

TOP PICKS WHERE TO EXPLORE

Top picks south of Bend

Big Tree — The short and easy trail in La Pine State Park is a great stretch of the legs and leads to the largest (in circumference) ponderosa pine in the world measuring in at 28 feet, 11 inches in girth. Known as Big Red, the tree used to be taller but at 162 feet tall, it still towers over its neighbors. The trail is less than a half-mile out and back so if you are still in need of exploring, the State Park has other trails to check out too.

Salt Creek Sno-park — The sno-park located along U.S. Highway 58 on the way to Oakridge offers cross country ski and snowshoe trails as well as a snow play area. The Diamond Creek Falls loops for two miles to the west the park's namesake waterfall — which is also the second tallest in the state — with the viewing area above still open for an icy view of it.

At one point, Big Tree was also the tallest ponderosa, but lightning strikes throughout the years have cut the top of it down to 162 feet tall.



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

A snowmobiler returns from riding the trails at Kapka Sno-park on Jan. 23.

Kapka

Continued from B1

The area's newest sno-park, Kapka does have a roughly 2-mile out-and-back trail to snowshoe to climb Kapka Butte, although this is considered backcountry snowshoeing because there is no designated trail, according to AllTrails.com. But more trails are just a short 10-minute walk across the Cascade Lakes Highway to the cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trails at Vista Butte Sno-park.

The main attraction at both parks, however, is snowmobiling. Even in the middle of the week, there are dozens of trailers in the parking lot and the faint sound of engines in the distance.

From Kapka's parking lot, riders can easily get to the Dutchman Flat trail system, Upper Three Creeks Sno-Park in Sisters, Wanoga Sno-Park, Elk Lake Lodge, Lava Lake and Edison Sno-Park to the south — or just about anywhere there is powder.

"There is no limitation of trails that people can use in that area because we have a high concentration of sno-parks in the area," said Nelson-Dean.

While the trails for different activities and access to the trails are a nice perk, the convenience of the parking lot at Kapka cannot be understated.

Unlike Dutchman Flat Sno-Park, just a few miles west of Kapka on the Cascade Lakes Highway, there is enough room to park large trailers for snowmobiles without the lot being over crowded. That's handy on busy weekends in the winter.

"You get up the Dutchman, usually that one is packed,"

Clute said. "This spot is the only place where you can park a trailer, usually you have to deal with skiers and everyone else (at Dutchman). These big trailers you can only get into here."

Vista Butte, can be easy to miss while driving up to Bachelor. Less than a mile from the Cascade Lakes-Forest Service Road 45 junction, Vista Butte has a small parking area, enough for roughly 10 cars, along the Cascade Lake Highway — which the forest service says is typically full on the weekend. However, Kapka and Swampy Lakes Sno-park are close by for extra parking.

While Vista Butte has 6 miles of ski and snowshoe trails, the trails in the park also connect to the Dutchman Flats and Swampy Lakes trails, which are much more expansive with groomed and ungroomed ski and snowshoe trails.

How to get there

KAPKA SNO-PARK

From Bend: Travel west on Highway 46 (Cascade Lakes Highway) for approximately 18 miles until you reach the junction of Highway 45 and Highway 46. Turn left and travel roughly 1/4 mile until you reach the turnoff to the sno-park on your left.

VISTA BUTTE SNO-PARK

From Bend: Travel west on Cascade Lakes Highway (46) approx. 19 miles.

After a snow dry spell for most of January, the several feet of fresh snow in the sno-parks has been a welcome sign.

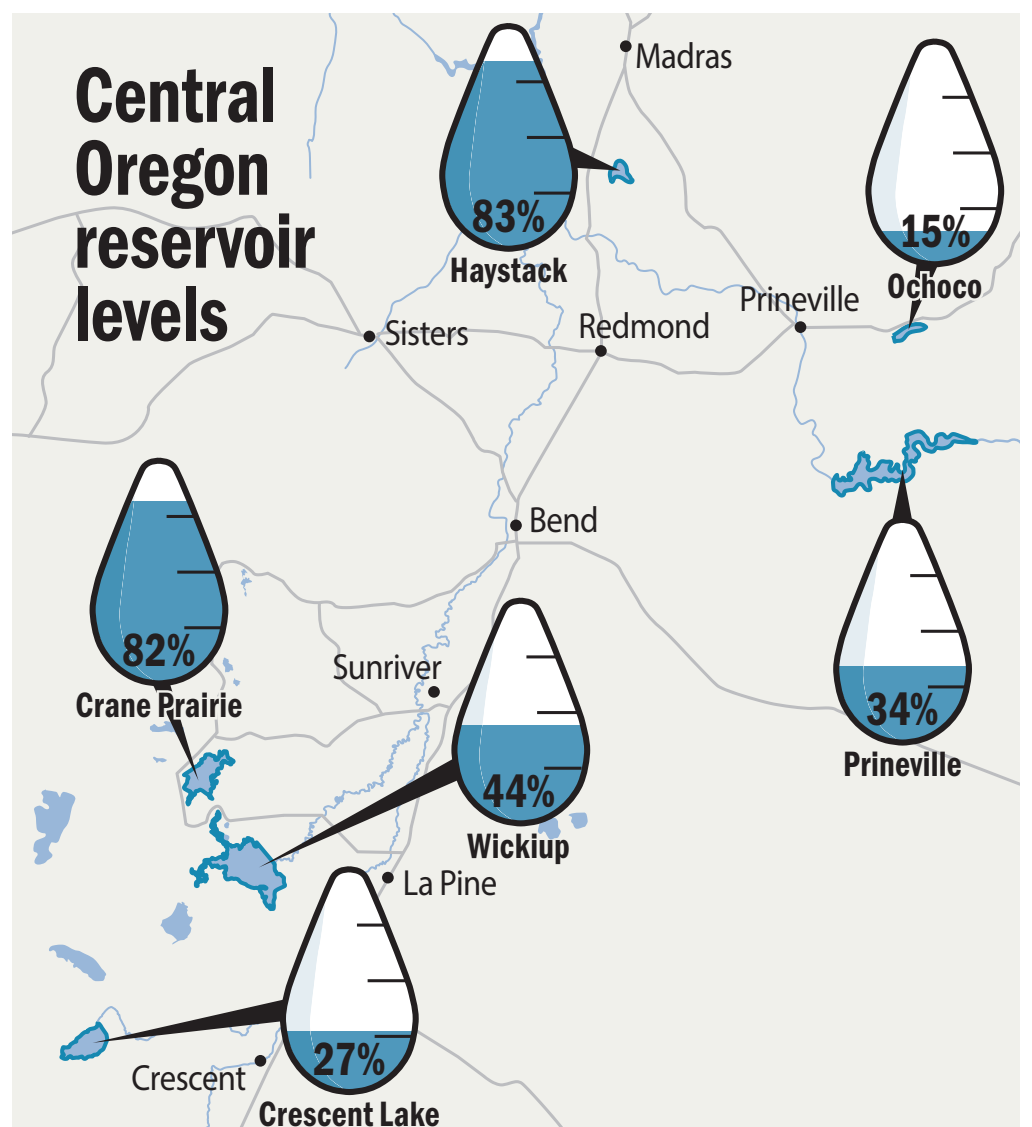
"It was awesome," said Clute, packing up his snowmobile after a day of riding.

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