

A white Christmas for skiers

Timely snowfall lets Anthony Lakes open for winter break

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The (La Grande) Observer

NORTH POWDER — Ski season is back in Eastern Oregon.

Recent snowstorms allowed Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort to open just in time for winter break as skiers flocked to the slopes on opening day on Saturday, Dec. 18. Conditions were ideal as ski resorts across the Pacific Northwest continue to see a rise in traffic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“There’s a lot of folks excited to get out and ski this weekend and through the holiday break,” said Chelsea Judy, the marketing director at Anthony Lakes. “We definitely expect to see it busy, but maybe not quite like last season.”

Last winter in the midst of the pandemic, Anthony Lakes saw a major rise in skiers as most indoor activities were closed off. Judy noted that the absences of winter sports also added a rise in individuals looking for a different athletic outlet to take part in.

“With no winter sports and people being eager to get outside, throughout the Northwest and even the nation the ski industry was very busy,” Judy said.

One skier noted that she was surprised by the more standard turnout this year, noting that last year at this time she sometimes had to wait up to 20 minutes to board the ski lift.

Another skier at the opening day stated that they were a bit rusty since last ski season, but that the conditions were ideal for getting back in the swing of things.

While the turnout may have seen a slight decline this year, those in the industry expected such after such a unique ski season in 2020.

Judy emphasized that skiing in general has seen a rise in newcomers in recent years, which was only furthered during the pandemic. While those at Anthony Lakes were happy to see an increase in visitors, the resort underwent a series of precautions.

Anthony Lakes opened its lodge again this year after closing it off last winter for COVID-19. More skiers are also allowed to park and congregate in closer confines than



Davis Carbaugh/The (La Grande) Observer

A group of skiers descend Road Run slope at Anthony Lakes during the resort's opening day on Saturday, Dec. 18, 2021. Ski resorts across the country have seen a significant increase in traffic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

last season. Masks are required inside of any indoor areas at the ski area as the pandemic persists.

Perfect timing

The storms from the weekend of Dec. 11 brought enough snow for the resort to reopen. While this year’s opening date was a bit delayed compared to last year’s opening right after Thanksgiving, those at Anthony Lake are not too concerned as long as the resort is open before schools let out for winter break.

“We really try to get open by at least that Saturday going into the holiday break,” Judy said.

Judy noted that the rush of skiers on opening weekend makes a big impact on the resort’s overall revenue for the ski season.

“It’s supposed to keep snowing, so that’s a bonus,” Judy said. “It looks like we’re going to see some awesome conditions for quite a while.”

Revamped experience

As the resort continues to adjust to COVID-19 and create an enjoyable skiing experience, Anthony Lakes has started several new programs and ramped up its beginner education.

The resort has rebranded its learning center area as “Alice’s Wonderland,” with numerous slopes and training areas for begin-

ners and young skiers. The carpet lift was remodeled with a covered conveyor and renamed “the caterpillar,” while the handle tow is now called “mad hatter.”

“It’ll be a really fun learning experience this year,” Judy said.

Another new feature will be an emphasis on supporting local businesses in Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties. Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort will be promoting “Support Local Thursdays,” in which visitors can show a \$40 receipt from a local business in the area to receive a \$25 lift ticket on Thursdays.

“We’re just trying to encourage local spending in the area,” Judy said.

In addition to promoting local businesses in surrounding areas, Anthony Lake has also seen a boost from being a more locally-based ski resort. This recent trend along with a rise in outdoor activities during the pandemic have both helped Anthony Lakes.

“People are really escaping the larger ski areas and traveling to the smaller ones,” Judy said. “That is an industry trend that is benefiting us. We’ll see a lot of locals and visitors.”

Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort is set to stay open through Jan. 2. The area will close at 1 p.m. on Christmas Eve and remain closed on Christmas Day.

Eagle bounces back from lead poisoning

By KYLE SPURR The Bulletin

TUMALO — Corky Luster was eager to see the golden eagle fly again through the juniper trees. Luster, a Tumalo resident and an emergency medical technician who volunteers with Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office search and rescue, found the eagle near the Tumalo Canal Trailhead while on a hike Nov. 18 with his two short-haired retrievers.

The eagle was slumped under a tree, unable to stand or fly with blood around its nostrils. Luster rushed back to his house to find a dog kennel and returned to transport the bird to Think Wild, a wildlife rehabilitation center in Bend.

Wildlife technicians at Think Wild discovered the eagle had severe lead poisoning and would have died if not for Luster.

A month later, Think Wild staff members gathered on Friday, Dec. 17, to release the eagle near the trailhead where Luster found it.

The 10-year-old female eagle spread its 6-foot wingspan and lofted its 11-pound body off a rock and flew down a ravine.

“I didn’t think it was going to be a good prognosis,” Luster said Friday. “But miracles happened, even around Christmas.”

Before the eagle was released, Think Wild staff invited Matthew Stuber, a Medford-based eagle coordinator with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, to attach a radio collar on the bird. Stuber strapped the 1.5-ounce collar to the eagle like a backpack and said it will track where it flies.

The tracking is part of a national U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conservation research project to analyze the survival of rehabilitated golden eagles, Stuber said. A total of 15 eagles are being tracked through the project, including five in the Pacific Northwest.

“We are trying to measure the survival of golden eagles who have been rehabilitated,” Stuber said. “We’re really trying to figure out how many of these birds make it.”

The golden eagle was the fourth one to be treated at Think Wild since its wildlife hospital opened about three years ago. Two of the eagles died shortly after arriving, and another was released last week.

Think Wild staff heard about another golden eagle that died from lead poisoning Dec. 3 near Brothers, east of Bend. The staff is alarmed at how many bird



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin photos
Savanna Scheiner, a wildlife technician with Think Wild in Bend, watches as a rescued golden eagle takes flight back into the wild Friday, Dec. 17, after being rehabilitated from a near-fatal amount of lead poisoning.

species are affected by lead poisoning, which is often caused when a bird eats the carcass of an animal shot with lead bullets or a rodent that eats the poisoned carcass.

It’s obvious when a bird has been poisoned by lead because they will appear intoxicated, said Sally Compton, executive director of Think Wild.

“They will have trouble with balance and not be able to fly,” Compton said. “Once it gets really bad, they can become completely paralyzed, anemic and dehydrated.”

Think Wild is urging people to use nonlead ammunition, fishing sinkers and rodent control.

Compton said the eagle released Friday was fortunate. It arrived at Think Wild with five times the amount of lead that is considered acceptable in wild raptors. But technicians were able to inject the eagle with medicine that improved its health over the past month.

“We are really happy that it doesn’t appear there is any significant long-term damage that happened,” Compton said. “We probably caught the eagle just in time for this successful treatment.”

Compton watched Friday as a wildlife technician, Savanna Scheiner, carried the eagle to a rock overlooking an opening through the juniper trees. Scheiner set the eagle on the rock and it took flight as quickly as a slingshot. Ten seconds later it had disappeared into the forest.

“She’s gone,” Compton said. “I can’t believe how fast that happened.”

Compton and her staff were thrilled to send the eagle on its way. It was a rare victory for the team, especially with how deadly lead poisoning can be to birds.

“It’s a really big deal for us,” Compton said. “Especially for our vet team. Every day they are working to take care of these animals. Having a win like this is extremely rewarding.”

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