When the weather is wild, most folks stay indoors, but some head to the beach! Storm watchers revel in the power of the ocean, with its storm-fed swells crashing ashore, pummeling the sea stacks and arcing spray into the sky. Winter on the Olympic coast can be a front row seat to nature’s most dramatic moments!

Hidden Secrets
The interface between land and sea is a dynamic place of give and take. Waves gnaw away the shore but also deliver dinner to intertidal creatures anchored to the rocks. Rivers bring fresh water and protective logs to the beach while salmon—their bodies essentially packets of nitrogen, phosphorous and more—carry ocean nutrients upstream to forest communities.

Though we’re attracted to this fluid landscape, mesmerized by the hypnotic rhythm of waves, wheeling eagles and racing fog, its story is relatively unknown to us terrestrials. If the sea were a mystery novel, some chapters would still be unwritten, others would celebrate exciting successes and some would tell cautionary tales.

Given the human desire to build at the beach, the existence of Olympic National Park’s wilderness coast is a success. The designation of Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, and the islands and sea stacks of offshore national wildlife refuges, extends that protection out into the ocean. This means that complex coastal food webs connecting tiny invertebrates to 40-ton humpback whales are also protected. The reintroduction of sea otters to the Washington coast in the 1970s and their increase to over 1,500 by 2014 is another successful chapter. So is the rebound of eastern north Pacific gray whales, which were removed from the Endangered Species List in 1994. Look for them feeding and migrating along the coast in spring.

Changing Waters
Lately, researchers are penning a cautionary chapter in this ocean saga. Sea water is acidifying. As humans pump greenhouse gases into the air, a large portion of the carbon dioxide is absorbed by the ocean. Thus far, this has helped terrestrial species dodge even greater warming. But it has changed ocean chemistry for the worse—a problem compounded by upwelling of carbon dioxide-rich, cold, deep water along our coast. So much sea life depends on shells—think of mussels, clams or corals. The acidifying ocean is corrosive to many species’ shells, especially in early life stages. This has forced some regional shellfish growers to shift nursery operations elsewhere.

The tale of the sea is still being written and we are all co-authors. If you explore the park’s beaches this winter, consider ways to protect this priceless resource from threats like pollution, marine debris and the burden of increasing carbon dioxide. Together we can craft a masterpiece to honor the powerful oceans of our blue planet.

Here were creatures so exquisitely fashioned that they seemed unreal, their beauty too fragile to exist in a world of crushing force.

Rachel Carson, The Edge of the Sea
Services and Facilities

Winter 2016-2017

Services and Facilities

Hurricane Ridge Road
Call (360) 565-3513 for a 24-hour recording of current conditions and weather conditions or follow condition updates on twitter at: twitter.com/HURRICANERIDGE

To improve public safety, all vehicles (including 4WD traveling above Heart O’ the Hills on the Hurricane Ridge between November 25 and March 26) must carry tire chains. Weather permitting, the road is opened to public use at 7:00 a.m. Monday through Saturday, and on Sunday from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Full snow conditions may cause delays. For safety, do not ski or walk in parking areas or campgrounds. Check at the Visitor Center for a list of places pets are allowed.

Other Park Facilities


Hurricane Ridge Area

Hurricane Ridge Deli & Rental Shop: (360) 565-3130 for general park information or (360) 565-3100 for wilderness trip planning.

Hurricane Ridge: Call (360) 565-3513 or see www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/current-conditions.htm for road and weather updates.

Visiting Olympic National Park’s mountains, coast and forests in winter can be magical, but it takes planning as fewer services and facilities are available. Most of the park are open and accessible 365 days a year, but roads and facilities may close temporarily with winter conditions or for reduced staffing. Call (360) 565-3131 or see www.apa.gov/olym/planyourvisit/current-conditions.htm for road and weather updates.

Emergencies
Call 911 for emergencies or to report a crime. For non-emergency help call (360) 565-5000 ext. 0 from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sunday through Tuesday, 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, or (360) 417-2499 after hours.

Entrance and Other Recreation Fees

Fees apply year-round in main spur road areas (Elwha, Heart O’ the Hills and Queets). Single visit pass (1-7 days) is $25 per private vehicle or $10 per person (age 16+) entering by bus, bike or foot. The Olympic National Park Annual Pass is $80. America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Annual Pass is $80 and is honored at national park, national forest, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Land Management lands. A $10 lifetime pass for U.S. seniors (age 62+) and a free lifetime access pass for those with permanent disabilities are also available, as well as a free 4th grade pass for certain military personnel and their dependents. Additional recreation fees apply for overnight camping permits. The Senior and Access passes provide a 10 percent discount on these fees.

