

Popular Gorge hikes closed due to winter storms

By **JAMIE HALE**
The Oregonian

CASCADE LOCKS — Winter can be a tricky season in the Columbia River Gorge. High rain-fall leads to gushing waterfalls, but it also leads to crumbling earth.

Landslides and windstorms are nothing new in the Gorge, but as our especially wet winter warms into a drizzly spring, fresh storm damage greets hikers on some of the most popular trails in the Gorge, cutting off or complicating access to waterfalls and scenic vistas at the region’s best season.

“We’re just seeing the effects of this really wet, wet soil,” explained Stan Hinatsu, recreation staff officer for the Columbia River Gorge Scenic Area. “We’re just finally getting the kind of weather we haven’t seen in a long time.”

Trail closures are posted on the websites of the Columbia River Gorge Scenic Area and Oregon State Parks (which manages some land in the area), as well as at the trailheads, but here are all the known weather-related trail closures in the Gorge, as of spring 2016.

Eagle Creek

The most notable damage came this past December on the Eagle Creek Trail, easily the most popular in the area, where a fallen tree took out a bridge only two miles into the 13-mile trail.

The 40-foot-long metal bridge will cost tens of thousands of dollars to replace, according to Hinatsu, and should be out for at least a year while the U.S. Forest Service gathers funds and coordinates the replacement project, which will require a helicopter to airlift the old bridge out and the new bridge in.

“It’s going to be a pretty expensive bridge,” he said.

The downed bridge blocks off easy access to two of the hike’s most stunning waterfalls — Tunnel Falls and Twister Falls — though hikers can still get to Punchbowl Falls and Metlako Falls before the closure.

How long will it be out?

The official estimate right now is at least one year, though that timeframe could get shorter or



In this March 22 photo, the bridge over Tish Creek on the popular Eagle Creek Trail in the Columbia River Gorge was destroyed by a fallen tree in December 2015. Officials with the U.S. Forest Service estimated it would take at least a year to replace it. Winter can be a tricky season in the Columbia River Gorge. High rainfall leads to gushing waterfalls, but it also leads to crumbling earth.

longer depending on how easily the money comes.

Can you pass?

A lot of hikers are crossing Tish Creek via a makeshift bridge made of small logs, but the U.S. Forest Service encourages all hikers to turn around, as a 15-foot waterfall looms just beneath the bridge.

Upper McCord Creek

The Upper McCord Creek Trail in John B. Yeon State Park, which leads to the spectacular dual plunges of Upper McCord Creek Falls, is impassable thanks to a major landslide in a treacherous part of the trail.

While the trail is technically closed only a short way up, the only big damage doesn’t come until you get up near the top, where the trail cuts underneath overhanging rock, a pipe handrail between you and a plunge down to Elowah Falls below.

The landslide happened back in late November, according to



In this March 22 photo, a pair of hikers navigate a user-made crossing across Tish Creek on the popular Eagle Creek Trail in the Columbia River Gorge.

Oregon State Parks, and efforts to clear it up have been stymied by weather and schedule conflicts ever since.

“I’ve been telling people ‘two

weeks, two weeks, two weeks,’ but it’s been six or seven weeks now,” explained Glenn Littrell, Oregon State Parks ranger supervisor for the Gorge.

Hood, Deschutes rivers open for spring chinook

THE DALLES – The popular spring chinook fisheries on the Deschutes and Hood rivers will open this spring.

Deschutes River

According to Jason Seals, ODFW fish biologist, managers are predicting over 4,000 adult hatchery fish will return to the Deschutes, which is well above management goals to obtain hatchery broodstock and other management needs.

“If the run comes back as predicted, chinook salmon fishing on the Deschutes should be excellent,” he said.

“In recent years, as many as 10,000 anglers have participated in the fishery annually.”

Here is a summary of the temporary rules for the

Deschutes River adopted by ODFW:

Open for adipose fin-clipped chinook from May 1 through July 31 from the mouth of the Deschutes at the I-84 bridge upstream to Sherars Falls.

The catch limit is one adult adipose fin-clipped salmon per day, and five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

All non-adipose fin-clipped chinook salmon must be released unharmed.

It is unlawful to continue to fish from Sherars Falls downstream to the upper railroad trestle after taking a daily bag limit of one adult chinook salmon.

Hood River

Managers are predicting far fewer adult fish returning to the Hood River—about 970 hatchery fish.

According to Seals, the Hood River offers another good opportunity to catch a spring chinook from the

bank but in conditions that are much less crowded than on the Deschutes.

In addition, the removal of Powerdale Dam in the summer of 2010 expanded the legal angling area and offers anglers considerably more room to spread out.

Here is a summary of the temporary rules for the Hood River adopted by ODFW:

Open for adipose fin-clipped chinook from April 15 through June 30 from the mouth to mainstem confluence with the East Fork, and the West Fork from the confluence with the mainstem upstream to the angling deadline 200 feet downstream of Punchbowl Falls.

The catch limit is two adult adipose fin-clipped salmon per day, and five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

All non-adipose fin-clipped chinook salmon must be released unharmed.

BRIEFLY

Bighorn ruling could have ramifications on Western grazing

BOISE (AP) — A ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recognizing a connection between bighorn sheep die-offs and diseases transmitted by domestic sheep could have far-reaching ramifications on federal grazing allotments.

The ruling earlier this month by the three-judge panel against domestic sheep producers upheld a lower court ruling in Idaho supporting a U.S. Forest Service decision to close sheep grazing allotments to protect bighorns.

“A lot of people were looking at this waiting to see what they did,” said Laurie Rule of Advocates for the West, noting it’s the first time a U.S. circuit

court has ruled on disease transmission between the species.

The ruling gives the Forest Service legal backing to look at other areas in the West where domestic sheep grazing should be limited to protect bighorns, she said, or for environmental groups “to try to force the Forest Service to do it if they’re not going to do it on their own.”

The Idaho Wool Growers Association and others sued in 2012, contending that the U.S. Forest Service illegally shut down 70 percent of sheep grazing in the Payette National Forest in west-central Idaho based on unproven disease transmission between domestic and bighorn sheep.

But a U.S. district court — and now a federal appeals court — disagreed.

“There’s that possibility that it could be used on other forests,” said Stan Boyd, executive director

of the Idaho Wool Growers Association. He said the association was considering its next move involving possible legal action.

Kristine Lee, director of Natural Resources for the U.S. Forest Service’s Intermountain Region, said the agency already had a strategy before the ruling.

North America had about 2 million bighorn sheep before numbers declined starting in the late 1800s to about 10 percent of that, the circuit court decision said, with over-hunting, habitat loss, food competition and disease transmission from domestic sheep generally cited as reasons for decline.

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SKI REPORT

Spout Springs Tollgate, Ore. CLOSED FOR SEASON

Anthony Lakes North Powder, Ore. New snow: Trace Base depth: 80" Conditions: Spring skiing, breezy

Ski Bluewood Dayton, Wash. New snow: None Base depth: 85" Conditions: 15" since Sunday, spring skiing on fresh snow

Ski Fergi Joseph, Ore. CLOSED

Mt. Hood Meadows Government Camp, Ore. New snow: 2" Base depth: 120" Conditions: Groom is wind-affected packed powder. Off the groom is skier-packed powder and powder over frozen granular.

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