

# Seminar focuses on salty Lake Abert

By Helen Schmidling  
Correspondent

Lake Abert in south Central Oregon has no fish, is too shallow for boating, too harsh for swimming, and far from scenic with its barren shoreline, teeming with rattlesnakes. You wouldn't want to pitch a tent or build a cabin on the shore. But if you're a Wilson's phalarope or an eared grebe, or other migrating bird, it's prime dining on the north-south flyway, a buffet of brine shrimp and alkali flies.

Lake Abert and nearby Summer Lake are the remains of the pluvial Lake Chewaucan, which once covered 500 square miles in the high desert of south-central Oregon, between Klamath Falls and Lakeview.

Next week, Oregon Public Broadcasting's Oregon Field Guide will visit Lake Abert. The program will air Thursday, March 19, at 8:30 p.m. and again on the following Sunday, March 22, at 6:30 p.m.

Furthermore, a workshop and symposium on the lake and its importance in the Lower Chewaucan Basin Aquatic Ecosystem will take place on April 24-25 in Camp Sherman. The High Lakes Aquatic Alliance Foundation, Inc. (HLAAF), headquartered in Camp Sherman, is hosting the two-day event.

Frank P. Conte, PhD, of Camp Sherman, professor of

zoology (emeritus) of Oregon State University, calls the situation of Lake Abert critical. The lake is in jeopardy, because the salinity of the water has increased and lake levels – which historically varied from year to year – have receded dramatically of late, to the point where the once-plentiful brine shrimp are nearly all gone. This dramatically impacts the historical migration pattern of these many birds.

This year's drought has compounded the situation. What the lake needs is more water. The seminar will address the issue and potential solutions, from the perspective of scientists, environmentalists, fishers and ranchers.

As an expert on salt (in water, in your body, and in the environment), Conte has become one of Lake Abert's champions. As president of HLAAF, he is a prime organizer of the upcoming seminar. He's also petitioning the state for help on behalf of the lake, the lowly brine shrimp, and the birds who rely on them as a food source.

"If you were to prepare a cup of water approximating the salinity of Lake Abert, it would give new meaning to the salty taste," Conte said. "But it does not give meaning to 'salt load / hypernatremia' of blood. That comes about if you cannot pee out the salt, or secrete it out your nose or eyes or ears or lungs. That is why the birds can eat the

brine shrimp and flies in Lake Abert. They can eliminate the salt from their nose salt glands. They eat brine shrimp and flies for fats and proteins, and pee out the nose. Very different from humans."

Conte is reaching out for support, both to Governor Kate Brown, and to the public, who use the high lakes Aquatic System for fishing, sailing, shoreline hiking, scenic photography, exercising pets, biking, or other types of recreation. Lifetime membership in the HLAAF is available for a \$25 donation. HLAAF is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to creating a partnership network of science and conservation agencies. For more information on the organization or upcoming events email Frank Conte at [spfclrecon@centurylink.net](mailto:spfclrecon@centurylink.net).

# Fatbike event set at Black Butte Ranch

Black Butte Ranch and Blazin Saddles are set to bring the third and final race in their Cow Patty Crit Fatbike Race series. This "FUNale" will take place at noon on Saturday, March 14, at Hoodoo Ski Area.

The course will be designed to inspire anyone to give it a whirl (so it won't be too tough), but stairs, ramps, logs, tight corners, and cyclo-cross-style barriers are all part of the fatbike fun. Awesome prizes will be up for grabs for each category from Blazin Saddles Bike Shop, Hoodoo Ski Area, and Black Butte Ranch.

Pre-race registration closes Friday, March 13, at 12 a.m. and can be done online at

[www.ultrasignup.com](http://www.ultrasignup.com) (search for "Cow Patty Crit"). Day-of registration and check-in will be available at the race site from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Pre-race registration fee is \$15 and day-of registration fee is \$25. There are no refunds. Race begins promptly at noon.

The race site will be snowy and/or muddy, so please dress appropriately. If you are competing be sure to wear appropriate clothing including closed-toe shoes and a helmet (both are required). If you are spectating, dress for weather and site conditions.

For more information contact race coordinator Kevin O'Hara at 541-595-5877 or by email: [KOHara@BlackButteRanch.com](mailto:KOHara@BlackButteRanch.com).

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