



Bend Park & Recreation District's West Bend Trail.

Submitted photo

Trails

Continued from B1

Our trail counter data for this year clearly shows that more people are using the park district trails that connect to U.S. Forest Service land.

Something that really stands out are the 2020 numbers for Haul Road and West Bend trails, pointing to how many people use our trails to access the national forest. The annual numbers are nearly double from the previous six years. The West Bend Trail had an 85% increase — nearly 40,000 more trips — over the total in 2019. The

Haul Road Trail experienced a 59% increase — just shy of 26,000 additional trail counts — than the previous year.

Also, Shevlin Park and Riley Ranch Nature Reserve follow this same pattern, and both parks have had continuous year over year increase since we started counting. Shevlin Park has two trail counters calculating visits on the north and south areas of the 1,000-acre park. The north area trail counter had a 40% increase, and the south area had a 37% increase, totaling almost 35,000 more visits than in the previous year. The upper trail area at Riley Ranch Nature Reserve saw more

than 41,000 additional visitors — almost a 70% increase in nature reserve explorers — from the prior year.

Overall, trail usage was up an average of 38% across all of our trail counters between 2019 and 2020. Even the Larkspur Trail, which has been detoured during the construction project at Larkspur Community Center, home of the Bend Senior Center, saw a 29% jump in use from the year prior. This is an important east-side trail and the numbers prove that the trail continues to be a well-used corridor despite partial closures. And not to be forgotten is the paved Pine Nursery

Park trail that saw an 80% increase or almost 18,000 more visits in 2020 than in 2019.

Trail counters are not without limitations. In the past year, we've had at least one of our trail counters experience considerable vandalism that resulted in unreliable data. It is rare that the counters get damaged, but someone damaged the end of the scope lens. We've also discovered issues that aren't human-caused. Tall grass in the sun or grass blowing in the wind can trigger the counter unintentionally. This is part of the challenge of finding the sweet spot for trail counter locations.

Despite these challenges,

my co-workers at the park district use the information from the trail counters to better understand use patterns and to plan ahead for future crossings, connections and new trails. The high use in 2020 definitely tells us that our goal of developing 47 more miles of trail by 2028 is on target with how community members are using trails for recreation and transportation.

For more information about park district trails, visit www.bendparksandrec.org/parks-trails.

Julie Brown is the communication and community relations manager for Bend Park and Recreation District.

Dogs

Continued from B1

When not working the tours at Bachelor, Nelson has been training the dog team with Rachael and Jerry at their sprawling ranch in Alfalfa, just east of Bend. The dogs are mostly Alaskan husky mixes.

Rachael Scdoris has continued racing over the years, but for the shorter, faster sprint races, like the Stage Stop, she figured Nelson was the better choice for a musher.

"We just realized that for this level of sprint racing, there is no margin for error," Rachael said. "I'm a musher who makes errors — that's just the way it is. So it's better for Rafael to go."

Scdoris was born with achromatopsia, a rare vision disorder that limits her to seeing only blurry shapes of objects more than a few feet away and makes her acutely sensitive to bright light. Despite her disability, Scdoris, a graduate of Redmond High School, has been mushing since she was 3, starting with the encouragement of her father.

Scdoris made worldwide headlines as the first legally blind musher to attempt the Iditarod in 2005. In 2006 she completed the race, placing 57th among 72 finishing teams. She skipped the Iditarod in 2007, and in 2008 she pulled out of the race 941 miles into the route. In her last Iditarod, in 2009, Scdoris finished 45th.

Each time she raced the Iditarod, she had a fellow musher along with her as her "visual interpreter."

Scdoris, who with Salerno has a 6-year-old son, Julien, raced in the Canadian Championship Dog Derby in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, three straight years from 2016 to 2018. Last year, she competed in the local Bachelor Butte Dog Derby near Bend. Both those races were canceled this year due to the COVID-19



Oregon Trail of Dreams sled-dog tours

The Oregon Trail of Dreams offers sled dogs tours at Mt. Bachelor ski area west of Bend.

For more information or to book a tour, visit otdsled-dogs.com or call 1-800-829-2442.

Rafael Nelson, left, and Rachael Scdoris with lead sled dog, Tolstoy.

Dean Guernsey/For The Bulletin

pandemic. The Stage Stop and the Iditarod, which starts in early March, are two of the few sled dog races that are still scheduled for 2021.

Scdoris' last Iditarod was nearly 12 years ago, but she has not ruled out a potential return to the world's most famous sled dog race. For now, though, she is content running the sled-dog tours at Bachelor and helping Nelson to train the dogs.

"Next year is the 50th running of the Iditarod, so that would be an interesting time to come back for sure," Scdoris said. "I miss the Iditarod, and it would be fun to go back. But training for these stage races is SO much easier. But it's still hard, and we've worked incredibly hard to build up this stage team."

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