

Bike trails open at Alsea Falls



Trails are clearly marked for different levels of ability at the Alsea Falls Recreation Area. (Amanda Cowan | Corvallis Gazette-Times)

1 hour ago • [By Bennett Hall, Corvallis Gazette-Times](#)

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Mountain bikers have a new place to play in the mid-valley.

This Sunday, the Bureau of Land Management will unveil nearly six miles of new or rebuilt trails at the Alsea Falls Recreation Site in south Benton County, including the area's first purpose-built mountain bike runs.

The recently completed project includes a major rehab of the popular hiking trail from the 16-site BLM campground to the falls themselves, including new stairs to the base of the scenic cascade.

But most of the work has been done on the other side of the South Fork Alsea River Scenic Byway, expanding and improving a little-used trail network that branches out from the Fall Creek trailhead.

The new trails are designed for both hikers and bikers (more work is needed before parts of the network will be suitable for use with horses), but two of the routes were engineered specifically for mountain bikes.

At a glance

WHAT: Grand opening of new Alsea Falls trail network, with all-day shuttle rides available to mountain bikers for a \$30 donation to Team Dirt (register online at bikereg.com/alsea-falls-team-dirt-shuttle-day by 3 p.m. today)

WHEN: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Alsea Falls Recreation Site

GETTING THERE: From Corvallis, go south on Highway 99 W for 15 miles. Turn west on Alpine Road and drive five miles to Alpine Junction, then continue along the South Fork Alsea River Scenic Byway for nine miles, with trail access via the Fall Creek trailhead

MORE INFO: Email Eric Emerson at eric@teamdirt.org

The 1.75-mile Springboard Trail is suitable for beginning riders, while the 1.3-mile Highballer is designed for those with intermediate-level skills. Both are what is known as directional flow trails, meaning they're intended to be ridden in a particular direction and have been built with lots of bike-friendly features such as banked turns and rolling up-and-down stretches.

Mountain bikers will be able to pedal to the top of the grade on closed-down logging roads, then come bombing down Highballer and Springboard like gravity's playthings, sailing through the curves and — if they're feeling frisky — catching air on some modest jumps.

"It's kind of like a roller-coaster — a marriage of art, engineering and fun," said Adam Milnor, the lead outdoor recreation planner for the BLM's Salem District.

Milnor designed the new trails in collaboration with Jason Wells of the International Mountain Bike Association. And the BLM got lots of volunteer assistance — more than 1,700 hours' worth — from the association's Corvallis affiliate, known as Team Dirt.

"Most of the trails used by mountain bikers are hiking trails," noted Team Dirt President Mike Ripley. "They're not necessarily the most fun."

Springboard and Highballer definitely optimize the experience for bikers, but they're also designed to accommodate hikers and trail runners, with clear sight lines and room to pass on the curves.

"We're really trying to meet the needs of mountain bikers and hikers and equestrians — give everybody a place to play," said Eric Emerson, the club's trails coordinator.

"Everybody wants to have fun, and it needs to happen in a safe and sustainable way."

To inaugurate the new trail system, Team Dirt will host a grand opening celebration from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday. Riders who want to save their legs and maximize their downhill runs — while providing some financial support to the club — can make a \$30 donation in exchange for an unlimited number of shuttle rides to the top of the grade (see information box above for registration details).

"We just drive 'em to the top and let 'em ride down," Emerson said.

The new trails help to fill in a relatively blank spot on the map for mountain bike enthusiasts in the mid-Willamette Valley, where they haven't had anything to match the thrills of the established trail networks of Oakridge, Bend, Hood River or Sandy Ridge near Mount Hood.

Milnor believes Alsea Falls not only will pull riders from Corvallis and Eugene but from the Salem and Portland areas as well.

"It's a local draw, but with the campground and the amenities in place, we think it's going to be a weekend draw," he said.

The expanded trail network also includes a traditional hiker-biker trail, the 1.5-mile Dutchman Trail, and two 0.6-mile multiple-use routes called Bailout and Anchor Line.

Rich Hatfield, a regional field manager for the BLM, said the six miles of new trail is the first phase of a planned 10- to 12-mile trail system, which also will include expanded parking and other accommodations for equestrians. Eventually, the goal is to create more than 20 miles of trails at Alsea Falls.

He's been in contact with hiking and equestrian groups and is hoping to replicate the kind of volunteer support he's received from the mountain biking community, which allowed BLM to stretch its trail construction budget and get the first phase of the project done more quickly than expected.

"We want to match the funds with the interest," Hatfield said. "We don't want to put in a trail system that nobody uses."

For Team Dirt, the Alsea Falls project has been a learning experience and capacity-building exercise which the club hopes to use as a springboard to create more and better recreational

opportunities for mid-valley riders.

The group recently worked with the Siuslaw National Forest to make a number of improvements to the North Ridge Trail on Marys Peak and is in discussions about additional projects. It's also having conversations with the city of Corvallis about creating some bike trails at Martin Luther King Jr. Park and talking to Oregon State University about sprucing up the popular but poorly constructed rider-created trails in the McDonald Forest.

"The biggest thing," Ripley said, "is extending the experience for mountain bikers."

Reporter Bennett Hall can be contacted at 541-758-9529 or bennett.hall@gazettetimes.com.

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