

Mountain bikers flock to Alsea Falls



Trails are clearly marked for different levels of ability at the Alsea Falls Recreation Site, as shown in this photo taken in June . (Amanda Cowan | Corvallis Gazette-Times)

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A new network of mountain biking trails at the Bureau of Land Management's Alsea Falls Recreation Site is proving to be a big hit with riders, and efforts to expand the riding opportunities further already are underway.

"The use is more than what we anticipated," said Rich Hatfield, a regional field manager with the BLM. "We're looking at probably four or five thousand visitors since the trails opened June 22."

Built in large part by volunteers from the local mountain biking community, the 1.75-mile Springboard Trail and the 1.3-mile Highballer are designed to make the most out of downhill runs, with bike-specific features such as banked turns and rolling up-and-down stretches. Riders can pedal to the top of each trail on decommissioned logging roads, then bomb downhill on the directional flow routes.

They're among more than 5 miles of new or improved hiking and biking trails that opened this summer at Alsea Falls, a popular recreational area in south Benton County with a 16-space campground. Plans call for additional work to expand the trail network to 10 or 12 miles, including more mountain biking runs.

Pitch in

Team Dirt, the Corvallis affiliate of the International Mountain Bike Association, is seeking volunteers to help improve and expand the new mountain biking trails at Alsea Falls Recreation Site. A volunteer work day is set for 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. this Saturday, with more scheduled for Oct. 25, Nov. 16 and Dec. 13. Additional trail-building opportunities are available for people who can't make those dates. Sign up online at teamdirt.org or email Eric Emerson at eric@teamdirt.org. More information is available on the Alsea Falls Trail Builders Facebook page.

Team Dirt, the Corvallis-area affiliate of the International Mountain Bike Association, is organizing volunteer work parties this fall to extend the Springboard Trail and lessen the grade on the Dutchman, a route that has proved a bit steep for novice riders. (See box with this story for more information.)

In addition, contractors working for the BLM will be flagging 2 miles of new trail routes slated for construction next spring.

"The way people are using the trails now is they're doing laps," Hatfield said. "To really make the most out of the network, we need more trails."

Eric Emerson, trails coordinator for Team Dirt, said the response from users has been "resounding." Based on anecdotal reports, most of the mountain bikers riding the new trails are from the south Willamette Valley, with about 40 percent from the Eugene area and another 35 percent from the vicinity of Corvallis. But others have come from Salem, Portland or Southern Oregon to check out the new runs.

"It's getting known in a very short time," Emerson said. "We have the camping there, and that's something a lot of mountain bike areas don't have."

Emerson hopes to harness the enthusiasm of local riders to keep expanding the new trail network. Team Dirt volunteers have already logged about 2,000 hours of work time on the project, he said, and the group is looking for fresh recruits to keep that momentum going.

Ultimately, he'd like to see as much as 20 miles of mountain biking trails at Alsea Falls, including some more challenging "black diamond" routes for expert riders to complement the easier runs already in place.

"We're hitting the group we wanted to hit (first), which is beginner and intermediate riders," Emerson said. "Next year we'll start working on some black trail."

The organization also offers mountain bike skills clinics for people new to the sport.

"We want to get people out on their bikes and get them safe so they keep coming back," Emerson said.

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