McKay Creek area closed to motorized vehicles

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

PRINEVILLE, Ore. - Motorized vehicle use will be prohibited in parts of the McKay Creek watershed on the Lookout Mountain Ranger District of the Ochoco National Forest from December 1, 2007, to May 31, 2008.

Forest Service managers are instituting the emergency closure order because increasing off-highway vehicle use has destroyed native vegetation, increased noxious weed spread, disturbed critical big game habitat and impacted culturally-sensitive areas. Sediment is also being carried into creeks and stream beds are being compacted at vehicle crossings.

â€œWeâ€™ve seen substantial impacts from motorized vehicle use during the wet season along McKay and we recognized that something needed to be done. Weâ€™ve also been very fortunate in that numerous partners, both local and national, have stepped up to help us complete the necessary restoration work. Now, we want to make sure those collective efforts are protected,â€• said District Ranger Art Currier.

Restoration projects completed in the McKay watershed include placement of rock structures and woody debris in the creek to create pools and habitat for juvenile steelhead (to be reintroduced next summer), the planting of riparian woody vegetation, including cottonwoods, to re-vegetate impacted areas, and the installation of fence to protect the plantings. Partners and programs supporting this work include the Crooked River Watershed Council, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the National Forest Foundation, Pelton Funds from Portland General Electric, Title II funds and the Youth Conservation Corps.

Maps of the 45,700-acre closure area are available at the Ochoco National Forest headquarters at 3160 NE Third St. in Prineville. All roads within the emergency closure area will be closed, unless marked with a marker and decal stating â€œRoad Open.â€• Cross-country off-road use will also be prohibited.

Travel restriction maps and information will be displayed on signs along roads leading into the forest. Hunters and firewood cutters will need to follow the closure order, which will be included in the firewood synopses available at the headquarters.

McKay Creek flows from the western edge of the national forest toward Prineville, along Forest Road 27. Some of the main routes will remain open within the closure area, including Forest Roads 27, 2705, 2710, 33, 325, 350 and 3320. Non-motorized, snowmobiles and dispersed camping (up to 300 feet from open roads) will also be allowed during the closure.

Violation of the order is punishable by up to a $5,000 fine or imprisonment for up to six months, or both. The Central Oregon Off-Highway Vehicle Operations (COHVOPS) and the Ochoco Trail Riders will patrol the area to help monitor the closure. To see the closure area map, closure order and areas that will remain open to the public within the closure area, visit www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon or contact Virginia Gibbons at (541) 416-6647.