

# Outdoors

## Learning to fish under coronavirus rules in Oregon



Henry Hughes fishes along the Alsea River amid the pandemic. PHOTO COURTESY OF HENRY HUGHES

**Henry Hughes**  
Special to Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

When our department meeting at Western Oregon University was canceled on March 12 over concerns of COVID-19, I figured it was a good excuse to go fishing.

There were few known cases of the virus in Oregon at that point. We thought the cancellation was just a precaution.

I emailed my colleague, Jackson Stalley:

“Fishing?” I asked.

“Yes, indeed!” he replied.

We met that afternoon with a hug before heading to a Willamette Valley pond to catch stocked rainbow trout waking up after a winter slumber. We shared a flask of whiskey and caught a 25-inch rainbow that weighed 8 pounds.

It was the last time fishing would feel normal.

I began Oregon’s spring fishing season when COVID-19 was just a whisper.

**I began Oregon’s spring fishing season when COVID-19 was just a whisper. A few weeks later, fishing has become a completely different experience, one in which social distancing is required for a pastime that could be outlawed at any moment.**

A few weeks later, fishing has become a completely different experience, one in which social distancing is required for a pastime that could be outlawed at any moment.

As most of Oregon’s parks and public lands have been closed down to recreation, fishing, at least for now, remains open and viable except on parts of the Columbia River. But it has required getting used to — the rules changing by the day. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has stressed fishing in small groups, or solo, keeping at least 6 feet from each other and staying close to home. Many boat ramps are likewise closed.

“Getting outdoors and fishing is a

healthy way to get fresh air and exercise during this difficult time provided the rules are followed,” ODFW director Curt Melcher told the Statesman Journal. “If we do see anglers are not abiding the order and endangering themselves and others, then we may need to modify fishing seasons.”

It has turned fishing into an altogether different experience.

Two weeks after our department meeting was canceled, Jackson emailed and suggested we return to the same trout pond. This time we took separate cars and boats. We didn’t hug, and any toasting over big fish would be done remotely. With Jackson paddling on the other side of the pond, I drifted quietly,

casting a streamer. Although I enjoy fishing with others, there’s also something meditative and soothing about angling alone. A muskrat swam within inches of my boat, and I paid closer attention to the redwing blackbirds singing in the cattails, and the osprey diving to seize a hapless trout. Osprey are paring up and rebuilding their nests this time of year.

Back in the real world, things got worse. There were several cases of COVID-19 in Polk County by March 25. People we knew had symptoms, a student at WOU tested positive. Almost 20,000 had died worldwide.

My friend, Mark Van Steeter, texted me: “Meet on the Alsea tomorrow? Water looks right.”

Mark, a geography professor, knows a lot about world health issues. He’s also a great steelhead angler, and when he says the conditions are right, I pay attention. The Alsea is also a short drive from our homes.

**See FISHING, Page 2B**

## About those projects you’ve been putting off



**Fishing**  
Henry Miller  
Guest columnist

“Depression is the inability to construct a future.”

In times of self-isolation and social distancing, it will serve us well, I think, to ponder that line by the late Rollo May, an existential psychologist ... and do the latter to avoid the former.

May probably was speaking clinically, but his words have a practical application.

To that end, maybe we should spend our collective enforced exile optimistically preparing for the future.

Nothing major, you understand; no building a boat in the basement, if you have one, or a canoe in the carport, in my case.

Think small with projects that rein-

force the belief that we’re going to come out of the current time in solitary in a better place.

We’re talking stuff that you planned on doing before the current reality intervened, mini-projects that are forward-looking.

Such as those \$%#@ chest waders.

### Leaky chest waders

There is an annoyingly small but persistent leak somewhere around the booty seam where the neoprene meets the waterproof — used to be — fabric on the left leg (or is it the right?, been awhile).

Thinking about the future, those waders will be essential for fishing and clamming trips.

In fact pre-coronavirus, there were a couple of outings on the docket for May and June.

Other tasks that in normal times you do in panic prep, usually the night before you load the truck, are great time-

fillers.

Does that Coleman stove need some maintenance before summer camping?

Drag it out of storage, oil and gas it up and see.

What was it dad taught you? The lever goes up to light, after a minute, the tube burns up.

Well waddaya know?

Still got it.

Even though you’re sitting in your back yard, the sight of that sputtering, then that steady, hissing, bright blue flame lights the promise of adventures to come.

Ditto for the old-school lantern.

Those silk mantels look shot, probably from thumping and bumping over that road between Sisters and Three Creeks Lake a couple of years ago.

Let’s just make sure the spares are handy to install when you get to the campground. And check it out that

**See MILLER, Page 2B**



**Projects can help remind you of better days in the past, and better days still to come.** SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL