



**THE REGION'S HUB FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES**

Each week in this section, you will find the area's most complete guide of what's open and closed; outdoor activities and events; top picks of places to explore; conditions of hiking and biking trails, fishing holes, water flows, camping spots, parks and more — as well as features from outdoor writers and field experts.



The shoreline at South Twin Lake is home to many snags outside the day-use beach area. Makenzie Whittle/ Bulletin photos

**Craving elevation, but not snow? Try Gray Butte**

BY CRISTINA PETERSON  
For The Bulletin

Spring arrives at different times around Central Oregon. East of the Cascades, at a lower elevation, abundant sunshine coaxes grasses and flowers out of winter dormancy long ahead of the high alpine. Many areas in the High Desert bloom with wildflowers in April and May. If you want to experience signs of spring but are also craving varied terrain before the mountain trails thaw, explore Gray Butte.

This volcanic butte looms about 5,000 feet in elevation above Smith Rock State Park. However, it is located within the Crooked River National Grassland. Designated in 1960 by Congress, the Grassland encompasses over 170,000 acres stretching from Lake Billy Chinook to the south and east. The Grassland is administered by the Ochoco National Forest though remains a separate unit by its unique designation.

Like most national forests and grasslands, multiple uses are allowed on Gray Butte. Grazing and a large communication site on the summit existed before this area became popular for recreation. For a long time, the trails in the area were mostly enjoyed by horseback riders. Some still get mostly equestrian use, such as the Cole Loop.

Increasingly, the Gray Butte Trail, especially, has become a spring favorite for mountain biking and trail running. Technical, rocky terrain mixed in with smooth, buffed-out single track keeps the adventures interesting. And glorious views of the High Desert spread out around Gray Butte from angles unseen anywhere else. There are sections of landscape that are hard to recognize or seem unfamiliar because of the unique viewpoints gained in this area.

The trails around Gray Butte can be accessed from Smith Rock State Park or by parking at Skull Hollow Trailhead. The campground at Skull Hollow was recently expanded, offering more campsites to accommodate the growth in popularity of this area. The adjacent trailhead is likely to be improved in the near future also.

Connecting the trails from Smith Rock to Gray Butte makes for a nice long day with significant elevation gain. Heading up the road from Skull Hollow on foot or bike, to the Gray Butte Trailhead, taking the Gray Butte Trail to the Cole Loop Trail back down to Skull Hollow to make a loop around the Butte is another good option.

See **Gray Butte** / B10



A pine bough lay in a snow patch along the North Twin Lake trail. The trail currently has moderate deadfall and several patches of snow that remain.

**Beat the summer crowds to take in**

**Twin Lakes**



BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE • The Bulletin

The brilliant, crystal blue sky opened wide above the modest South Twin Lake while a variety of goldeneyes, canvasbacks and mallard ducks glided gracefully along the surface without being disturbed by boats or swimmers that fill the shores come summer.

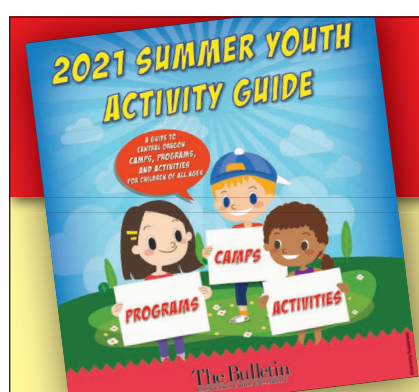
South Twin Lake and its nearly identical neighbor, North Twin Lake, sit directly northwest of Wickiup Reservoir off S. Century Drive near La Pine. The southern sibling is home to the Twin Lakes Resort,

which reopens for the season April 20 with its restaurant opening April 22, meaning that summer is truly on the way for Central Oregon.

Like many Central Oregonians, I have spent long summer days basking on the wide beaches and swimming in the cool waters, but I haven't seen it when snow still clings to the southern shore.

As that snow continues to melt and temperatures steadily rise, the serenity the ducks had on the lake will diminish as the popularity of the lakes increases.

See **Twin Lakes** / B9



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