

Enjoy Soapstone Prairie but Don't Be Caught Off-Guard!

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is a local treasure encompassing 28 square-miles of remote country and uninterrupted scenery. The rugged and diverse terrain offers a wealth of opportunities for biking, hiking and horseback riding. Soapstone Prairie's remoteness, rapid changes and extremes in weather, and limited cell phone coverage can make for a true "wilderness" experience.

This past summer the extremes and remoteness of Soapstone Prairie took a few visitors by surprise. Natural Areas Rangers who patrol the site daily assisted visitors with incidents that had happy outcomes but could have been worse. Several visitors were thrown their horses, several suffered from heat exposure, and many others experienced a "longer than planned" outing due to underestimating the scale of the property and unfamiliarity with the trail system.

As the fall approaches we offer a few suggestions so that your next visit does not take you by surprise:

Be prepared: Soapstone's 18,000 acres are remote and varying in terrain. Plan your trip ahead and take into account the distance and weather conditions you're likely to encounter. Start early. Sundown comes quickly with autumn's shorter days. To help you navigate trails, carry a site map which you can find at the trailheads or download one from our website at www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/finder/soapstone. Navigate the property by making note of the lettered trail intersection markers. If you are traveling alone, let someone know your travel plans and estimated return time. As cell phone service is not reliable remember an emergency call box is located at the entrance gate station. Be aware that help is more than an hour away.

Weather moves quickly: Conditions at Soapstone Prairie are often harsher than weather in Fort Collins. Exposure to the elements can lead to heat illness or hypothermia. Wind, sun, and exertion can quickly dehydrate. Replace fluids at a rate of 4 oz. for each 20 minutes of activity even in cold weather. Water is not available at Soapstone Prairie. Replace electrolytes with a salty snack or sports drink every hour. As fall approaches fast moving rain and snow squalls will become increasingly common. Be sure you have more than enough food, water, insulation, wind and rain clothing.

Wildlife caution: Rattlesnakes are common at Soapstone. If you see a one, give it plenty of clearance (6 feet or more) and let it move off on its own.

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is an extraordinary place in a backcountry setting. Plan your visit, don't be caught off-guard, and be prepared to be blown away by its rugged scenery, diverse trail offerings, and abundant wildlife!

Rick Bachand is the Natural Areas Ranger Supervisor. Natural Area and Trails Rangers can be reached at 970-416-2147.

Caption:

Soapstone Prairie is open dawn to dusk, March- November. From Fort Collins, drive north on Highway 1 (Terry Lake Road) turning left (north) onto County Road 15 towards Waverly. Continue on CR 15 to the intersection with Rawhide Flats Road (right turn) and follow north to the entrance station.