

# Devil's Gulch: A respite from snow and rain

By **TIM TRAINOR**  
East Oregonian

If this long, snowy winter has you feeling cooped up and your favorite trails are still covered by piles of snow, you could do worse than stretching those hibernating hiking muscles in Devil's Gulch in Wallowa County.

Though relatively unremarkable, the trail is centrally located between Joseph and Imnaha and offers an interesting collision of alpine and desert landscapes, as well as the opportunity to see lots of wildlife in the winter and spring. But perhaps the best part: It's warm and dry and has been snow-free for weeks.

Accessing the property couldn't be easier, as the trailhead is located right off the Imnaha Highway. If traveling from Joseph, look on your right for a large pullout and a small footbridge crossing Little Sheep Creek. If you come to Bear Gulch Road you've gone too far.

The lightly used trail, located on the 3,500-acre Clear Lake Ridge Preserve, begins there. The Nature Conservancy land is open to the public, but comes with rules such as no motorized vehicles, no camping, no bear or bird hunting, and deer and elk hunting during rifle season only. There have been recent upgrades to the trailhead but not so much to the trail itself.

That trail begins by following and occasionally crossing the mostly dry creek bed, which has a decent volume of water in some places and then goes completely dry in others as the stream disappears underground. The trail pushes up the gulch through some undergrowth and quickly comes to an old, abandoned bunkhouse located next to a mossy spring. Bear claw marks scrape across the old shack, and bear scat was scattered up and down the trail on a recent visit. So, too, were elk and deer droppings, and a fellow trail walker said he spotted 30 head of elk on a recent walk through the area. The incongruities of the land are the most interesting part of the hike, with a few ponderosa pines trying to grow in the hard ground, and there's even a grove or two of aspen trees — bear claw marks



Staff photo by Tim Trainor

**Most of the Devil's Gulch trail, located between Joseph and Imnaha on Nature Conservancy property, is unspectacular. But the gulch is warm and snow-less, and both people and wild animals can be found there in early spring.**



Staff photo by Tim Trainor

**An old bunkhouse located along a mossy spring in a desert canyon, is one of the many incongruities experienced when walking along Devil's Gulch.**

show clearly all the way up a few of the trunks. There are lots of volcanic rock outcroppings up Devil's Ridge and there's even some volcanic ash along the trail, in addition to lots of classic wind-swept grasses and sagebrush. An unidentified hawklet cried out for a meal from one of the rocky overhangs, and mom later visited with one.

The trail is accessible for hikers of all skill levels, though a few easy rock hops are necessary to keep your feet dry. It would be an excellent place to walk leashed dogs. Breathable long sleeves and long pants are recommended as defense against a few thorny thickets. That aside, hikers can walk for miles and notice the country changing slowly from the hot desert where you left your car

into the cool foothills where you sadly decide to turn around.

In between there are numerous side gulches and ridges for exploring, and places where the shed hunting could be excellent this year — any ungulate who could make their way to this small gulch had it much better than their brethren high in the Eagle Caps.

In general, Devil's Gulch isn't the most interesting trail in the world, but it gets more interesting with each and every step. And it offers a place to work up a sweat outdoors in February and March in Wallowa County. That by itself makes it worth a try.

*Tim Trainor is the opinion page editor of the East Oregonian and interim editor of the Wallowa County Chieftain.*

## Timber group files suit against monument expansion

By **MARK FREEMAN**  
Medford Mail-Tribune

A timber-industry group has joined the growing list of entities asking the federal courts to invalidate last fall's near-doubling of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

The American Forest Resource Council filed suit Friday, March 3 in federal court claiming President Barack Obama illegally used the Antiquities Act to add thousands of acres of O&C Act lands in the monument expansion, contradicting a 1940 Department of the Interior legal opinion stating O&C lands can't be pulled from production.

The land was part of the original O&C Act lands that were set aside by Congress for sustained timber production as managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The 1940 internal governmental review conducted during a proposed expansion of the Oregon Caves National Monument concluded the Antiquities Act can't trump the O&C Act.

It is the third federal suit filed since Feb. 3 seeking to nullify the expansion of the monument east of Ashland by 47,624 acres. Including the expansion,



AP Photo/Jeff Barnard

**This Sept. 20, 2006 file photo shows a helicopter ferrying a log to a log landing on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest near Selma.**

the monument now includes 113,013 acres of federal lands within a footprint that covers about 137,500 acres in southeastern Jackson County, Klamath County and Northern California.

Nearly identical lawsuits were filed Feb. 13 by the Oregon Association of O&C Counties and Feb. 17 by the Murphy Co., which owns about 2,000 acres within the monument footprint.

AFRC President Travis Joseph said the council

opted not to join one of the existing lawsuits because his council represents the timber industry, which seeks to ensure those lands remain available to provide logs to local mills.

Jackson County and other counties within the O&C association are suing primarily to seek cash payments in lieu of taxes that are tied directly to O&C land timber sales, Joseph said.

Like the Oregon Association of O&C Counties

suit, AFRC filed its suit in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. Joseph said that was done because Obama signed the executive order creating the expansion there, and because the monument now falls in two states with two different district courts.

The Murphy Co. suit was filed in federal court in Medford.

Murphy's lands and other private lands within the monument footprint remain

private and are not subject to monument rules, which ban commercial timber harvest but would allow well vetted noncommercial cutting. Murphy's suit, however, claims its lands will lose significant value if the expansion is not overturned.

When President Bill Clinton used the Antiquities Act to create the monument in 2000, 40,155 acres of previously designated O&C lands were included. However, that designation was not challenged with the use of the 1940 legal opinion.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., who supported the expansion, in October estimated that the expansion boundaries included 53,454 acres of former O&C lands. BLM hopes as early as Wednesday to pinpoint the exact number of new O&C lands added to the monument by the expansion, BLM spokesman Jim Whittington said.

The Soda Mountain Wilderness Council and other monument supporters have filed briefs in the first two cases seeking to join in defense of the monument expansion. They argue that they can't rely on BLM nor the Trump administration to defend their interests in keeping the expansion intact.

## Deadline extended for input on North Cascades grizzlies

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — People will have more time to weigh in on several proposals to restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades.

The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are giving the public 45 additional days to comment after local officials and residents asked for more time.

The *Bellingham Herald* reports that April 28 is the new deadline to comment on four options, including taking no action.

Three other alternatives seek to restore a population of about 200 bears, by relocating animals to 9,800 square miles of mostly public land in and around North Cascades National Park and letting them breed.

## SKI REPORT

**Spout Springs**  
Tollgate, Ore.  
**CLOSED FOR SEASON**

**Anthony Lakes**  
North Powder, Ore.  
**New snow: 1"**  
**Base depth: 74"**  
**Conditions: Variable, precipitation should remain snow and not rain over weekend.**

**Ski Bluewood**  
Dayton, Wash.  
**New snow: Trace**  
**Base depth: 79"**  
**Conditions: Machine groomed, wet snow**

**Ski Fergi**  
Joseph, Ore.  
**CLOSED, RAIN**

**Mt. Hood Meadows**  
Government Camp, Ore.  
**New snow: 2"**  
**Base depth: 119"**  
**Conditions: Packed-powder groom with a few hard spots. Sun in forecast.**

## Idaho plan to save wildlife gets approval from federal officials

By **KEITH RIDLER**  
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Federal officials said they have approved Idaho's wildlife conservation plan that allows the state to seek federal money to bolster mainly nongame species and avoid potential listings under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a letter received by state officials last week signed off on Idaho's 1,500-page State Wildlife Action Plan that identifies 205 species of concern. Those species include

already listed grizzly bears and salmon, plus imperiled sage grouse, monarch butterflies and the magnum mantleslug, which hasn't been verified in Idaho since a dead one was found 2013.

"Ultimately, the goal is to make sure that these species don't make the endangered species list and those that are on come off and the state maintains management authority," said Brad Compton, assistant chief of Wildlife for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Idaho has received about \$550,000 annually under its

previous plan developed in 2005.

Officials examined nearly 5,000 species to come up with the 205 identified as "species of greatest conservation need." The plan divides those species into three priority categories, with 43 assigned to what the plan calls an early warning list of species possibly heading toward extinction within the state.

The plan also identifies potential threats and the highest priority actions to help specific species.

Idaho "really went above and beyond in getting

input from partners and stakeholders to develop a robust method to identify the species of greatest conservation need," said Kathy Hollar, chief of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Region. "Idaho has a lot of biodiversity so they had a lot to work with."

She noted the program involves more than keeping species off the Endangered Species List.

It's "the whole idea of being able to keep common species common so you have biodiversity and the

full complement of species and their interaction in the ecosystem," she said.

Idaho's Fish and Game is responsible for wildlife conservation of nongame species, which account for about 98 percent of the wildlife in the state. But Compton said the agency receives no Idaho general fund money. The money the agency gets from hunting and fishing license sales goes back to benefit hunters and anglers, he said.

That means the federal money is the main source for conserving nongame species.