

The Metolius Preserve (and nearby areas)

The Metolius Preserve embraces a wonderful, diverse set of plants and animals on the east side of the Oregon Cascades northwest of the town of Sisters. Even though it is lower in elevation (at about 3000') than much of the High Desert just to the east, because of its proximity to the Cascade crest, and the abundance of springs and streams, it is surprisingly verdant and supports many plant species you wouldn't normally see at this lower altitude.

The 1200+ acre area is managed by the Deschutes Land Trust. They report that it is home to many mammals, including bear, deer, beavers, otters, and cougars. They also say there are flying squirrels, which are something I would truly like to see! The creeks in the preserve provide a habitat for spring Chinook salmon, native redband trout, and serve as migratory routes to Suttle Lake for sockeye salmon.

The Preserve is accessed from two very disjunct trailheads, on the north and south sides. The North Trailhead welcomes you to the area they term the Larch Trails. The South Trailhead presents you the Fir Trails, and a little further south, the Pine Trails. Even though these describe the inhabitants of the area generally, you can still find most of the tree species in any of the areas. On my two trips to the area I found many conifer species:

- Grand fir
- Douglas-fir
- Ponderosa pine
- Lodgepole pine
- Western white pine
- Incense cedar
- Western larch
- Western juniper
- Engelmann spruce (well, I didn't find this one, but it is reported to be there)

Directions and other information are very well described on their website, (<https://www.deschuteslandtrust.org/protected-lands/metolius-preserve/>) however I have a few tips I learned first-hand. It is open year-round, but even on the first day of spring, the snow on the access roads was about 6 inches deep and fairly challenging for my AWD SUV. However, I was rewarded with the place to myself and lots of solitude, although I could hear the traffic on Highway 20 much of the time. The trails were well marked, but the snow cover this winter on about half of the terrain made a fun game of trying to get back to the trail. The area is relatively flat, making for easy hiking.



The kiosk and parking area at the South Trailhead

A nice thing about the South Trailhead is that it can access all the areas, as it sits more centrally in the Preserve. The downside, at least when I drove to it were snowy roads, whereas the North Trailhead had very little snow to contend with. This trailhead had a quick access to the picturesque South Fork Lake Creek. A little further north lies the North and Middle forks. They all originated from Suttle Lake, a little to the west, and flow into the Metolius River. The South Trailhead also headquarters the Becky Johnson Interpretive Area where they hold many educational and landscape restoration events in warmer times of the year.

Some of the conditions and conifers I found:



The snowy road on the way in to the South Trailhead



Incense cedar



A young western white pine



A cone from an older white pine (its "banana" shape distinguishes it from its relative the sugar pine cone)



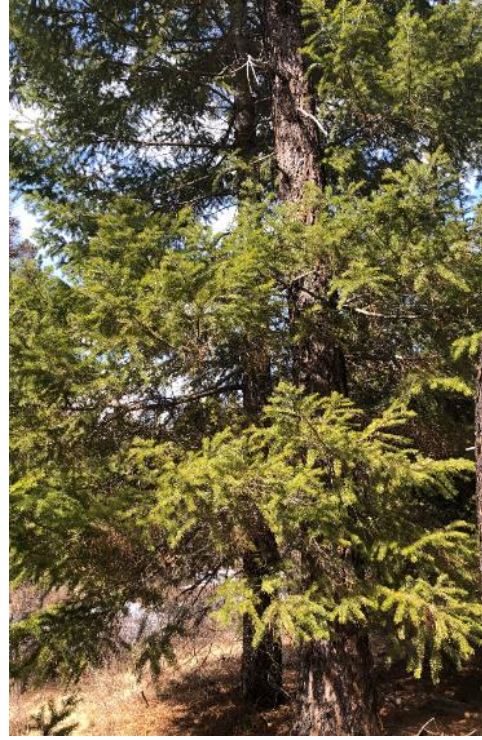
The stately, and very common ponderosa pine



Grand fir (notice how the needles lie mostly flat)



Douglas-fir (not a true fir) - notice the "three-fingered" bracts on the cone



Douglas fir



Western larch - these "bare" trees are one of only a few deciduous conifers!



