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ODOT will close McKenzie Pass Highway at 10 a.m.

McKENZIE BRIDGE – With 6 inches of snow already accumulated on McKenzie Pass Highway and another 12 inches expected through Thursday, the Oregon Department of Transportation will close Oregon 242 for the season at 10 a.m. today.

The closure follows five days of early season snowfall at and below the pass elevation of 5,325 feet. The highway is the original alignment of the McKenzie Highway (OR 126) between Springfield and Sisters, and is open only during the summer and early fall travel season. After completing a final sweep to make sure no vehicles (along with campers, hunters or hikers) are parked along the road, ODOT will close and lock the snow gates on the east and west sides of the highway.

The scenic highway opened to vehicle traffic this year on Aug. 16, following an \$800,000 modernization project that replaced two antiquated bridges on the west side of McKenzie Pass.

The 79-day open period is well below average compared with most years. The longest open period occurred in 1934, when the pass was open for 250 days. The shortest open period (due to weather) was 90 days in 1999. The highway has closed as early as Oct. 18 (in 1996) and as late as Jan. 10 (1939). The earliest open date was March 21 (in 1934) and the latest was July 29 (in 1999) due to heavy snow.

The bridge replacements that took place this past summer represent the second phase of a three-year, \$3.8 million improvement project jointly administered by the FHWA, U.S. Forest Service and ODOT. During the summer of 2007, this included the improvement of Dead Horse Grade (at milepoint 69) to cut back the slope and realign the highway, making the road safer and more stable. The work in 2009, which marks the third and final phase, includes a 15.5-mile

pavement overlay, culvert installation and shoulder stabilization. The 2009 project will result in a shortened “open” period for the public to use the highway.

Built in the mid-1930s, the highway became a seasonal scenic highway in the 1960s 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 made the highway too difficult to maintain and keep clear during the winter months. During the summer, about 300 cars a day travel the highway.

ODOT #