



# FAQs on Freeze-Thaw and Winter Riding

***Winter riding is tricky - if you are leaving tracks in the ground, turn around!***

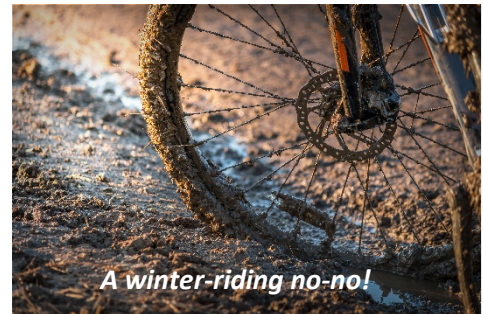
***Prevent trail damage and help MORE maintain a sustainable trail system for all users!***

## Freeze Thaw During Winter to Early Spring Riding

During much of the year, mountain biking trails in the area are usually good for riding within a day or so of a normal rain event. Things get a little more complicated during the winter and early spring seasons, with the impacts of the freeze-thaw cycle on local trail conditions. Understanding freeze thaw will help you become a better trail supporter and help MORE maintain a sustainable trail system year-round.

### What is freeze thaw?

When the temperature drops below freezing, the moisture in the ground freezes in place instead of draining away. Because water expands as it freezes, the frozen soil gets broken up, resulting in less compaction of the trail surface. Once the air temperature rises above freezing, the newly broken up soil, in combination with the now melting ice, combine to make a muddy mess of the trail surface. These conditions are often worse where the sun warms up the trail during the day, but entire trail systems can be impacted when freeze-thaw occurs on a repeated cycle over several days.



Gauging when freeze-thaw will be a problem is tricky, and even the small amount of moisture that accumulates due to a nightly frost can cause wet trails. As a general rule, if the temperature drops below freezing (32°F) for more than a couple of hours, a freeze-thaw cycle will occur. And once the melting starts, it can be several days before the trail has dried enough to ride again, unless, there is another freeze-thaw cycle, where the timing starts over again.

### When can I ride in the Winter?

You can ride trails that are **DRY or FROZEN**.

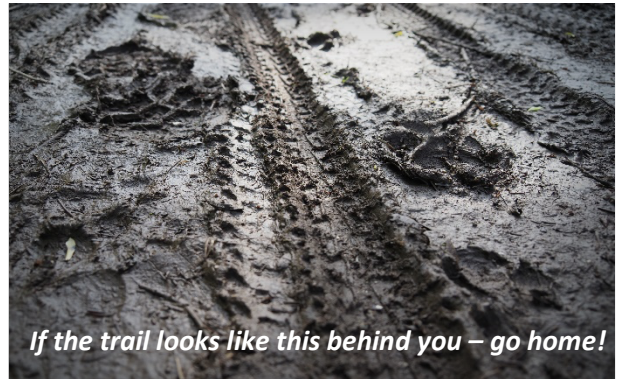
Depending on how cold it has been and how much rain or snow melt was recently added, it is usually okay to ride the trails if the air temperature is and has been well below freezing for several hours. For example, early in the morning after a night or more of below-freezing air temperature can yield a good, hard frozen trail surface; a “hard” freeze typically occurs with sustained temperatures of 28°F or lower.

***But it is important to plan your ride so that you are off the trail well before the melting begins.*** Pay attention to the expected increase in temperature as the sun rises – if air temperature increases or if the sun is warming up the trail surface, the top layer of the trail will begin to thaw, and riding will result in a rutted and damaged trail.

Also, it will take several to many days for the trails to dry out following a freeze-thaw cycle or a winter rain event. How long depends on many factors, including air temperature, trail conditions, soil type, evapotranspiration rates, sun exposure, and others.

### **How do I know I shouldn't be on the trails and why does it matter?**

***Stay off the trails when the trail surface is muddy OR if you are leaving ruts in the trail.*** Riding in these conditions results in significant trail damage, and makes it take even longer for the trail to dry out. Trail repair following this type of damage requires hours of hard work by MORE volunteers – often requiring de-berming and filling in damaged areas using hand tools. Although we have an amazing group of dedicated volunteers, there is a lot of routine trail maintenance and trail expansion work that we would prefer to work rather than spending hours repairing trail damage resulting from rutted trails. Riding only on dry or frozen trails will help sustain a healthy trail network for many years to come.



### **Where can I find more information about trail conditions in my area?**

Check out **Trail Status Resources** at [www.more-mtb.org](http://www.more-mtb.org) for additional information on local trail rainout lines and Facebook groups that often discuss local trail conditions.

### **What about when the trails are 95% dry, but there is an occasional puddle due to a drainage issue?**

Remember the rule for the occasional puddle is to “ride through it” and keep single track single! Riding around the puddle only widens the trail and makes trail repair more difficult. You can also contact the trail liaison (e.g., [park name]@more-mtb.org) and offer to come out to help nick and drain puddles to keep the trail in good shape.

### **These parks are public, and I pay taxes, so why can't I just ride and let the park staff fix up the trails?**

Riding on wet trails causes damage that cannot be easily fixed-up by limited park staff and funding. Although the parks support some trail repair, they rely heavily on MORE volunteers like you and fundraising to keep the over 750 miles of natural surface trails in the DMV area ready to ride. Even with 1,000 volunteers, that would make every MORE volunteer responsible for ¼ mile of trail repair, which would be a herculean task for even the most dedicated trail steward!

### **Where else can I ride?**

Check out **Alternative Ride Suggestions** at [www.more-mtb.org](http://www.more-mtb.org) – there are many gravel routes and asphalt paths in the area.