

Metolius River not affected by fishing restriction

The Metolius River will remain open for angling under normal hours, despite state-wide restrictions enacted last week.

Last Thursday, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife curtailed fishing hours on most of Oregon's rivers to avoid additional stress on native fish already suffering from high water-temperatures and low stream-flows from this year's drought. The cold, spring-fed Metolius was among several reaches of water exempted because they are less prone to high-water temperature risks.

The closure announcement has caused some confusion and alarm in the local fishing community.

"While the ODFW emergency closures on some rivers in Oregon is not only big news, it is also responsible and a good thing to do on rivers where salmon are dying," said Jeff Perin, of The Fly Fisher's Place in Sisters. "That said, people around Bend and Sisters are not understanding the press releases and misinformation and rumor are running high."

The Deschutes River above Macks Canyon, the Crooked River (from mouth to Bowman Dam) and Tumalo Creek are also exempted.

"Most of the Central Oregon rivers we fish are not effected by the ODFW closures that were published (July 16)," Perin noted. "People are freaking out for no reason. There is so much misinformation circulating about this closure thing I think it is important to inform our friends that fishing Central Oregon is as good as it always

is. The water remains cold, and flows are great. Come fishing. Book a trip. Go on your own. Whatever. Just don't get swept away from the hype that is surging through the news right now."

Closures are as follows: Effective Saturday, July 18, and until further notice, all waterbodies defined as streams in the 2015 Oregon Sportfishing Regulations are closed above tidewater (where applicable) to fishing for trout, salmon, steelhead and sturgeon from 2 p.m. to one hour before sunrise.

Angling for these species is now prohibited at all times in the Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls, including the Clackamas River up to the Interstate 205 Bridge, the Multnomah Channel and the Gilbert River. The following sections of the John Day River will also have complete closures: The mainstem of the John Day River above Indian Creek near Prairie City; the Middle Fork of the John Day River above Mosquito Creek near the town of Galena; the North Fork of the John Day River above Desolation Creek and Desolation Creek.

"Earlier this month, we indicated that if these drought conditions continued, we may have to close or restrict some fisheries," said Mike Gauvin, ODFW's recreation fisheries manager. "These are difficult, but necessary actions to protect native fish already suffering from extreme drought

conditions.

"This doesn't mean that all fishing has to stop." According to Gauvin, most streams will still be open in the early hours when water temperatures are cool, and there are many great fishing opportunities in lakes, reservoirs for hatchery stocked rainbow trout, warmwater fish, like small-mouth bass or crappie, as well as all of the ocean fisheries.

"As extreme weather events become more frequent due to climate change, we need to be prepared for the stress these conditions will have on fish, wildlife and their habitats," Ed Bowles, Fish Division administrator said. "Planning for the effects of these changing climatic conditions presents a unique challenge for us, yet we are committed to doing our best to enhance resiliency to climate change and avoid significant impacts on our natural resources."

ODFW already implemented emergency regulations on several other rivers. In addition, trout stocking schedules and locations have been adjusted and some hatchery fish have been released early as a result of high water temperatures. Elevated water temperatures have led to salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon deaths in several rivers.

Gauvin encourages the public to report sightings of stranded fish, or other wildlife distressed by drought, to the department and to take precautions when fishing during

these drought conditions.

On days when temperatures soar, anglers can do their part to reduce the stress on fish by adopting the following measures:

- Fish early in day when water temperatures are cooler.
 - Use a thermometer to check water temperatures frequently. Stop fishing when temperatures exceed 70 degrees.
 - Consider changing locations to high-elevation lakes or shaded streams near headwaters. These places are often cooler.
 - Use barbless hooks so you can release fish easily without harming them.
 - Use the appropriate gear and land fish quickly. The longer the fight, the less likely the fish will survive.
 - Keep the fish in the water when you unhook it, and cradle the fish upright until it revives enough to swim away.
 - Use your judgement. If conditions where you want to fish seem especially severe (low, hot water), consider fishing somewhere else where water conditions are better.
 - Check the regulation update pages on the ODFW website before you head out to make sure temporary emergency regulations have not been put in place for the waters you want to fish.
- Gauvin recommends anglers check the weekly Recreation Report on the ODFW website for updates on stocking, water conditions and boating access.

In addition to fish and fishing-related actions, the dry, warm weather could increase the danger of wildfires. Wildland fires can destroy hundreds, sometimes thousands, of acres of habitat. Late-season fires may also affect hunting season dates, hunting opportunities, and the condition of winter range for deer, elk and other species. Fewer water-holes means wildlife will have to travel farther for water. Leave wildlife access to water by not camping at water sources.

Less water will also increase competition for placement of hunting blinds amongst hunters. Setting up a blind at a water-hole is a common and lawful practice, but hunters are asked to be extra considerate of other hunters and wildlife this year. Also, follow land managers' regulations and don't set up blinds too early or leave them indefinitely. BLM allows hunting blinds to be up for 10 days. U.S. Forest Service requires a permit and also has a time limitation.

The Bureau of Land Management does not allow camping within 300 feet of water sources; U.S. Forest Service rules vary by forest and area.

In the effort to raise awareness of the dire conditions that Oregon faces this summer, Governor Kate Brown's office has created a website for more information, www.drought.oregon.gov, and launched the "#ORDrought" campaign.

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