

RECREATION AND TOURISM PLANNING CONTEXT

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Marion County +
Mid-Willamette
Valley Council of
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Key Findings / Takeaways

- Recreation and tourism opportunities in the Santiam Canyon were impacted from fire damage to varying degrees. The most significant impact occurred in the Shellburg Falls and the High Lakes Recreation areas (<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/recreation/Pages/santiam-state-forest.aspx>). The Santiam Horse Camp (see photos below), Monument Peak trail system, and trails in the Niagara area were also impacted by fire.
- Other severely impacted areas include the Opal Creek Scenic Area and Wilderness east of Salem. Henline Creek and Falls, and the Three Pools Recreation Site were badly burned; and the Henline Creek bridge providing access to the Opal Creek was destroyed. Additionally, all of the buildings at Opal Creek Ancient Forest Center at Jawbone Flats were destroyed as well. Breitenbush Hot Springs was also impacted; all cabins were destroyed; however, the soaking pools are still available.
- Trails and recreation infrastructure throughout the Santiam Canyon suffered damage resulting in the need for facility infrastructure repair, trail rehabilitation or relocation, stair/handrail replacement, and culvert or bridge replacement.



Source: <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/documents/aboutodf/implementation-plan-north-cascade-district.pdf>

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- In Linn County, all of the recreational closures are at areas controlled by state or federal agencies. Nearly every recreation site near Lyons, Mill City, Gates, and Cascadia is closed. The Phantom Bridge Trail is currently inaccessible since wildfire damage has cut off access to the roads. Some campsites at the Detroit Lake State Recreation Area are open and more are scheduled to open later in the spring and summer. Most of the sites that have remained open are overlooks and day use areas, like the Mongold Day Use area that contains the only boat access ramp to Detroit Lake.
- In Marion County, all six County parks and the North Fork corridor remain closed to public access, which sustained considerable damage with the near total destruction of vegetation and park amenities. Parks closed due to wildfires include: Salmon Falls, Bear Creek, North Fork, Niagara, Minto, and Packsaddle. Due to the North Fork corridor closure, there is no recreational access to the Little North Fork or Santiam Rivers, and bicyclists are not allowed to use North Fork Road SE, Gates Hill Road SE, or Pioneer Road SE. Source: <https://www.co.marion.or.us/PW/Parks/Pages/default.aspx>
- Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) maintains updates on the status of recreation sites, including site, condition, open/close status, and estimated date to open, as well as maps: **Oregon Department of Forestry : Recreation : Restoring the Santiam State Forest.** (<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/recreation/Pages/santiam-state-forest.aspx>)
- Oregon State Parks also maintains an interactive **Interagency Recreation Status Map** (<https://stateparks.oregon.gov/index.cfm?do=visit.status>), made possible by collaborative efforts from every government agency affected by the 2020 wildfires, which provides a comprehensive status on what recreational resources are open or closed.

Existing Plans, Policies, Projects, or Funding

Pre-Disaster

- **Marion County Parks** (<https://www.co.marion.or.us/PW/Parks/>) - There is little information about park planning on the County's website. There is a **Draft Marion County Parks Master Plan** that is dated 2010 (<https://www.co.marion.or.us/PW/Documents/parksmasterplanwappendicesapril022010.pdf>).
- **North Santiam Canyon Economic Opportunity Study**, published December 2014 by the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments (<https://www.mwvcog.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?cdm-download-file-id=NDV8MjAxNS0wOC0yNyAxMDoyNToyM3xuc2MtZW9zLWRYYWZ0LXBsYW4tOS4yNS5wZGY=>) - This report, while done prior to the wildfires, sheds light on the importance of recreation and tourism to the economy of the counties and local jurisdictions impacted by the fires. The economic study states that tourism and recreation use are becoming an important part of the economy as recreational activities near Detroit Lake and within the Willamette National

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Forest continue to attract users from around the state. However, the report states that current infrastructure remains a limiting factor as traffic volumes on Highway 22, the main highway artery that connects the mid Willamette Valley to Central Oregon and serves as a gateway to nearby Cascade mountains and North Santiam River recreation areas, is in severe need of modernization and safety improvements. Without these critical safety enhancements, communities in the North Santiam Canyon will be unable to capitalize on economic development opportunities and recruit and retain residents and businesses.