Pet regulations vary for a project such as road, trail and sign repair; and must be on a leash and not in parking areas or campgrounds. Check at the Visitor Center for a list of places pets are allowed.

for current condition updates on twitter at: twitter.com/HURRICANERIDGE

Network access

General Park Information

For information see the park website www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/current-road-conditions.htm

Hourly traffic at Heart O’ the Hills may be closed due to a snow slide.

Hurricane Ridge Deli & Rental Shop:

Hursting Ridge information desk 30 minutes before the walk. From December 17, 2016 through March 26, 2017, snow permitting, this easy to moderate walk joins a park ranger at Hurricane Ridge to experience the wonders of winter on snowshoes. If you can walk, you can join a park ranger at Hurricane Ridge to experience the wonders of winter on snowshoes. If you can walk, you can

Snowmobile rates

Snowmobile rates are $32/day. For rope tow only, rates for full day and half day are $26 and $17. Tube park rate (including tubes) is $10 per hour. Only tubes furnished by Hurricane Ridge. Skis and snowshoes are also available. Cross country skiers in the ski area will use ski trails.

Snowmobile/Snowshoe/Logging Snowmobile: Hurricane Ridge Winter Sports Club offers lessons for ages 10 and up. Private lessons are also available. For more information, contact www.hurricanesnowridge.com or call (484) 667-7669.

Equipment Rentals: Several businesses are located on the Olympic Peninsula and in the Puget Sound area rent winter recreational equipment. Hurricane Ridge Rental Shop (see hours and dates above) packages include skis, boots and poles. The shop requires a driver’s license to rent equipment.

Location

Cross-Country Downhill Snowshoes

Hourly rates resume in late May.

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Equipment Rentals: Several businesses are located on the Olympic Peninsula and in the Puget Sound area rent winter recreational equipment. Hurricane Ridge Rental Shop (see hours and dates above) packages include skis, boots and poles. The shop requires a driver’s license to rent equipment.
Before heading out, check at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center for current avalanche conditions. Wear an avalanche beacon, carry a probe, snow shovel and the 10 essentials (see page 8), and avoid avalanche terrain such as cornices, gullies and steep lee slopes.
Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing

With easy access and 15 to 20 miles of routes, Hurricane Ridge is the focus of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in Olympic National Park. Though experienced skiers of all abilities can enjoy the area, be very, beginning skiers are limited to the meadows above the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center. Backcountry skiers can explore several slopes and bowls in the area. No trails are groomed or marked, however, two routes use unplowed roads which can usually be navigated.

NOTE FOR SNOWSHOERS, WALKERS, SNOWBOARDERS AND SKIS: Do your part to help everyone enjoy this area. Snowshoers, walkers and snowboarders, please stay in one side to avoid disturbing ski trails on trails, and do not snowshoe or walk through the downhill ski area.

Before heading out on any trip remember to register at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center and check current avalanche conditions. Below are descriptions of routes in the Hurricane Ridge area.

Easiest

Hurricane Hill Road

1.5 mi/2.1 km one way

Beginning just west of the visitor center, this trail first descends steeply, then follows the rolling, moderate ridge along the unplowed Hurricane Hill Road. Experienced skiers can use this trail to reach the Hurricane Ridge Route (see Most Difficult), as well as several bowls for backcountry skiing. In clear weather there are good views to the north and south, especially at the trailhead where this road terminates at the Hurricane Hill trailhead. Much of this ridgeline trail is sheltered by a subalpine forest, making it a good choice in windy, inclement weather or when there is an elevation avalanche hazard.

Wolf Creek Trail

8 mi/12.9 km one way to Whiskey Bend Road

This route begins 0.6 mile west of the visitor center along the unplowed Hurricane Hill Road (see above) and descends through meadows and forests into the Elwha Valley. There are several south-facing slopes near the beginning which are good for backcountry skiing. The Wolf Creek Trail is seldom snow-covered in lower elevations. Users usually just descend a few miles through forest and several meadows with nice south views, then return the same way.

Obstruction Point Road: To Waterhole

3.4 mi/5.5 km one way

Rather than descend the exposed, steep, often drifted and icy route of the summer road, this route follows the rolling, moderate ridge along the unplowed Hurricane Hill Road to the Waterhole. Skiers and snowshoers should stay well to the windward (southwest) side of the road and watch the snow bank back uphill to the curve. After descending a steep but short meadow, the route intersects and follows the unplowed Obstruction Point Road.

More Difficult

Hurricane Ridge Route

1.6 mi/2.6 km one way

This route starts at the end of the Hurricane Hill Road route and climbs 700 feet to the summit of Hurricane Hill. There are several very steep sidehills if users follow the summer trail route, so extreme caution under icy or elevated avalanche hazard conditions. As an alternative, skiers and snowshoers can follow the ridgeline, which has fewer steep sections. Be careful to stay off cornices that build up along the face of the ridge. Under good conditions, advanced skiers or snowshoers will find this a rewarding trip with good views and some nice slopes.

