

Jefferson goes hopping mad for frogs



STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

The Jefferson Mint Festival is known less for its mint and more for the annual frog-jumping competition.

ANNETTE UTZ
SPECIAL TO THE APPEAL TRIBUNE

Jefferson is normally a quiet town but things really get hopping when the annual Jefferson Mint Festival and Frog Jump takes place.

This is the 60th year of the event and with the theme "60 Years of Hoppiness" the festival will celebrate by taking a trip back to the 1950s. This comes complete with a sock hop, car show and the always popular frog jumping contest.

"The big thing this year is that we're bringing it back to Main Street where everybody loves it to be," festival organizing committee member Stacy Bittick said. "We have a brand new committee and we've been working hard to get input from the community. After all, it's about families and kids. We'll have music, a dunk booth, a bounce house, all kinds of family-friendly activities.

"We've also been working with other small-town festivals and inviting

them to participate in ours. We've been getting really good feedback about it."

Most of the action takes place near the Greater Jefferson Community Center, 107 Main St. Opening ceremonies will begin at noon on Friday, July 14, with the national anthem, speeches, vendors and, hopefully, a bi-plane flyover, according to Bittick.

Later in the afternoon, a chicken dinner at 5:30 p.m. can provide the nourishment needed for guests to kick up their heels at the 7 p.m. sock hop.

Saturday's fun includes a pancake breakfast at the fire hall (189 Main St.), live music, a car show at Umpqua Bank, a downtown parade and the frog jump. Registration for the frog competition is at 11 a.m. at the library, 128 Main St., with the frogs taking the spotlight at 3 p.m.

The festival tradition began in 1957 in celebration of the multitude of mint farms in the area at

the time and in recognition of the local mint farmers. The frog jump was introduced the following year as an added attraction and it's still going strong.

"As a musician, I've been working with the festival for years helping to organize talent," Committee Chairman Dave Black said. "I've been the chairman for the last couple of years - I guess I raised my hand at the right time during a meeting - and I didn't realize how much work goes into putting these festivals together but I'm having a

wonderful time and get to work with a great group of people.

"For a while, there wasn't much enthusiasm about it (the Mint Festival) since we held it out at the middle school. We wanted to create more community involvement and now that it's more accessible for everyone this year, I think we're on the right track. I'm really excited about where we are now in our planning and we're going to work to get the festival back to what it once was. It's going to be a lot of fun."

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Will state break record for outdoor crowds a third consecutive year?

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The last two years in Oregon have brought record numbers of people into the state's great outdoors.

This year, expect more of the same.

"All signs point to another busy summer," Oregon Parks and Recreation Department spokesman Chris Havel said. "I think we'll end up very close to last year's record in spite of the wet spring."

While one of the wettest years on record has slowed some outdoor enthusiasm this spring — and heavy mountain snowpack could dampen alpine exploring in the early summer — the overall trend is toward another crowded summer, officials said.

"We're expecting another big year of increased visitors," Detroit district ranger Grady McMahan said.

A big reason for that, McMahan and Havel said, is the total solar eclipse on Aug. 21.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors are expected to descend on Oregon for one of the most anticipated events in state history. With hotels and campgrounds booked to capacity — and overflowing crowds expected on highways and public lands — the eclipse is expected to create short-term chaos and boost long-term numbers.

"We're getting calls from all over the U.S. and the world about the best viewing spots, the best times to come out, just about everything," said McMahan, who is in charge of Detroit district of Willamette National Forest, which sits squarely in the path of totality. "People are planning not just to come here for one day, but to hang out for maybe weeks. They're looking for a complete recreation experience and that will make what would already be a busy time even crazier."

Havel agreed. "Whoever scheduled this eclipse for the busiest time of the year really didn't think it through,"



PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

The "First Pool" is a small swimming hole upstream of the Elkhorn Trailhead on the Little North Santiam River. The river is running almost twice as high as a year ago and well above normal.



The summit of South Sister gets fairly crowded during sunny weekends in August and September.

Havel said with a laugh. "We're guessing an 8 to 12 percent bump from the eclipse as people hang out beyond the weekend a little longer than they normally would."

Summer recreation tips

Beware early season river and creeks

The wet and snowy winter means rivers and creeks will be running higher and colder than normal, making them very dangerous for the next few weeks at least.

The Little North San-

tiam River — popular for swimming — is running almost twice as high as a year ago and well above normal.

A person boating a river or jumping into a swimming hole is likely to find more treacherous conditions than normal.

"The water temperature is frigid — 50 degrees or below in many areas," said Ashley Massey, spokeswoman for the Oregon Marine Board. "The current is very strong. Arms and legs quickly cramp with exertion in cold water, especially when the outside

temperatures are hot.

"This scenario is how many people drown."

Get reservations

Many campgrounds on Oregon's national forest lands have a number of campsites available for reservations. This is highly recommended, as the land managers have said competition for first-come, first-served sites have been brutal the past few years.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for eight years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsOROutdoors.

Wildfire

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detto said.

Oregon's largest wildfire of the past century, in fact, was sparked after a wet winter. In 2012 — a year that saw above-average snowpack — the Long Draw fire roared across southeastern Oregon, burning 557,628 acres. That year saw 1.2 million acres burned, the most in two decades.

On the state's more timbered west side, officials are expecting less drama, but are still concerned about factors like dry lightning strikes and human-caused wildfires.

Last year, humans were responsible for more than half of the 220,000 acres burned statewide.

"We can't be complacent because just one lightning strike or careless camper can burn thousands of acres," said Ken Armstrong, Public Affairs Director for the Oregon Department of Forestry. "The highly combustible, understory fuels dry out quickly, and when you add lightning to the mix, the danger can be high."

Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for nine years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsOROutdoors.

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