

OUTDOORS



State parks officials made the decision to close many state parks ahead of spring break this year to prevent the spread of COVID-19. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

Parks director talks COVID-19 shutdown, wildfires

Zach Urness Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Even during a year packed with drama, the weekend that shut down Oregon's outdoors remains surreal moment in state history.

Beginning in the coastal town of Warrenton, where mayor Henry Balensifer declared tourists a "clear and present danger," all of Oregon's recreation destinations would eventually be closed for nearly two months due to concerns about the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lisa Sumption, the director of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, was in the middle of that moment and more during what's been a chaotic 2020 for Oregon's outdoors.

The czar of 257 state parks and recreation sites, including many of Oregon's most beautiful places and most popular campgrounds, Sumption navigated the shutdown, reopening and economic impact of COVID-19, along with historic



Oregon Parks and Recreation Director Lisa Sumption. PHOTO COURTESY OF OPRD

wildfires and wind storms.

Last week, Sumption and OPRD associate director and longtime spokesman Chris Havel joined the Statesman Journal's Explore Oregon Podcast to

talk about why the parks were shut down, how they've been impacted and what comes next — including when yurts and cabins will reopen.

The podcast also featured Havel,

Sumption and I talking about our favorite less-visited state parks.

Below are some highlights from the conversation, but to hear the entire thing, subscribe to the Explore Oregon Podcast or find it on StatesmanJournal.com/explore.

Zach: All right, so we've been having these kind of conversations since 2014 and typically we're talking about a wide-ranging bunch of issues — crowding at state parks, drone use at Silver Falls, where you could expand camping on the Coast. This year, you faced a pandemic that required shutting down and then reopening the entire state park system, major staffing shortages, a historic summer for people getting outside, and then parks hit by wildfires. I guess the question is, how are you going to remember 2020?

Lisa Sumption: This is the reset year, this is the back to basics. Anything we thought we were talking about before

See **DIRECTOR**, Page 3B

Of clams and rototillers, mushrooms and leafblowers



Fishing

Henry Miller
Guest columnist

At every monthly Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting, there is an agenda item known as the field reports.

It's a series of presentations from regional managers, along with reports about department initiatives and programs from sections such as Information and Education and the Conservation Program about timely issues and events around the state.

It's all interesting and informative stuff, which since March because of Covid has been delivered virtually via Zoom.

That's a popular streaming service, the use of which is no more difficult to deal with than trying to get a bird's nest out of a bait-tying reel with a salmon on the other end of a line.

For insight, ask a teacher ... about Zoom, that is, not the bird's nest.

On a personal note, Zoom has become the Hollywood Squares version of family togetherness during the pandemic. RE: Hollywood Squares, ask your grandparents.

Now where was I? Oh, yes.

The field reports.

Back in the day, I always found one of the highlights of commission meetings



Not a rototiller in sight during a clamming outing on Siletz Bay, site of motorized clam carnage in a long-ago item in the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division field report. HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

to be the presentations by the Fish and Wildlife Division of the Oregon State Police.

One unforgettable item grabbed everyone's attention.

Along with various and sundry poaching incidents, the uniformed presenter reported that a couple of enterprising scofflaws had lugged, no kidding, a gas-powered rototiller onto Siletz Bay at low tide.

To go clamming, producing a churning swath of sea-life mulch in the process.

For the uninitiated, rototillers, tractors with disk harrows, power augers and other motorized gardening and farm implements are not what are described in the Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations as legal methods of take.

Nor are industrial-strength leaf blowers for uncovering shitake mushrooms, another field reports highlight from a different commission meeting.

Turns out there is another way to keep up with what's going on at the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division.

The section puts out a monthly newsletter about the highlights and lowlights, albeit usually about a month behind, featuring everything from hunting and fishing violations to rescues of people, critters and birds.

It's free in PDF form, and best of all doesn't involve Zoom. Check it out at <https://www.oregon.gov/osp/programs/fw/Pages/Newsletter.aspx>

TEXAS BOATING TALES - The capsizing of five boats by the wakes of fellow participants during a July 19 on-water parade for Trump on Lake Travis in Texas reminded me about another Lone Star fiasco involving a pleasure boat, that one on the Gulf of Mexico near Kingsville.

I joined a fellow Navy buddy for a fishing junket to a pier to fish for sea trout.

As an aside, the late and much-lamented Wayne "Skeeter" Singleton was also known as "Duck Butt" for the wisps of downy hair around the bald spot on the back of his head.

Skeeter and I were alums of the Guided Missile Division aboard the U.S.S. Hancock. Both of us finished out our enlistments at NAS Kingsville after three tours off Vietnam.

I digress.

Anyway, the pier was about 20 yards from a boat ramp, and fishing being somewhat lethargic, the half-dozen anglers on the pier were easily distracted by a guy launching his boat.

See **MILLER**, Page 2B