

# OUTDOORS



The painted hills of the Juniper Hills Preserve near Post. WILLIAM SULLIVAN/FOR THE REGISTER-GUARD

## OREGON TRAILS

Explore eastern Oregon's painted hills  
(no, not the famous ones)

William Sullivan | Special to the Statesman Journal

The colorfully striped Painted Hills of Eastern Oregon are often featured in picture books of the state, but did you know this scenery isn't limited to the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument? Private ranches through the Ochoco Mountains have similar hills. • Now, the Nature Conservancy has bought one of the best and opened it to respectful hikers. The 13,998-acre Juniper Hills Preserve is on the outskirts of Post, a remote ranching community in the upper Crooked River valley. • Although Post is generally considered part of Eastern Oregon, it claims to be the geographic center of Oregon, and a glance at the map shows that's true. **See JUNIPER, Page 2B**

## Time for a little holiday halibut fishing?



Henry Miller with a halibut hauled up with the assist of an electric motorized reel. FILE PHOTO

Henry Miller  
Special to the Statesman Journal

Holiday halibut fishing is becoming a thing in Oregon.

"Memorial Day weekend is crampacked with fishermen," Paula Griffith, an office clerk at Newport Tradewinds, said.

She was talking about the all-depth halibut season that is open daily through June 30 off the coast from Cape Falcon near Manzanita south to Humbug Mountain just north of Brookings.

While weekend 12-hour trips to the halibut grounds up to 35 miles off the coast are filling fast, charter offices are having to get their sea legs about the everyday fishing, a novelty after the traditional three-open, four-closed fishing during the spring season that had fishing closed for the 2021 Memorial Day weekend.

"It's a very big deal in that we don't know what to expect," said Lauren Craven at Newport Marina Store & Yaquina Bay Charters about the expanded opportunity, adding that weekends in May are, "very, very full. And then the weekdays are a little more spread out, but we still do have a lot of bookings."

High winds and rough seas during the 2021 spring and summer all-depth seasons coupled with COVID-19 restrictions such as social distancing meant the total allowed sport catch between Falcon and Humbug wasn't landed, which led to the 2022 season restructuring.

Previous seasons under the three-on, four-off open-days format cut skippers some slack after physically taxing, and fuel-consuming 12 hours at sea beyond 240 feet depth (40 fathoms), the borderline between near-shore and all-depth fishing.

"It's posed some logistical challenges with scheduling," Craven said. "It's difficult for our captains and our crews to know exactly what to expect and try to make sure we're not overbooked with too many long trips in a row."

And don't get her started about stocking herring and other baits for the private boats joining the halibut flotilla.

Charter offices are juggling scheduling by going with online bookings and scheduling all-depth halibut trips on high-interest days to cut the skippers some slack.

Along with scheduling and the unpredictability of the weather, there's one other potential snag: Fuel prices.

The last big spike was during the 2008 recession when most charters had to impose a fuel surcharge because of rising costs.

"We raised the price on halibut trips for the season," said Eva Harmon, the owner with her husband of Dockside Charters in Depoe Bay.

Hopefully, she said, operators won't have to do that again this year.

The feeling was mutual, said Craven at Newport Marina & Store.

"Our prices are set right now with no fuel surcharge, and that's what we're hoping going into June," she said. "But if fuel doesn't go down at all, we might have to add a surcharge or up our price a little bit. We really don't want to."

Charters aren't the only ones affected by the prices at the pump. It also affects the decisions of people thinking about the long drive to the Oregon Coast ports to fish, Craven said.

"We hope people don't cancel because of gas prices," she said.

On the plus side, Craven added, boats came back with a few halibut after the

**See HALIBUT, Page 2B**