

Badlands Wilderness Area

As wilderness areas go, Badlands is an unusual one in my experience. It is not in a distant, rugged area, but is only about 20 miles from the city of Bend, and a nice day hike; fairly level and appropriate for short distance walks, and young families. In the winter it is often snow free in otherwise snowy central Oregon, and provides a nice, sunny walk when much of Oregon is wet. On the other hand it can be very hot in the summer, unless you can hike it in the morning. Other than the ubiquitous juniper trees, the area is full of lava rock mounds and typical high desert vegetation.

The most popular access is Flatiron Rock Trailhead, right on Highway 20 about 20 miles east of Bend, Oregon. There are a handful of other trailheads, including three off of Dodd's Road. You will see the most cars at the Flatiron access, but for good reason; it is easy to get to and it is the easiest access to the Ancient Juniper Trail that has some of the oldest trees in the state. With the number of trails in the area, it would be easy to pick a loop of almost any length. If you wanted to arrange a car shuttle, you could hike over twenty miles across it.

The area is managed by the Bureau of Land Management. It was designated as an official Wilderness Area in 2009. It is over 30,000 acres in size.



Flatiron Rock Trailhead - the most popular trailhead for entrance

The only tree I have seen there is the western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*), but it is king of its domain:



Fairly common scene in the Badlands. Juniper, Big Sagebrush, and Rabbitbrush

Not only is it dominant in the area, but some of them are well over 1000 years old. One in the area is reported to be over 1600 years old, and the oldest tree in Oregon. The Ancient Juniper Trail, which can be reached easily from the Flatiron Rock has many of the old ones.



Can this one be one of the 1000+ year old junipers?



The juniper on the left has female cones which look like blueberries, the one on the right has male cones which are much smaller

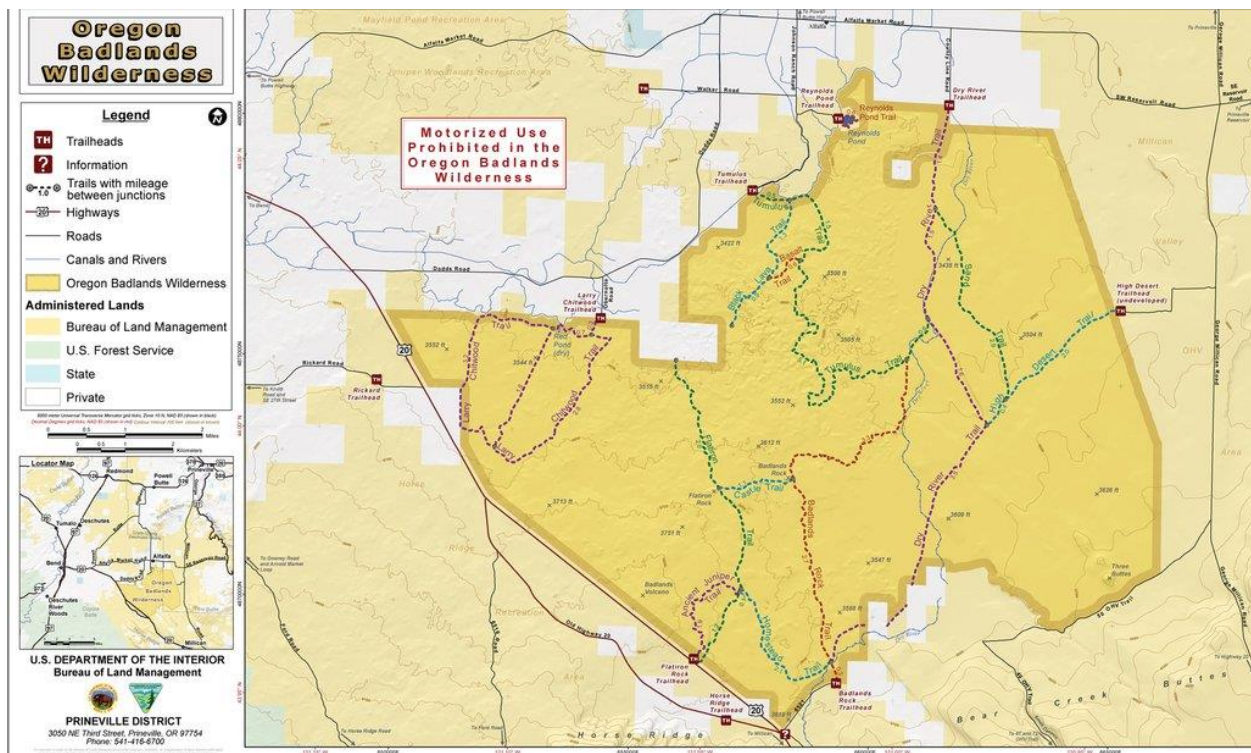


These “berries” are actually the female cones. I think they look like blueberries. About 50% of plants are monoecious with both sexes on the same plant, 50% dioecious, producing cones of only one sex.

If want to avoid the crowds, you might want to try the north accesses. When I visited Dry River Trailhead off of the County Line Road, there weren't any other cars. Perhaps that's because you have to walk more than a half mile until you get into the junipers. There were a few cars at the Reynolds Pond Trailhead, and as the name suggests a pond and a pleasant setting.



Reynolds Pond



Source: Bureau of Land Management