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McKenzie Pass Highway to reopen at noon

MCKENZIE BRIDGE – McKenzie Pass Highway (OR 242) will reopen at noon following the removal of several boulders and other debris from a Sunday afternoon slide.

The slide sent several large boulders, including one measuring more than 7 feet in diameter, onto the historic highway at milepost 69 near Dead Horse Grade, about 8.5 miles west of the Dee Wright Observatory.

ODOT crews on Monday used explosives to split the largest boulders before removing the chunks from the highway. The slide loosened several large rocks on the slope above highway. A backhoe with a pneumatic hammer attachment arrived on the scene late Monday afternoon, but was not able to break loose the unstable rock by nightfall. Tuesday morning, work resumed and the largest of the rocks teetering on the slope were removed at about 9:40 a.m. Clean-up and debris removal will be completed by noon.

The slide is likely the result of the expansion and contraction of the slope following the recent freeze-thaw cycle experienced at elevations above 3,500 feet last week.

Oregon 242 is the original alignment of the McKenzie Highway (OR 126 East) between Springfield and Sisters, and is open only during the summer and early fall travel season. 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 Highway 126. Even during its tenure as the main route between the southern Willamette Valley and central Oregon, the narrow, twisting roadway and high elevation (the summit is 5,325 feet) 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.

For the latest road condition updates, go to www.tripcheck.com

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