- **Detroit Reservoir Water Reductions** - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will lower summertime water levels in Detroit Reservoir in order to mitigate risk in the unlikely event of a large earthquake, a decision residents and businesses worry will shorten the recreational season. While Corps officials stress that the dam is in “very good condition,” a seismic hazard analysis last year revealed there is a possibility the spillway gate’s supporting arms could buckle during such an event, resulting in an uncontrolled release of water. Marion County is in the process of dredging the marinas, part of a multi-year project, that could help offset the impacts caused by water level reductions.
- Each jurisdiction in Santiam Canyon has its own comprehensive plan that include policies and projects for natural resources, open spaces, and recreation facilities, among other land uses. The Comprehensive Plans that govern recreation in the canyon were originally established 10 or more years ago with limited revisions.

Post-Disaster

- **Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) Major Revision of the North Cascade District Implementation Plan** (February 2021) (<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/Documents/aboutodf/implementation-plan-north-cascade-district.pdf>) - The revised Implementation Plan (IP) for the North Cascade District covers the Santiam State Forest and reflects circumstances after the fires. This revised plan covers Fiscal Year 2021 through June 30, 2023, and provides a broad overview of strategies and activities with the aim of reestablishing a healthy, productive forest that provides the economic, environmental, and social benefits required by law on state forests.

The Implementation Plan’s objective is to restore and enhance diverse recreational opportunities. In the short term, the Recreation Education and Interpretation (REI) team will be engaged in recreation facility and trail restoration and repair work to address public safety, investment protection, and resource impacts. As restoration and recovery work progresses, the REI team will transition into a recreation planning effort focused on the redesign of recreation facilities and trail systems that reflect the change in forest setting and offer interpretive and educational opportunities. This phase of the restoration effort will include the development of conceptual plans for new

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trails and facilities to enhance and support recreational needs well into the future with an eye toward integrated regional recreation planning with other State and Federal partners.

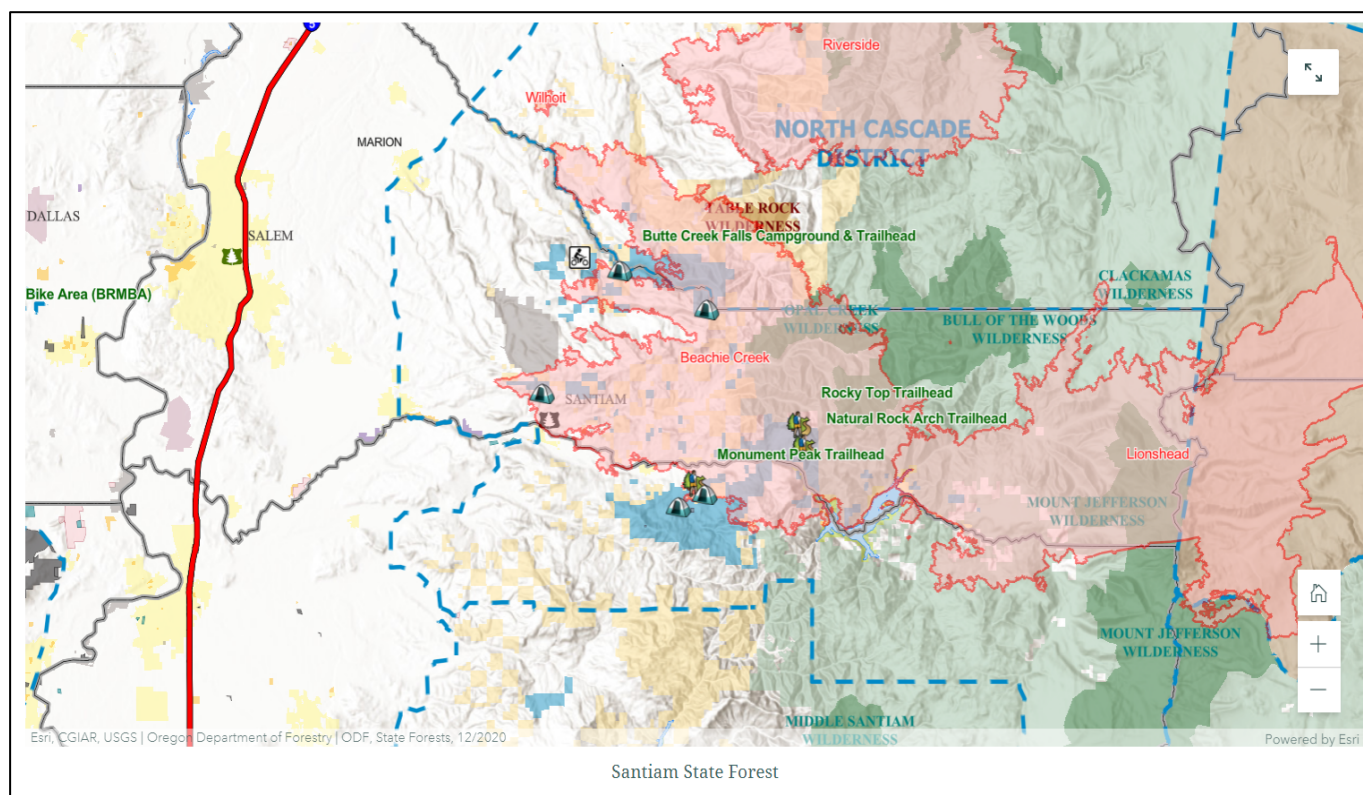
Additionally, the REI program is building an education and interpretation program framework focused on the role of fire on the landscape and relationships with active forest management. Additional opportunities for complementary redesign of recreation facilities and habitat restoration will be explored as part of the long-term recovery and restoration planning.

