



Mark Morical/Bulletin

Andrew Williams, of Bend, flies off a jump feature at the Madras East Hills trail system on Sunday.

Freeride

Continued from B1

While many trails near Bend have free-ride features, most of them must be built within the natural surroundings, such as rocks, logs and trees. The plethora of man-made features at Madras East Hills makes it unique to Central Oregon.

"Madras is a pioneer in so many ways with this trail system," Morrow said. "It's already created a bunch of revenue for the town. It's put us on the map. On the weekends, the trailhead is packed out. And that's maybe 10% locals. People travel here to ride the trails."

I made the hourlong drive from Bend to Madras on a windy Sunday, and met up with friends Mark Johnson and Andrew Williams, also both from Bend.

We started out on the West Side Trail, one of the longer trails in the system, which led us to the west side of the network through a treeless area, the wind ripping into our faces. Before long we arrived at a ridgetop, then descended a series of concrete berms and jumps.

The trail then led us back east across the flats to the east side of the system. There we pedaled up a challenging climb and arrived at the top of another ridge, where multiple trail options were available.

We sampled a few different trails, including White Buffalo and Quarantine, both of which include a series of freeride features and lead back to the main trailhead via the Bridge to Nowhere trail. This trail included a wood bridge, paver rollers and a large table-top jump.

After one more lap we were ready to head back, having ridden nearly 10 miles in just under two hours. Even though Madras East Hills is built with a downhill, freeride

experience in mind, we still managed to climb nearly 1,000 feet during the ride.

For some riders at Madras East Hills, the climbing is less of a chore, as the area is open to electric bikes. While E-bikes are prohibited on most national forest and BLM land, they are allowed on the network near Madras.

"We want to be a space that everybody can come ride," Morrow said. "E-bikes being a growing category, with some debate going on, what we did was we designed the trail with E-bikes in mind, for both types of riders. It opens up opportunity for those who might have physical limitations, but still want to experience mountain biking."

Morrow said the plan is to eventually link the Madras East Hills system to trails in the Crooked River National Grassland to the east, including the Gray Butte area near Smith Rock and trails near Prineville and the Ochoco Mountains.

"We want to build trails moving that direction over the next five to 10 years," Morrow said. "We want to connect it to

a greater trail system that really interlinks our awesome terrain and beautiful scenery. We have a team at COTA working on that through the Ochoco Trails group."

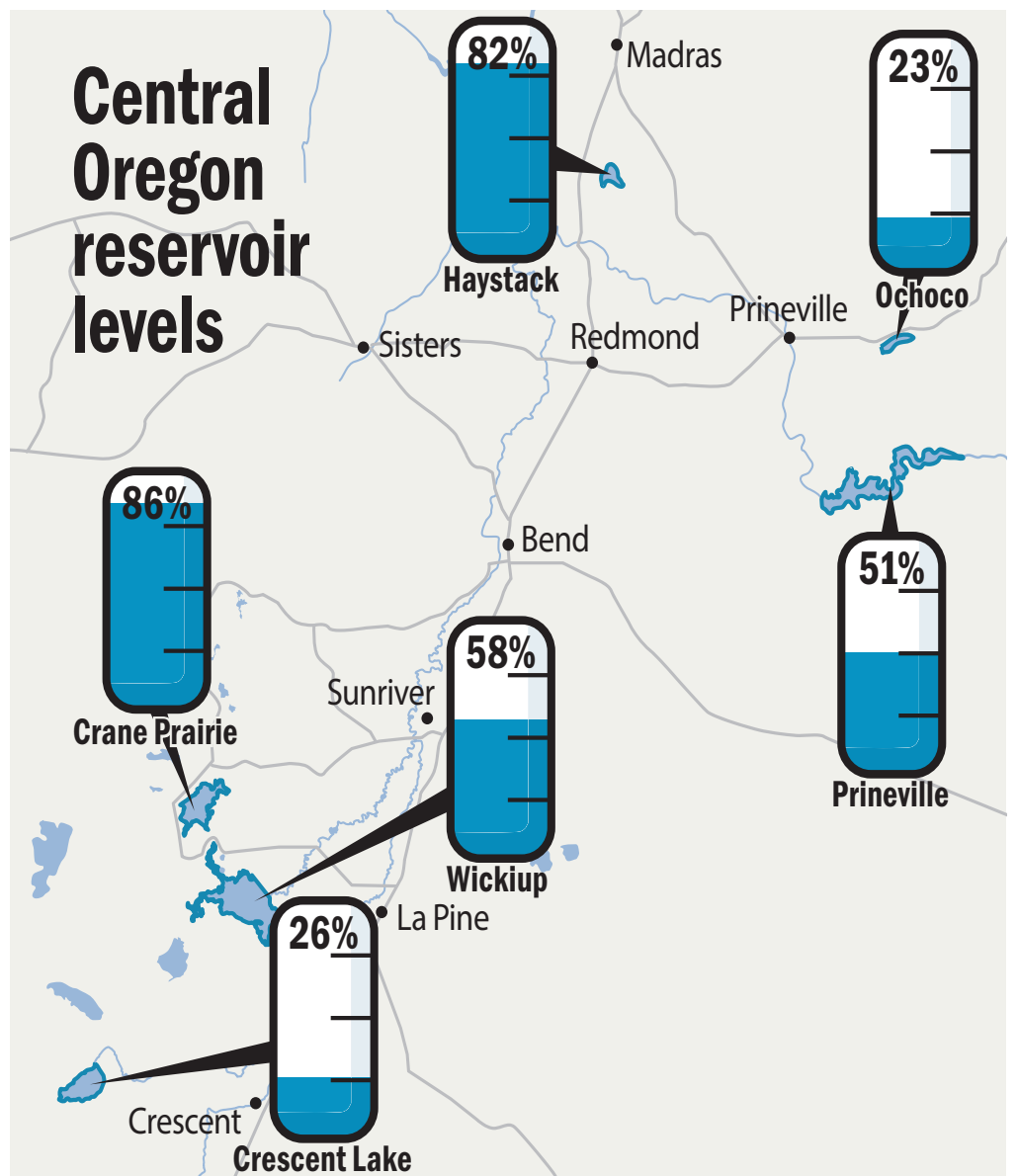
While Madras East Hills is an ideal winter and spring option, when many trails near Bend remain snowy or muddy, Morrow said the trails near Madras remain rideable year-round.

"They stay pretty good throughout the summer, surprisingly," he said. "Here in Madras, we have a clay-based soil. So during the summer months when things turn into a dustbowl in Bend, our trails are packed down pretty nice. There are some soft spots, but we've been fortifying those with rock armor."

The first race at Madras East Hills is the Bone Crusher XCO, featuring a 4-mile lap course and scheduled for April 17. Categories are available for all age groups as well as E-bikes.

For more information, visit madrastrails.com.

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