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For more information: Adam Torgerson, (503) 986-2880 (Salem)  
Peter Murphy, (541) 388-6224 (Bend)

## ODOT to reopen McKenzie Pass Highway on Saturday, Aug. 16

**McKENZIE BRIDGE** – With the successful completion of a bridge replacement project on the McKenzie Pass Highway (Oregon 242) and clearing of dangerous trees from the eastern slopes of McKenzie Pass temporarily halted until late fall, ODOT will open the eastern and western snow gates to vehicles, bicycles and hikers at 7 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 16.

The western Alder Springs snow gate has been closed to the public since Nov. 1, 2007, when ODOT closed the highway for the winter. The eastern gate, nine miles west of Sisters, has been opened intermittently to bicycles and pedestrians since July 14. The lower western snow gate at White Branch was opened June 21 to allow public access to Proxy Falls, Alder Springs Campground and other Willamette National Forest attractions.

The upper snow gate at has remained closed to allow a contractor to complete an \$800,000 bridge replacement project. No vehicle or bicycle traffic was allowed east past the Alder Springs snow gate for safety reasons.



The project is a joint effort by the Willamette National Forest, ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration. Started in June because of a lingering, heavy snowpack, officials originally hoped to have the bridges completed and the highway reopened for traffic by Sept. 1. Long days and hard work by the contractor will allow the scenic highway to reopen two weeks ahead of schedule.

On the east side of the highway, access from the snow gate near Sisters was hampered by the heavy snowpack that delayed a project to remove dead trees near the highway. Some weekend access from the east side to the Obsidian Trailhead has been allowed since mid-July.

The bridge replacements that took place this 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.

Oregon 242 is the original alignment of the McKenzie Highway (OR 126 East) between Springfield and Sisters, and is open only during the summer travel season.

The longest “open” period occurred in 1934 when the pass was open for 250 days. The shortest open period was 90 days in 1999. The earliest open date was March 21, 1934, and the latest (excepting the construction-related delays in 2007 and 2008) was July 29, 1999.

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.

**## ODOT ##**