Lake of Snowflakes

Straddling the crest of the Cascade Mountain Range, Crater Lake National Park is one of the snowiest inhabited places in America. Storms from the Pacific Ocean dump an annual average of 43 feet (13 meters) of snow at Park Headquarters. That’s equivalent to 1.4 inches (3.6 cm) of snow falling every day for an entire year!

Is this tremendous amount of snow a burden or a blessing to the park? On the one hand, it can certainly make life difficult! Many animals, including deer and elk, must leave the park each winter in order to survive. Park employees must work hard to keep roads plowed and facilities functioning. And for the public, storms often lead to disappointment—Crater Lake is completely obscured by clouds almost 50% of the time in the winter and early spring.

But consider the bounty that blizzards bring. The thick blanket of snow provides protection and warmth for “subsurface” (below the snow) mammals such as shrews, voles, and pikas. It serves as a water reservoir for the park’s old-growth forests, insulating trees from drought and fire. It provides visitors with opportunities to ski, sled, snowshoe, and marvel at winter’s beauty. And it also benefits people beyond the park, since most of the melted snow eventually leaves the park to feed the Rogue, Umpqua, and Klamath Rivers. Snowy winters are good news for downstream farmers, ranchers, cities, and wildlife.

Above all, it’s thanks to snow that a lake exists here at all! This mountain top caldera receives no water from rivers or streams. Its water comes straight from the sky. Because the lake is fed by direct snowmelt (and because there are no inlets contributing silt, sediment, or pollution), it holds a world record: it’s considered to be the cleanest and clearest lake in the United States. Fed by rain and snow (but no rivers or streams), the lake is considered to be the cleanest and clearest large body of water in the world.

While the type of precipitation hasn’t changed much, the amount of precipitation has: warmer temperatures have been causing more of it to fall as rain and not as snow.

Average Annual Snowfall at Park Headquarters, by Decade:

- 1930s – 614 inches (1,560 cm)
- 1940s – 523 inches (1,328 cm)
- 1950s – 572 inches (1,453 cm)
- 1960s – 507 inches (1,288 cm)
- 1970s – 495 inches (1,257 cm)
- 1980s – 475 inches (1,207 cm)
- 1990s – 493 inches (1,252 cm)
- 2000s – 455 inches (1,156 cm)
- 2010s – 418 inches (957 cm)

Overall, though, snow totals have been declining. The amount of precipitation hasn’t changed much, but the type of precipitation has: warmer temperatures have been causing more of it to fall as rain and not as snow.
Winter Colors

Lake Viewing

When skies are clear, excellent views of Crater Lake can be enjoyed at Rim Village. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Snowmobiling

The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Backcountry Camping

There are no designated sled trails or snow-play areas in the park, but there are opportunities for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The park is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Raven Trail

The Raven Trail is a favorite of park visitors. The trail is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Dukeduck Creek Trail

The Dukeduck Creek Trail is a favorite of park visitors. The trail is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Cradle Lake Visitor Center

The Cradle Lake Visitor Center is the official stop for visitors to the Crater Lake National Park. The center is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day and provides information, exhibits, and souvenirs. The center is located near the south entrance to the park. The center is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Cradle Lake Visitor Center

The Cradle Lake Visitor Center is the official stop for visitors to the Crater Lake National Park. The center is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day and provides information, exhibits, and souvenirs. The center is located near the south entrance to the park. The center is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Riverview Hotel

The Riverview Hotel is a favorite of park visitors. The hotel is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Crater Lake Visitor Center

The Cradle Lake Visitor Center is the official stop for visitors to the Crater Lake National Park. The center is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day and provides information, exhibits, and souvenirs. The center is located near the south entrance to the park. The center is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.

Crater Lake Visitor Center

The Cradle Lake Visitor Center is the official stop for visitors to the Crater Lake National Park. The center is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day and provides information, exhibits, and souvenirs. The center is located near the south entrance to the park. The center is open year-round, but some areas may be closed due to snow. The snowmobile is open on the lake only during storms. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely "invisible" at times. Snow and clouds are seen at the edge of the lake. Shadows from the landscape are visible in the water. The lake looks like a mirror during the summer. Only at night can the lake be observed at Rim Village. The park is open year-round, and the lake is accessible at all times. The lake is completely "invisible" to the eye during storms. The sun is visible at all times, and the lake is visible at all times.
Support Your Park—

Shop in the Visitor Center Bookstore

When you shop at the visitor center, all proceeds from your purchase are reinvested back into the park. The bookstore is operated by the Crater Lake Natural History Association, a nonprofit organization established in 1942 to support the park's educational and scientific programs.