Recreation facilities and trails that have been significantly impacted will be closed to public access for extended periods to ensure public safety and allow for hazard tree removal, forest road repair, post-fire harvest operations, reforestation, and facility and trail repair. The team will develop a public access management plan that reflects the progression of rehabilitation, recovery, and safety mitigation work.

- **Santiam Restoration Plan** - Beginning in the winter of 2021, ODF staff will develop a multi-decade, long-term restoration plan. The Santiam Restoration Plan will articulate the long-term needs beyond the spatial and temporal scope covered in the short-term revised IP. ODF will engage counties, stakeholders, tribes, and partner agencies during the development of the Restoration Plan.
- **ODF Collaboration and Partnerships** - A concerted effort between partner agencies (including Oregon Department of Transportation, Marion County Parks, and federal emergency assistance funding), recreation clubs, organizations, and volunteers will be needed to restore recreation on these lands and across ownerships. Opportunities for new or continued collaboration over the next few years with respect to recreation include (but are not limited to):
 - Coordination with recreation clubs, organizations, and volunteers on trails and recreation infrastructure-related recovery and restoration efforts.
 - Potential project with Oregon Hunters Association to establish early seral forage plots.
 - Work with partners on education and interpretive messaging around fires and fire legacies.
- **ODF Santiam State Forests Recovery Website** (<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/recreation/Pages/santiam-state-forest.aspx>) - Provides maps, tables, and videos with information on recovery work. The site links forest plans, including the 2021 implementation plan, and public engagement opportunities.
- **Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)** - ODOT has already been doing a lot of clearing work along Highway 22, and Marion County has reached agreement with the state to do much of the clearing along North Fork Road, gateway to many of the top attractions.

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- **Breitenbush Hot Springs** – Updates on the status of Breitenbush Hot Springs are provided at <https://breitenbush.com/reopen>. Much of the area, including some trails, are still barricaded. Only two indoor sleeping rooms are open in the Lodge; however, tent and RV sites are available.
- **Opal Creek Ancient Forest Center and Wilderness School** - This center is still closed. Updates are provided at <https://www.opalcreek.org/>.



Santiam State Forest After the Fire: Recreation Impacts (Oregon Department of Forestry, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6a8a70c4a81142b3ab50fb75db29c79c>)

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Opportunities for Recovery

- Ensure local stakeholders and communities are involved in ODF's restoration and recovery efforts such that recreational resources reflect local needs and the needs of tourists upon which local economies depend. ODF Plans include ongoing public engagement opportunities for communities to learn more about the future of forest restoration and management. Providing ODF with community perspectives will strengthen the actions and directions that come out of these planning documents.
- As the safety and capacity of Highway 22 is essential to supporting the level of recreation and tourism activity in demand, modernizing the corridor to support long term capacity needs should be considered, if not already underway.
- Update Linn and Marion County's Parks Master Plans to understand local needs and leverage funding that aligns and implements those needs in the recreational recovery efforts.

Recommendations

- Update Park Master Plans and Comprehensive Plan elements to assess and incorporate changed landscape and community needs.
- Engage in existing ODF planning efforts to ensure community interests are represented.
- Engage with transportation planners and public works professionals at the state, counties, cities, and COGs to ensure the Santiam Canyon transportation system is modernized and upgraded to support ongoing and increasing demands from the many users, including those seeking to access recreation and tourism in the area.