

McGowan Cross-Country Ski Area*

At 6000' McGowan has deeper snow than Colby Meadows (5000') and good ski conditions often last longer after a storm. Good cross-country (xc) skiing also starts earlier and lasts longer into the spring due to the higher elevation. There are several miles of ski trails, varying from easy to advanced. The Forest Service grooms McGowan and Church Camp roads when snow conditions permit. The Lassen Park Rd. (Hwy 89) is closed in winter beyond the Visitor Center (about 3 miles beyond the McGowan turnout) and provides easy skiing on the closed Park Rd. and access to advanced backcountry skiing. The Visitor Center has a warm bathroom open 24/7 and hot food and snacks are available on weekends and holidays. There is an entry fee to get into the Park. Annual passes are available. There is no fee for skiing on the Forest Service roads and trails in the McGowan Cross-Country Ski Area.

McGowan is about 80 miles from Chico and you can easily be on the snow in an hour and half from the Chico Park & Ride. Easiest access to this excellent xc ski area is from the Lassen Park Road (Hwy 89). From Chico there are two routes. The shortest and fastest (in good weather) is east out of Chico on Hwy 32. Hwy 32 ends at a "T" intersection with Hwy 36. Turn left (East) on Hwy 36, heading towards Mineral and Red Bluff. The little resort store at Child's Meadows is usually open for coffee, hot chocolate and bathroom breaks. They also rent good, stable XC skis. Just past Morgan Summit turn right (North) onto the Hwy 89/Lassen Park Rd. About two miles up you will see a giant turnout to the left (west side) of the road. This is the main trailhead and the most common way to access the McGowan ski trails.

(Note: on busy weekends and holidays parking diagonally rather than parallel allows more people to find a parking space.)

On a cold winter morning, especially just after a storm, the shady corners in Deer Creek Canyon on Hwy 32 can be icy and this narrow road can be hazardous. Many prefer to use Hwy 36 out of Red Bluff instead. This alternate route to Lassen is a bit longer, but it can actually be faster since most of it is straight road at lower elevations. You can get food and gas in Los Molinos. From Chico simply take Hwy 99 north to the Hwy 36 turnoff in Red Bluff. You will encounter a few hairpin corners a few miles below Mineral that can be icy, but this route is generally safer than Hwy 32, especially on cold mornings. Hwy 36 is the main supply route from Red Bluff to Chester and Susanville so is more likely to be open and plowed during storms than Hwy 32. Stop at Mineral Lodge for coffee/hot chocolate or a bathroom break. There is no gas available in Mineral. The Mineral Lodge Restaurant is open for breakfast on weekends and holidays. The store is open every day. Mineral Lodge also rents snowshoes and has some old xc skis for rent. About 5 miles up the road from Mineral you will see the Hwy 89/Lassen Park Rd. turnoff on your left. See the directions above to get to the McGowan ski area trailhead parking.

You can also access the McGowan trail system from two points along Hwy 36 before you get to the Park Rd. turnoff. The Nanny Creek Trail starts from a big turnout on a corner about 3.5 miles out of Mineral. Just a mile farther up the road you will see another large turnout for the Church Camp Trail. The Church Camp trail is quite

easy until you get near the upper end. The Church Camp trail is often groomed by the Forest Service, as is part of McGowan Rd. Some people like to do a car shuttle from the turn-off up on the Park Rd. down to Hwy 36. This provides about 2.5 miles of mostly downhill skiing. (There are some short steep sections near the top that can be challenging in icy conditions.) The Church Camp Trail intersects both the Christie Hill Trail and the McGowan Road Trail (see a map of the McGowan XC Ski Area in the Files section). When combined with the Conard View Trail or the little used Christie Hill trail, Church Camp can make for full day of skiing with a wide variety of scenery and ski challenges.

The trail map has indicators of difficulty to help with your route choices. Some people like to park at the McGowan Road trailhead and simply ski the easy road out to the weather station and back (about a 2.5 mile round trip). This route can be easily extended, but the downhill section beyond the weather station is a bit steep and can be very fast (and covered with sitz marks!) in icy conditions.

The Nanny Creek Trail is rarely groomed. In recent years it seems Nanny Creek has been the trail most susceptible to destruction of ski tracks by snowshoers. The popularity of snowshoeing has been a mixed blessing. While it has gotten more people out to enjoy the beauty of our snowlands under their own power, many snowshoers seem blissfully unaware how difficult they are making it for skiers nor are they aware that traditional trail courtesy is for skiers and snowshoers to make separate tracks. On several occasions, we have found Nanny Creek rendered useless for skiers by snowshoers walking three or four abreast, not only obliterating the ski tracks but, by taking up the whole road, making it impossible to put in new tracks for skiers. When snowshoe tracks freeze they become extremely difficult to negotiate on xc skis. We are working with the Forest Service to get some trail courtesy signs put up, but progress has been slow. In spite these inconveniences, the Lassen/McGowan area offers incredible vistas and great skiing. Enjoy!