Obstruction Point Road: Waterhole to end

4.3 mi/6.9 km one way

This route begins midway out the unplowed Obstruction Point Road (see above description above the first 3.4 miles to Waterhole). After Waterhole, the route gains 950 feet, climbing steadily for 0.5 miles to open slopes on Eagle Point. In clear weather, views can be spectacular but steep sidehills and exposure to storms make this a difficult route. It is recommended only under good conditions for experienced skiers. Travel beyond Obstruction Point can entail steep terrain with high avalanche potential.

Sunrise Ridge

2.1 mi/3.4 km one way

Begin this route by crossing below the intermediate rope tow and tube park, then climbing to the right of the ski hill (stay right of the trail). After crossing under the top of the ski area’s intermediate rope tow, this route follows a narrow ridge toward the south side of Mount Angeles. There are several avalanche prone areas along the way, so check ski and snowboard conditions and use caution under unsafe conditions. Be especially careful to stay off cornices that form along the ridge and side ridges. Several nice slopes on the east side descent to the Hurricane Ridge Route.

Other Areas

Depending on the snow level, other roads and trails in the park and in Olympic National Forest may be snow-covered. Check at the visitor center for current snow levels. The Deer Park Road may provide opportunities. For those who are not skiers, this steep, narrow road is closed to cars at the park boundary, 9 miles from Highway 101, at around 2,000 feet of elevation. The road climbs steadily about 9 more miles from the park boundary up to the lower elevations. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) says the road may be usable from the boundary; but users usually need to hike several miles before reaching the snow level.

For other routes on the Olympic Peninsula, refer to guides such as 100 Best Cross-Country Ski Trails in Washington, by Tom Kemkerm and Vicky Spring, Snowscape Guides: Washington by Dan Nelson, or Backcountry Ski and Snowboard Routes: Washington by Martin Volkman.

Avalanche!

Olympic Mountain terrain and weather create ideal conditions for avalanches. Before heading out, check the Northwest Avalanche Center forecast at www.nwac.org and check at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center for current local conditions. Wear beacon and carry a probe and snow shovel. The site and size of avalanches can vary from small to extremely large. Even in low hazard areas, avalanches can be dangerous. In some slopes. With extreme conditions backcountry travelers should be avoided. Certain terrain features, for example steep gullies that funnel snow, unstable cornices (see below), or dark cliff faces on warm spring days, can be dangerous. The survival rate for avalanche victims is extremely low. If you or a group member are caught in an avalanche, take these steps in your rescue attempt.

- Ensure the safety of survivors.
- Mark where victims were caught and last seen.
- Quickly search downstream from the last seen points for clues.
- Use the avalanche debris below the last seen points by probing in a grid pattern with probes, ski tails or poles.
- Keep searching! The victim could be inches away from your boots.
- Send an extra person for help.
- If you are caught, make swimming motions and try to keep yourself on top of the snow. As the snow begins to slow down, push the snow away from your face to create an air pocket.

Most Difficult

Snow Play

Snow sliding is a favorite pastime for some, but it has also been one of the most dangerous activities a Hurricane Ridge user could participate in. Injuries, even permanent disabilities occurred when people collided with trees, other skiers, or lost control and ended up in the road.

For your safety, sliding/tubing is permitted in only two locations:

- The Small Children’s Snowplay area near the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center where children eight and under may slide.
- The tubing park operated by the Hurricane Ridge Winter Sports Club in the downhill ski area.

If conditions are too icy to allow safe sliding, the sliding areas may be closed.

For the safety of participants, metal or hard plastic runner skis and wooden tobogans are not permitted. Only tubes provided by the ski area are permitted in their tubing park. The gates are compressed air for inflating tubes, and they are not available. To be as safe as possible, please:

- Ride only in the designated areas.
- Be sure the path is clear before starting your slide. Collisions can result in injuries. Watch for skiers and snowshoers crossing below the areas.
Find Your Park in Winter

Olympic is a park for all seasons. Visitors prepared for unpredictable weather can experience the beauty and solitude of winter without summer crowds. But winter is the wet season. Snow and rain can swell streams overnight, making crossings treacherous and washing out trails. Camp above flood plains. Boardwalks and bridges are very slippery when wet or icy. On the coast, storms push tides higher, creating huge waves that easily move beach logs or trap hikers on rocks. Winter storms can blow down trees, blocking trails and closing roads. Be prepared; always carry the 10 essentials, even for short hikes: extra clothing, extra food and water, map, compass, flashlight, knife, sunglasses, matches, fire starter/candle, first aid kit.