A fairly rare lodgepole pine (for the area)

I also visited two areas near there that would be worth making a side trip to. The Head of the Metolius River is a short distance from the North Trailhead. It is where water gushes from the rocks and originates the Metolius River. It is a short walk from the parking area. It is thought that the fault that created the nearby Green Ridge brought the underground waters from the Cascades to the surface.



One of the main springs supplying the water

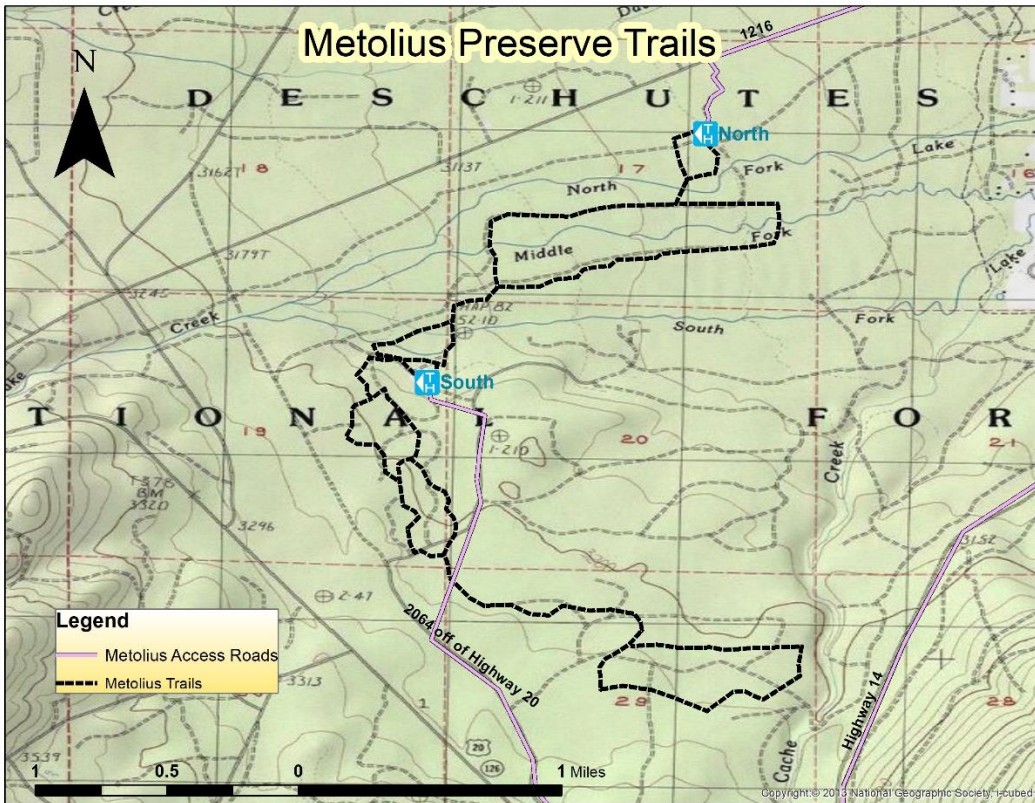


The head of the Metolius River

The Green Ridge mountains and the Metolius River to the north also provide a lot of recreational activities including trails, fishing, and campgrounds. My particular objective that day was to find some sugar pines that are known to be near the top of the Green Ridge. I started from the Allan Springs Campground on the river (see the map below), and headed due east to try to reach the pines. There are also dirt roads from the east that would access the ridge, but they were impassible this time I was told. The campground, as well as my steep ascent provided a very lush forest of incense cedar, grand fir, Douglas-fir, and of course the ubiquitous ponderosa pine. But my aching legs and the incoming rain, got me only two-thirds the way up the ridge, and alas, I did not find my objective of the fairly rare sugar pines. They are a lot more common in California, but not this far north. On another trip, I guess.



The Metolius River at Allan Springs Campground



Metolius Preserve Trails And Area

