

RECREATION REPORT

BOAT INSPECTION STATIONS OPEN

SALEM — Aquatic invasive species inspections are required for all watercraft entering Oregon if the inspection station is open. Located around Oregon, stations are open if large orange “Boat Inspection Ahead” signs are posted followed by “Inspection Required for All Watercraft.”

Inspecting boats coming into the state is the first line of defense in keeping aquatic invasive species such as zebra or quagga mussels, snails and aquatic plants out of Oregon. These invaders can cost millions in damage to water delivery systems and serious environmental damage to our rivers, lakes and native aquatic species.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) inspection stations in Ashland and Ontario are open year-round. Seasonal stations opened Monday in Brookings, Klamath Falls, Lakeview and Umatilla.

Inspections for aquatic invasive species typically take just five to 10 minutes. Watercraft found with aquatic invasive species attached is decontaminated on the spot. Both boat inspections and decontaminations, if needed, are free.

“It’s important boaters stop at these stations, get a free boat inspection, and help keep aquatic invaders out of Oregon and Pacific Northwest waters,” said Rick Boatner, ODFW Invasive Species supervisor. “People who stop at these stations are directly contributing to our success in keeping aquatic invasive zebra and quagga mussels, snails, and aquatic plants out of Oregon.”

All vehicles towing or carrying motorized or nonmotorized boats, including canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and sailboats, must stop. Boatner said anyone hauling a boat who doesn’t stop at an open station could receive a \$110 fine. For boat safety inspections, contact your local county sheriff marine patrol or the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Permits are also required for most boaters in Oregon. Nonmotorized boats (paddlecraft) 10 feet and longer require a permit as do all motorized boats. Permits are available at ODFW license sales agents or ODFW offices that sell licenses, at Marine Board dealers and online via Oregon State Marine Board or ODFW. Permit sales provide funding for the six inspection stations.

SOGGY SPRING TRANSFORMS A TYPICALLY DRY FOREST



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

A temporary pond, created by abundant snowmelt and recent rains, makes a strange sight in a usually dry ponderosa pine forest.

SMALL POND, BIG SURPRISE

I was walking in a pine woods on a recent morning when I came upon a most unexpected sight, one which enchanted me for its rarity as much as for its beauty.

It was a pond.

I was so taken aback by the sudden appearance of this body of water which appears on no map, and so pleased by this unanticipated scenic gift in an otherwise undistinguished landscape, that I stopped and gazed across its surface for several seconds.

The ingredients that made this pond possible were obvious enough, as I looked around.

The snowpack this winter was prodigious even at the modest elevation where I was hiking; and indeed, knee-deep drifts still lingered in the shady north-facing clefts on the day of my visit (April 13).

Augmented by persistent precipitation over the previous several weeks, the melting snow had transformed typically dry channels into temporary streams.

Most of these channels have been extensively mined — the site is just a couple miles from where Auburn, the first town in what became Baker County, was founded in 1862. And miners, as they often did in our arid region, built small earthen dams to impound the short-lived seasonal runoff and thus make it possible to process ore longer than if they had relied solely on the stingy natural flow. The dams have been breached to some extent but some are still capable of holding back a fair amount of water.

It was one of these dams that created the pond I happened on while walking in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Elkhorn Wildlife Area about a dozen miles southwest of Baker City.

It’s a fine place for an early spring hike, when snow still lies deep in the higher mountains and you have perhaps tired of listening to the raucous clatter of snowshoes on crunchy spring snow. You have to be patient, though — ODFW bans public entry to the 3,200-acre site from Dec. 1 to April 10 to prevent people from harassing the hundreds of elk the agency feeds here each winter to keep them from gobbling ranchers’ haystacks.



ON THE TRAIL
JAYSON JACOBY

At the instant when I climbed a minor rise and first saw the pond I felt the thrill that happens only when you’re hiking alone and are surprised by the sort of sublime scene that nature is so adept at assembling.

There is, I’ll concede, an element of frustration at such moments.

I wanted to share the tableau, to express immediately to a companion how strange and wonderful it was to see water where I expected only the rusty smattering of pine needles and the tawny mats of dead April grass.

The pond covered perhaps a tenth of an acre. The water was a curious shade, one I don’t remember ever seeing except perhaps in a painting. It was a milky, translucent green, the surface speckled with rafts of ponderosa needles. There was scarcely a breath of wind and the pond reflected the pines on the gentle slopes above the water. It reminded me of nothing quite so much as the swamp where Luke Skywalker meets Yoda in “The Empire Strikes Back.”

(Other than the absence of a small, greenish Jedi master.)

The pond had captured, as it were, several ponderosas and it was the sight of their trunks, thrusting from the water in the manner of mangroves in a tropical lagoon, which lent the scene such a fanciful, even mystical, flavor.

The ponderosa is for me the signature conifer of the dry, south-facing slope. Its orange, sun-baked bark serves as the air freshener of the forest, a unique blend of cinnamon and vanilla that no cadre of chemists, with their ersatz concoctions of the test tube, can ever hope to replicate.

To see that bark soaking in a pond, however ephemeral, seemed to me as jarring as finding a palm tree high in the Wallows with a 3-foot-deep snow well around its base.

(And perhaps a couple of coconuts to complete the scene.)



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

A rainy early spring has combined with a bountiful snowpack to create streams where water rarely flows.