Buy Crater Lake License Plates

If you live in Oregon, consider choosing Crater Lake license plates for your vehicle. For a one-time charge of $30, you can outfit your car with these beautiful plates while supporting park projects. You can purchase Crater Lake plates at any time, not just when buying a new vehicle or renewing your registration. Visit any Oregon DMV office or www.dmv.oregon.gov/odmv for details.

Volunteer Your Time

Looking for a hands-on way to help the park? Consider sharing your time and talents as a Crater Lake VIP (Volunteer-In-Parks). Full-time volunteers are needed throughout the year to help staff visitor centers and present interpretive programs. Opportunities are advertised several times each year at www.volunteer.craterlake.org. Volunteers are provided free housing in exchange for 3 months of service.

Contribute to the Crater Lake Trust

The Crater Lake National Park Trust is a nonprofit organization that raises private funds to support park projects and connect the park with surrounding communities. It helps fund, for example, field trips to the park for more than 5,000 grade-school students each year. In a program called “Classroom at Crater Lake,” kids engage in hands-on science and learn about wildlife, old-growth forests, and winter ecology. For more information about the T rust and its activities, visit www.craterlake.org/education.

Share Your Comments

Whether you have a compliment, concern, or suggestion, we’d like to hear from you! Whether you have a compliment, concern, or suggestion, we’d like to hear from you! To share your comment, visit www.nps.gov/rlc/craterlake.

Contribute to the Crater Lake Trust

The Crater Lake National Park Trust is a nonprofit organization that raises private funds to support park projects and connect the park with surrounding communities. It helps fund, for example, field trips to the park for more than 5,000 grade-school students each year. In a program called “Classroom at Crater Lake,” kids engage in hands-on science and learn about wildlife, old-growth forests, and winter ecology. For more information about the T rust and its activities, visit www.craterlake.org/education.

Share Your Comments

Whether you have a compliment, concern, or suggestion, we’d like to hear from you! Whether you have a compliment, concern, or suggestion, we’d like to hear from you! To share your comment, visit www.nps.gov/rlc/craterlake.

Climate Chart

Crater Lake National Park is one of the snowiest inhabited places in America. Storms from the Pacific Ocean dump an average of 43 feet (13 meters) of snow at Park Headquarters. That’s equivalent to 1.4 inches (3.6 cm) of snow every day for an entire year! The park’s tremendous snowfall is a result of its position at the crest of the Cascade Mountains.

Data is from Park Headquarters, 1931-2015.

It can be a hazardous job,” reports Steve, “especially when it’s dark and white-out conditions are occurring. A winding mountain road, you never know what’s around the next corner. You can never be too careful.

The crests head slowly north, averaging 25 miles (4 km) of road cleared per day. In a light snow year, they’ll reach the park’s North Entrance by mid-May. After a severe winter, it will take until mid-June. The East Rim Drive is their final leg. “If we can get all the way around by the 4th of July,” Steve says, “we’re happy.”

For your safety, when you encounter a snow plow on the park’s narrow roads, be careful. Waiting until an intersection or until the plow comes to a stop and the operator waves you by. Until then, assume that the operator can’t see you, as visibility from inside the plow can be poor. Also, skiers and pedestrians should be sure to keep well away from the dangerous cascade of snow thrown by the rotary plows.

Thanks to the hard work, long hours, and dedication of the park’s heavy equipment operators and mechanics, we can access and enjoy Crater Lake National Park every month of the year.

The association funds a variety of projects, including the printing of these offers are directed to the right. For a complete list of merchandise and to buy items online, visit www.craterlakeoregon.org. You can also order by calling 541-594-3111.

and maintain trails, contact visitors, operate a winter information desk at Rim Village, and assist with special events. Learn more at www.friendsofcraterlake.org.

The Crater Lake Ski Patrol has been assisting winter visitors and maintaining the park’s cross-country ski trails since 1983. Members of this volunteer organization are identifiable by their bright red jackets, receive training in wilderness first aid, survival skills, search and rescue, map and compass use, and avalanche safety in exchange for at least 6 days of service. For more information, visit www.craterlakeskiptl.org.

To learn more about the Trust and its activities, visit www.craterlake.org. Share your love of the park by making a tax-deductible gift.

The Mountain That Became a Lake CD

Listen to this CD as you drive the park’s roads. Scientists, park rangers, and Klamath Indians share facts, stories, and insights about Crater Lake. 60 minutes, $16.95.

Crater Lake Water Bottle

This plastic bottle’s flip-top cap keeps water cold. Made from recycled materials. $3.99.

Star and Planet Guide

Rotating “planisphere” for locating, stars, planets, and constellations in the night sky. $11.95.

Crater Lake Reusable Shopping Bag

Earthy, fine, and great for groceries. Made from recycled materials. $3.99.

