

Let's Go!

Ski clubs, volunteers getting trails ready for the new season



ROSALIE RAYBURN / FOR THE JOURNAL Michael Arndt, left, a volunteer with Friends of the Sandia Mountains, uses a peavey to move a downed tree so Sam Beard, right, will be able to cut it into shorter lengths to help in building a trail.

BY ROSALIE RAYBURN FOR THE JOURNAL

The Old Farmer's Almanac has some good news for New Mexico skiers, with a prediction for a colder than normal winter and above normal precipitation for the Desert Southwest.

Volunteers from two clubs that cater to cross country skiing enthusiasts have been active in recent weeks clearing and improving trails in anticipation of an active winter season.

Cross country, or Nordic skiing involves skiing over the snowy landscape instead of depending on lifts. Skiers wear flexible boots that are clipped in at the toe leaving the heel free. Wax or scales on the bottom of the ski provide traction to move forward.

The classic style involves moving each foot forward in a long gliding stride. Skate skiers use shorter thinner skis and move with a skating motion, using long poles to help propel themselves along.

Sandia Nordic Ski Club, formed in 2017, is geared toward those who want to ski on groomed trails. Club vice president Jeff Huser said trails that have been groomed are easier to glide on because the machine breaks up the snow, leaving a corduroy pattern that is relatively smooth.

" By providing groomed trails we hope to get more people interested in cross country skiing," Huser said.

Members of the Sandia Nordic Ski Club have been working alongside volunteers from the Friends of the Sandia Mountains (FOSM), a volunteer service organization that works with the U. S. Forest Service, on a project to modify a four-mile trail stretch of trails near the top of the Sandia Crest. The goal has been to make them accessible for a machine which creates a groomed trail that can be used by anyone for classic style and skate style cross country skiing.

Volunteers use chain saws to cut fallen trees into logs that can be moved. Those who use chain saws must take required training to be certified by the Forest Service, and wear protective clothing. Early in November, volunteers were working on a section of trail off the Ellis Trail. Huser explained that the volunteers have been moving logs from the higher side of the slope to the lower side, so snow will form a drift and make it easier to level the trail.

Work previously done, involved mowing and cutting brush in meadow areas, further down the mountain near the 10 k Trail parking lot.

During the ski season, Huser said, the club plans to groom the trails weekly. Smoothing and compacting the snow this way will slow melting and extend the ski season, he said.

Volunteers with the New Mexico Cross Country Ski Club have also been doing trail clearing and maintenance projects. The Club, which has been around for about 50 years, focuses on skiing in back country areas in different parts of New Mexico and on organizing skiing excursions to Colorado.

Carl Smith, a member of the NM Cross Country ski club and FOSM, said volunteers have held work days to move fallen trees, prune branches and cut brush to clear trails in the Doc Long, Sulphur Springs and Cienega areas off the Sandia Crest Road. They've also been working in the Jemez Mountains in the Los Griegos area which offers views of Redondo Peak and Valle Grande, Peralta Canyon, Coral Canyon and trails in the Valles Caldera National Preserve in the Coyote Call Area and on South Mountain.

Each club holds regular meetings and offers instruction clinics for those who want to start the sport or improve their skills.

More info

SANDIA NORDIC SKI CLUB; SandiaNordic.org Annual membership: Family \$40, individual \$25

NEW MEXICO CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLUB; nmccskiclub.org Membership: first year for those aged 40 and under \$1; after that \$15 per year. Spouses and dependents must sign up individually. (Minors under 18 covered under adults membership.)