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Meissner Nordic club victimized again

Apparent theft of firewood is fourth incident in less than a year



Judith Smith, of San Jose, Calif., skis on a groomed trail at Virginia Meissner Sno-Park on Tuesday, December 26, 2017, west of Bend. Smith said despite a few bare patches near the parking lot, the skiing was fine on the groomed trails. (Joe Kline/Bulletin photo)
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For the fourth time in less than a year, the Meissner Nordic club has been targeted by thieves and vandals.

Club officials said Tuesday that a large quantity of firewood has gone missing from the shelter the club stocks and maintains at Virginia Meissner Sno-park west of Bend. The nonprofit club collects donations to maintain and groom nearly 25 miles of cross-country ski trails fanning out from the sno-park, as well as the shelter located about 1½ miles off Century Drive.

Larry Katz, operations manager for the club, said he discovered the wood was missing on a visit to the shelter Friday. Locks that had been put on a nearby wood storage locker were gone — though the doors were undamaged — and around half the wood intended to last through the ski season was gone.

Though it's unclear when the wood was taken, Katz suspects it was before Dec. 1, the day

the Deschutes National Forest closes a gate that allows vehicles to drive to the shelter. The road is officially closed to vehicles, but drivable when there's little snow on the ground.

“You certainly can't steal firewood if you're not driving up to the shelter,” he said. “You're not going to be carrying it out an armload at a time.”

Katz said the club has been pushing the Forest Service to do more to restrict vehicle access to the area in recent years, but has had little success. He said recently, club members have explored ending the agreement under which the club is obligated to supply the shelter with firewood in order to nudge the Forest Service toward constructing an additional gate.

Attempts to contact a Deschutes National Forest representative on Tuesday were unsuccessful.

The most recent episode comes on the heels of a November incident (<http://www.bendbulletin.com/localstate/5752612-151/meissner-nordic-club-suffers-third-break-in-in-six>) during which someone broke in to a separate storage building at the sno-park and took the club's snowmobile for a joyride, leaving it damaged. In May and then again in late summer, chainsaws and other trail maintenance tools were stolen from the storage building.

Katz said the club spent around \$5,000 replacing chainsaws and other hand tools, and repairing its snowmobile and the storage building. Valuable tools are no longer stored at the sno-park.

Katz and club board member Steve Roti said the vanishing firewood is another frustration on top of what's been a slow start to the ski season. Limited snow coverage adjacent to the sno-park means skiers risk damaging their skis, and has kept the club from shifting from a five-days-a-week grooming schedule to six.

Roti said until more snow falls, skiers are encouraged to start their ski trips at Swampy Lakes Sno-park, located about a mile and a half uphill from Meissner. The Swede Spur trail and the higher elevation portions of the Tangent Loop both allow skiers starting at Swampy Lakes to access trails that are not yet easily accessible from Meissner.

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