62-mile pot race begin at noon.

A shuttle will be available to take you to the race start from the parking lot beginning at 9:45 a.m. on both Thursday and Friday. It’s wise to be early.

The finish is not easy to time, but if you’re dressed warmly you can hang out at Fergi and watch the 62-mile race competitors come in on Thursday and Friday late afternoon to evening; 100-milers come in on Friday morning; Juniors come in Friday afternoon to evening; and 200-milers come home on Saturday early morning to late evening.

Drive right up to the Fergi Ski Area parking lot to watch the teams finish and ski on Saturday while you wait.

The Awards Banquet and Dinner will be set up in the Joseph Community Center on Saturday evening beginning at 5:30 p.m. Mushers will share tales from the trail and a live and silent auction fundraiser will be conducted.

The bar opens at 5:30 p.m. and dinner is served at 6:30 p.m. Dinner is \$20 for public, \$18 for members, \$12 for volunteers and handlers; \$8 for children ages 5 through 12. Little kids are free. Ticket sales locations will be announced soon. A full schedule is available at <http://eaglecapextreme.com>.

If you go:

Sharpe Park/Montgomery-Duban Headlands is at 14692 Rosario Road, south of Anacortes. From Highway 20, 0.7-mile north of the Deception Pass Bridge, turn west on Rosario Road. The park is on the left in 1.7 miles. No permits or fees required.
Facilities
Picnic tables, vault toilet, view-point benches
Traveler’s tip
For a Strait of Juan de Fuca view from your car, drive to the parking lot at West Beach in Deception Pass State Park. (Discover Pass required.)
• Skagit County Parks and Recreation: bit.ly/1NyH3wT
• Washington Trails Association: wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/sharpe-park-sares-head

Behind me, bleached-gray fir snags — of doubtless appeal to roosting eagles on calmer days — hung over a grove of madrona saplings struggling to stake a claim.

Wind-pummeled, I didn’t stay long, but the view was worth it.

The Sares Head walk is an easy 25-minute amble, just over a mile round-trip, with some moderate exertion.

Other choices include several intersecting paths that can add up to a scenic 2.14-mile loop, including steeper terrain that takes you down closer to the water.

“On a little bluff perched above the water on the Porpoise Point Trail visitors can almost always spot harbor porpoises rising to the surface,” Brian Adams says. “It’s certainly one of my favorite places in the park.”

Machin adds that, on foggy days, he has heard the eerie whoosh of whales spouting just offshore.

Wait for spring and you might miss the storms but you’ll get another payoff as the rocky slopes burst with dainty wildflowers, including calypso orchids, chocolate, camas and fawn lilies, along with fairy slippers, shooting stars, yellow monkey flowers and coastal strawberry.

— The original story can be found on The Seattle Times’ website.

Have a photo of your trophy elk or sturgeon? Or snap a shot of your child’s first trout? Email it ttrainor@eastoregonian.com and see it published in the next East Oregonian Outside page.