*Safety notes:

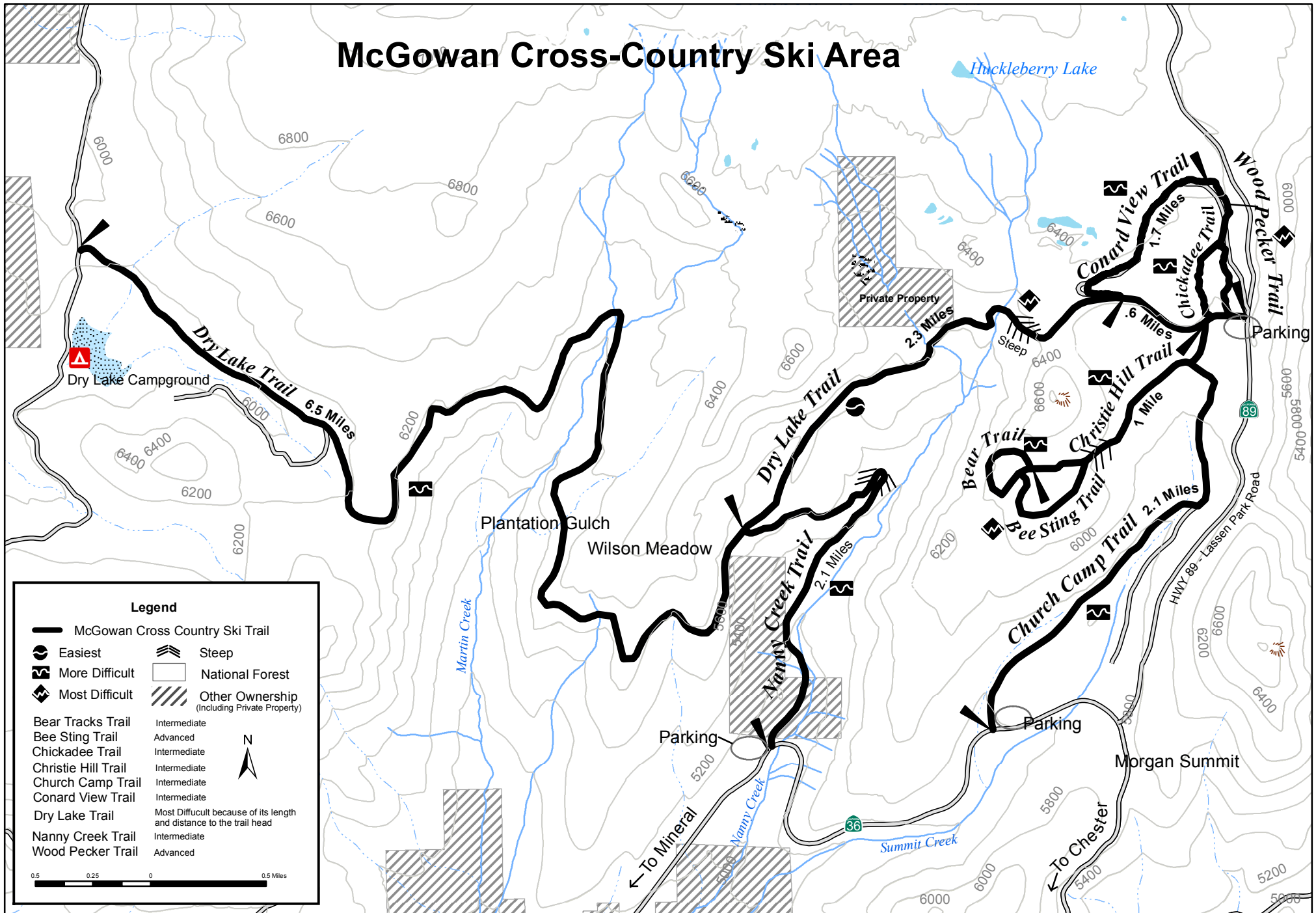
Skiing in a light snowstorm can make for some truly magical ski days, but always check the weather before you venture into the mountains to make sure you are not facing a major storm. (See weather sites in the Links section.)

Once you leave Chico on Hwy 32 or Red Bluff on Hwy 36, there are no gas stations until you reach Chester. The gas station in Mineral has been closed for several years. Always fill your gas tank before traveling into snow country. Shady corners on Hwy 32 can hide black ice. On cold mornings Hwy 36 is a safer choice.

The McGowan Area ski trails are not patrolled. You are on your own. Cell phones usually work at the turnout and on the high ridges but not the ski trails. Although serious injuries are rare for xc skiers and snowshoers it is still strongly advised that you always carry the Ten Essentials (see the Files section).

The law requires that you carry chains in the mountains in winter. You can be cited for failure to do so. 4WD vehicles with snow and mud rated tires are almost always sufficient and will get you past those CHP chain checkpoints. Even with 4WD it is still a good idea to carry chains in case you have to negotiate seriously iced up roads to get home.

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Legend

- McGowan Cross Country Ski Trail
 - Easiest
 - More Difficult
 - Most Difficult
 - Steep
 - National Forest
 - Other Ownership (Including Private Property)
- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Bear Tracks Trail | Intermediate |
| Bee Sting Trail | Advanced |
| Chickadee Trail | Intermediate |
| Christie Hill Trail | Intermediate |
| Church Camp Trail | Intermediate |
| Conard View Trail | Intermediate |
| Dry Lake Trail | Most Difficult because of its length and distance to the trail head |
| Nanny Creek Trail | Intermediate |
| Wood Pecker Trail | Advanced |