But don’t let winter chase you inside! There are always options. Stop at the Olympic National Park Visitor Center/Wilderness Information Center (WIC) in Port Angeles for maps, tide tables and trail reports or check the park website www.nps.gov/olymp. If you plan to camp overnight in the park’s wilderness, check the above website for information on bear canisters, wilderness fees and required permits, or call the WIC (360) 565-3100. May through September some popular spots, including the coast, have camping limits. See the website for making reservations. For you and your pet’s safety, pets are not allowed on trails in the park. The following options are usually accessible in winter, depending on snow level and storm damage.

Low-Elevation Hiking

Elwha Valley: The road is closed to vehicles this winter due to areas vulnerable to flood damage, but hikers and bicyclists can still access the valley. Nearby trails include Madison Falls, Smokey Bottom, West Elwha, Griff Creek, and Cascade Rock. Or walk the road to the stunning views from the Glines Canyon Spillway Overlook.

Lake Crescent: Marymere Falls, Barnes Creek and the west end of the Spruce Railroad trail.

Ozette: Cape Alava or Sand Point trails.

Mora and La Push: James Pond, Second, Third and Rialto Beaches.

Kalaloch: Short trails to beaches, beach hikes and the forest nature trail.

Hoh: Hall of Mosses and Spruce Nature trails, or lower Hoh River trail.

Quinault: Maple Glades and Kestner Homestead trails at the national park ranger station, Irela Lake trail or lower parts of the North Fork and Graves Creek trails. There are also several nature trails in Olympic National Forest along the South Shore Road.

High Country Trips

Snow camping requires preparations, but offers a glimpse into a season that few truly experience. Weather changes quickly. Places like Hurricane Ridge and Blizzar Pass earn their names, and whiteout conditions can occur any time!

Hurricane Ridge has the easiest high country access. For safety, observe these rules:

- Overnight campers must get a permit at the WIC, and register and check with a ranger at Hurricane Ridge for camping and parking locations.
- Plan trips for weekends since the road is usually closed Monday through Thursday.
- If a storm forces a road closure, you may need to use tire chains and have a shovel in case of a snowy descent. Use caution as plow operators may not see you. If you are locked in uphill from the gate, call park dispatch at (360) 565-3000 ext. 0 or (360) 417-2459 after hours.
- Because of the risk of sudden storms, winter overnight parking is not allowed at Hurricane Ridge. You must park 3.3 miles below the Ridge at Third Peak (see map on pages 4-5). Check with rangers at Hurricane Ridge to see if a car shuttle is available.
- Campers must be 1/2 mile away from the Hurricane Ridge parking lot and out of sight of ski/snowshoe trails. Check with a ranger for suggestions.
- Use a camp stove. Campfires are prohibited.
- Share the trails—avoid walking or snowshoeing in ski tracks.
- In emergencies, dial 911 from the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center foyer.
- Check avalanche conditions and carry beacons (see page 7).

A River Reborn

The largest dam removal project in history was completed in 2014 and the Elwha River flows freely once again. After over 100 years, salmon have access to over 70 miles of habitat protected within Olympic National Park. In 2016, biologists documented adult Chinook, coho, sockeye, steelhead and bull trout swimming in the upper reaches of the Elwha River after passing through both the former Elwha and Glines Canyon dam sites. Biologists have also seen adult pink and chum salmon, and Pacific lamprey upstream of the former Elwha Dam site.

As fish recolonized upstream habitat, sediment and logs that had been trapped behind the dams headed downstream. All the stored sediment that researchers expected to erode downstream has now been released. Along the way it is creating a more braided, meandering river and restoring spawning habitat. Of the millions of cubic yards of sediment, 90 percent has reached the ocean, adding over 80 acres to the river’s estuary. There, it is replenishing beaches and creating critical habitat for marine life including juvenile salmon and forage fish such as smelt, eulachon and red-sided shiners.

With the dams gone, natural revegetation and crews planting hundreds of thousands of seedlings are greening the once barren reservoirs. Ten-foot alders, thickets of cottonwoods and willows, and carpets of other plants are helping to stabilize slopes and control erosion. Roosevelt elk, black-tailed deer and black bears are feeding in the rich new habitat.

The Elwha River restoration saga is ongoing. Though the road is currently closed to cars due to flood damage, you can walk or bike in the Elwha Valley. It is 3-4 miles to exhibits and stunning views at the Glines Canyon Spillway Overlook. In early winter, look for coho spawning in tributaries near Madison Falls or the Elwha Ranger Station; in spring look for winter steelhead in the same spots. To learn more, visit Olympic National Park’s website www.nps.gov/olymp.

Sockeye salmon colonizer seen above both former dam sites during a summer 2016 snorkel survey. Bottom, sediment delivered by the reborn river is restoring the Elwha River estuary (August 2016).