Clack’s Nutcracker T-Shirt

100% cotton T-shirt with colorful Crater Lake logo. Designed to keep your head dry during athletic activity. $19.99.

Volcanoes

Folding, waterproof guide to volcanoes, lava rocks, and plate tectonics. 16 pages, $6.95.

Guide to the National Parks of the United States

A book of photos and Geographic stories, features, data, and maps. 380 color maps, 80 color maps, 480 pages, $28.00.

Trees to Know in Oregon

The identification is way and enjoyable with this photo-packed, fact-filled guide. 153 pages, $18.00.

Other Useful Items

- The Mountain That Became a Lake CD
- Crater Lake Water Bottle
- Star and Planet Guide
- Crater Lake Reusable Shopping Bag
- Clack’s Nutcracker T-Shirt

The Science and Learning Center draws researchers and educators to Crater Lake from around the world, eager to use the park as an outdoor laboratory and classroom. For more information about the Science and Learning Center and its programs, visit www.nps.gov/tf/craterlake.

For a complete list of merchandise and to buy items online, visit www.craterlakeoregon.org. You can also order by calling 541-594-3111.

The Science and Learning Center draws researchers and educators to Crater Lake from around the world, eager to use the park as an outdoor laboratory and classroom. For more information about the Science and Learning Center and its programs, visit www.nps.gov/tf/craterlake.

Volcanoes

Folding, waterproof guide to volcanoes, lava rocks, and plate tectonics. 16 pages, $6.95.

Guide to the National Parks of the United States

A book of photos and Geographic stories, features, data, and maps. 380 color maps, 80 color maps, 480 pages, $28.00.

Trees to Know in Oregon

The identification is way and enjoyable with this photo-packed, fact-filled guide. 153 pages, $18.00.

Other Useful Items

- The Mountain That Became a Lake CD
- Crater Lake Water Bottle
- Star and Planet Guide
- Crater Lake Reusable Shopping Bag
- Clack’s Nutcracker T-Shirt

The Science and Learning Center draws researchers and educators to Crater Lake from around the world, eager to use the park as an outdoor laboratory and classroom. For more information about the Science and Learning Center and its programs, visit www.nps.gov/tf/craterlake.

Volcanoes

Folding, waterproof guide to volcanoes, lava rocks, and plate tectonics. 16 pages, $6.95.

Guide to the National Parks of the United States

A book of photos and Geographic stories, features, data, and maps. 380 color maps, 80 color maps, 480 pages, $28.00.

Trees to Know in Oregon

The identification is way and enjoyable with this photo-packed, fact-filled guide. 153 pages, $18.00.

Other Useful Items

- The Mountain That Became a Lake CD
- Crater Lake Water Bottle
- Star and Planet Guide
- Crater Lake Reusable Shopping Bag
- Clack’s Nutcracker T-Shirt

The Science and Learning Center draws researchers and educators to Crater Lake from around the world, eager to use the park as an outdoor laboratory and classroom. For more information about the Science and Learning Center and its programs, visit www.nps.gov/tf/craterlake.

Volcanoes

Folding, waterproof guide to volcanoes, lava rocks, and plate tectonics. 16 pages, $6.95.

Guide to the National Parks of the United States

A book of photos and Geographic stories, features, data, and maps. 380 color maps, 80 color maps, 480 pages, $28.00.

Trees to Know in Oregon

The identification is way and enjoyable with this photo-packed, fact-filled guide. 153 pages, $18.00.

Other Useful Items

- The Mountain That Became a Lake CD
- Crater Lake Water Bottle
- Star and Planet Guide
- Crater Lake Reusable Shopping Bag
- Clack’s Nutcracker T-Shirt

The Science and Learning Center draws researchers and educators to Crater Lake from around the world, eager to use the park as an outdoor laboratory and classroom. For more information about the Science and Learning Center and its programs, visit www.nps.gov/tf/craterlake.

Volcanoes

Folding, waterproof guide to volcanoes, lava rocks, and plate tectonics. 16 pages, $6.95.

Guide to the National Parks of the United States

A book of photos and Geographic stories, features, data, and maps. 380 color maps, 80 color maps, 480 pages, $28.00.

Trees to Know in Oregon

The identification is way and enjoyable with this photo-packed, fact-filled guide. 153 pages, $18.00.

Other Useful Items

- The Mountain That Became a Lake CD
- Crater Lake Water Bottle
- Star and Planet Guide
- Crater Lake Reusable Shopping Bag
- Clack’s Nutcracker T-Shirt

The Science and Learning Center draws researchers and educators to Crater Lake from around the world, eager to use the park as an outdoor laboratory and classroom. For more information about the Science and Learning Center and its programs, visit www.nps.gov/tf/craterlake.