



Oregon Department of Transportation

NEWS RELEASE

Region 4 Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Jefferson, Wheeler,
Deschutes, Crook, Klamath and Lake Counties

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For more information: Peter Murphy
541-388-6224

McKenzie Pass Highway (east) open for non-motorized traffic

Road improvement project will close highway starting July 6

BEND -- The McKenzie Pass Highway (OR 242) is open to pedestrian and bicycle traffic only on the east side from the gate approximately 9 miles west of Sisters to near the Dee Wright Observatory.

An ODOT snow blower has been clearing one lane of the highway, which will not open for vehicle traffic until all snow is melted off the roadway. The snow gate on the west side at Alder Springs (mile point 65.9) will remain shut until mid-August due to a highway paving project on the west side. That same project will require the closing of the east side from July 6 until mid-August, too.

ODOT urges those who access the highway from the east side to seize the opportunity to ride or walk the scenic route for the next few weeks. Beginning on or around July 6, Willamette National Forest officials will begin a paving project at Dead Horse Grade (about mile point 69).

During the work period, the highway will be closed to all traffic. U.S. Forest Service officials anticipate completing the project no later than Aug. 15.

The highway will remain open from the east gate near Sisters to just west of the Obsidian Trailhead, allowing visitors approaching from the east to hike the Obsidian Trail and visit the Dee Wright Observatory.

The longest closure period occurred during the winter of 1998-1999, when the highway was closed for 256 days and did not open until July 29. The shortest closure period occurred during the winter of 1933-1934, when the highway was closed for 96 days.

The first route over the McKenzie Pass, known as Craig's McKenzie Salt Springs/Deschutes Wagon Road, was completed in 1872. This toll road connected the Willamette Valley with Camp Polk, near what is now Sisters. The charge was \$2 for a wagon drawn by two horses, \$2.50 for a wagon with four horses, \$1 for a man on a horse and 10 cents each for loose cattle and horses.

Modern construction techniques allowed crews to rebuild the road in the 1920s. At that time, the McKenzie Pass Highway was built and the former wagon route was abandoned, except in places where the new highway followed the same path.

In 1936 the Clear Lake-Belknap Springs section of OR 126 was completed, giving motorists a new, straighter, year-round alternative for travel between the Willamette Valley and Central Oregon.

The McKenzie Pass Highway became a seasonal scenic highway in 1962 with the completion of the Clear Lake-Belknap Springs section of OR 126. Even during its tenure as the main route between the southern Willamette Valley and Central Oregon, the narrow, twisting roadway and high elevation (5,325 feet) made the highway too difficult to maintain and keep clear during the winter months.

##ODOT##