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Snow season looks good for skiers

By KATE WHITTLE
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<p>Anthony Lakes Ski Area opened Saturday. The ski area will be open Saturdays and Sundays through December 11. Beginning December 17, it will be opening every day through January 1, except Christmas Day.</p>

Eastern Oregon powderhounds can look forward to another good year for snow sports.

Last year, the Pacific Northwest benefited from the weather pattern La Niña, which brought heavy snowfall to many ski resorts. La Niña is back for 2011-2012, according to the National Weather Service.

“I think it’s going to be a great year,” said Travis Stephenson, general manger for the Bluewood ski resort near Dayton, Wash. “We’ve got good snow, we’re almost at a point where we can open.”

Bluewood’s base stands at about 19 inches, he said.

Tesmond Hurd, a meteorologist with the non-profit La Grande Weather Service, said La Niña will bring higher than normal precipitation and below normal temperatures in the Pacific Northwest. “Expect, I’d say, slightly above average snow conditions,” he said. “Most snow itself should be fairly dry.”

During La Niña, cooler Pacific Ocean temperatures change global weather patterns, creating drier conditions in the southern U.S. and wetter conditions in the northern part of the continent.

Hurd monitors weather at Anthony Lakes Ski Resort near La Grande, which Saturday expected to become the first ski resort in Eastern Oregon to fire up the lifts.

Between 20 and 30 inches of snow have accumulated at the trail’s base, he said, and he’s already snowshoed up to the top and snowboarded a few trails.

“A lot of people I’ve talked to are excited to get out there and go skiing and snowboarding,” Hurd said.

One of Eastern Oregon’s small community-based ski resorts is still waiting on snow. At the Ferguson Ridge Ski Area near Joseph, affectionately known as Fergi, ski club president Charlie Kissinger the last time he checked, the base held about 14 inches.