

SHOOTING: Rangers seek to minimize user conflicts

Continued from page 1

shooting in the forest. Sometimes that sense of danger is simply the result of being startled by the sound of gunfire erupting in the forest. While the cadence of a well-run AR-15 engaged in a Mozambique Drill (2 fast/1 slow) may be a symphony for some, for those unaccustomed to firearms, the sound itself can be alarming. And, if done unsafely, target shooting can put others in danger.

“There’s safe ways to target shoot, and there’s unsafe ways to target shoot.” Nelson-Dean said.

The primary consideration is to be sure of your target — and what lies behind it. A good backstop helps ensure that “stray” bullets or ricochets don’t pose a danger to people hiking or riding in the forest. Most local shooters congregate at one of Sisters Country’s many gravel pits, where piles of dirt and cinder and tall slopes keep the activity confined and safe.

One of those gravel pits in Sisters has been a focus of discussion. The McKenzie Gravel Pit just west of Crossroads off Highway 242 lies relatively close to the

subdivision, and the equestrian Jimerson Trail runs nearby. The sound of gunfire is plainly audible from Crossroads, and some horseback riders have felt insecure in the area. Some locals want to see the pit closed to shooting.

“I don’t know where discussions are, but it’s not yet closed,” Nelson-Dean reported.

It is worth noting that the entire National Forest in the area — except within 150 feet of Crossroads — is open to shooting.

The discussions around the McKenzie Pit illustrate the conflicting values that can come into play in the forest, potentially pitting local residents who value their peace and quiet, and hikers and horseback riders concerned about their safety against target shooters. But then some of those shooters are also hikers, horseback riders, and local residents themselves.

“The more people we add into a situation, the more complex it becomes,” Nelson-Dean acknowledged.

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Nelson-Dean said that the Forest Service wants everyone in the forest to be aware that there are others pursuing their recreation out there — and to act responsibly so that the agency does not have to step in with additional management actions.

Rules and restrictions for shooters

There are 12 “golden rules” of safety that shooters should all know from the time they first pick up a firearm.

1. Always treat the gun as loaded.
2. Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.
3. Always keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.
4. Always keep the gun unloaded until you are ready to use it.
5. Never point the gun at anything you don’t intend to destroy.
6. Be sure of your target and what is beyond it.
7. Learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the gun you are using.
8. Always use proper ammunition.
9. Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions before loading and shooting.
10. If your gun fails to fire when the trigger is pulled, hold your shooting position for several seconds; then with the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, carefully unload the gun.
11. Don’t rely on the gun’s safety to keep it from firing.
12. Be aware of your surroundings when handling guns so you don’t trip or lose your balance and accidentally point and/or fire the gun at anyone or anything.

Target shooting is allowed on National Forest or grassland unless restricted. Check your local ranger district for more information about local restriction. General restrictions include:

- In or within 150 yards from a residence, building, campsite, developed recreation area or occupied area.
- Across or on a National Forest or grassland road or body of water.
- In any manner or place where any person or property is exposed to injury or damage as a result of such discharge.
- Into or within a cave.
- Firing tracer bullets or incendiary ammunition.
- Disturbing, injuring, destroying, or in any way damaging any prehistoric, historic, or archaeological resource, structure, site, artifact, property.
- Abandoning any personal property or failing to dispose of all garbage, including targets, paper, cans, bottles, appliances.

Forest Service spokesperson Jean Nelson-Dean also encouraged additional awareness of issues particular to the Central Oregon region. During fire season, it is important to avoid shooting over dry grasses or into areas that might catch fire. The use of exploding targets is generally prohibited

in the first during fire season.

Nelson-Dean said that there have been some issues regarding the use of exploding targets in the Prineville BLM district, but she isn’t aware of any problems in the Sisters area.

Shooters should also be mindful of their impact on the land. Some shooters are notorious for bringing appliances and other junk out into the forest to shoot — and leaving a mess behind. That gives all shooters a black eye.

“Use appropriate targets,” Nelson-Dean said. “When you’re out and target shooting... encourage each other not only to shoot responsibly, but to clean up after yourselves.”

There are many target options available in addition to paper targets. “Reactive” targets include steel gongs, rubber targets and clay pigeons, which are available in a biodegradable form.

Don’t put targets on trees.

“Shooting trees is not only unsafe, it’s illegal,” Nelson-Dean said.

Done properly, target shooting is a safe endeavor, enjoyed by men, women and children — one of the multitude of activities available on the National Forest around Sisters.

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