

RECREATION
REPORT

**ODFW CLOSES
PART OF CAMP-
GROUND NEAR
NORTH POWDER**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is closing part of the campground it operates at the Elkhorn Wildlife Area west of North Powder due to what the agency describes as “illicit activities and disturbances by campers.”

The campground, which is near the Wildlife Area headquarters where the Area manager lives, is designed for hunters during hunting seasons but has been open to the general public with the purchase of a wildlife area parking permit.

ODFW has blocked access to secluded campsites on the northwest end of the campground which are nearest to the wildlife area office, facilities and manager’s residence. This will help distribute campers to areas that are more visible to staff and law enforcement if problems occur, according to a press release from ODFW.

A gate along the driveway to the wildlife area headquarters will be added this summer and will be closed after business hours to prevent driving access beyond the campground.

ODFW presented this information to the Union County Commissioners on Wednesday along with alternative actions including the possibility of a closure of the campground to overnight stays.

Other campgrounds in the area include Pilcher Creek and Wolf Creek reservoirs. Dispersed camping is also available in the nearby Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The science of storms

As a born-and-bred Midwesterner, partly raised on a diet of cumulonimbus, I enjoy me a good thunderstorm. And while technically this column is mainly focused on landscape, our recent storminess inspires me this time around to give a bit of attention to the skyscape — and, after all, the two go hand in hand.

Thunderstorms are part of our yearly natural fabric here in Northeast Oregon, even if their frequency pales in comparison to the lightning-clobbered Southern Rockies, say, and certainly the central and southern U.S., one of the great global nurseries for T-storms of the all-out whopper category.

West of the Cascades, thunderstorms are as scarce as anywhere in the Lower 48 — basically due to the coolness of the dominating airmasses arriving from the Pacific. East of the Cascades, more removed from that tempering maritime influence, we get more. At the regional scale, more specifically, the Blue and Wallowa mountains are a Northwest thunderstorm “hotspot,” thanks to factors such as hot summers, influxes of marine moisture, and rugged highland terrain in relation to storm tracks. Northeast Oregon sees an average of 20 or so thunderstorm days each year.

That modest T-storm activity is enough to exert an ecological influence — providing the bulk of our lean summertime precipitation, and, more importantly, sparking the lightning fires that have profoundly shaped our forests, shrublands, and way of life. And it’s certainly enough to reliably spice up the spring and summer skies now and then, providing atmospheric scenery to truly match our dramatic countryside.

That scenery provokes a primal response: awe, more often than not — awe in the old-school sense that comes tinged with a bit of fear. Maybe even seeing how quickly a thunderhead can boil up thousands of feet, or watching a black scud race in ahead of an incoming storm, doesn’t give you a little twist in the gut, but hopefully the whipcrack of a thunderbolt — wielding a cool hundred million volts or so and heating the air around it to tens of thousands of degrees — instills the proper respect.

Moist air given sufficient buoyancy — thus cooling enough for its water vapor to condense into cloud and then precipitation — births a thunderstorm. Instability — when a given air parcel is warmer and less dense than surrounding air, and so compelled to keep rising — is an important ingredient. What gives it the initial lift can be anything from a cold front bulldozing through, to the simple heating of an air parcel by strong sunlight (convection). Mountains are T-storm factories for multiple reasons. In summer, for one thing, they form convection-prone heat islands.

Furthermore, vapor-primed airmasses riding up mountain flanks cool enough to form clouds and potentially storms. And the funneling effects of mountain-



Photo by Ethan Shaw

Two views (above and below, right) of a thunderstorm looming over the Wallowas.



**THE LAY
OF THE LAND**

ETHAN SHAW

ous topography can brew up thunder, as when air streams flow into one another downwind of peaks or converge along ridgetops.

Last year served up some memorable thunderstorms for me, including that May evening when most of the southwest-to-northwest horizon over the Meacham breaks spasmed strobestyle as multicell storms marched into the west slope of the Blues. The most mythic was a shortwave-spawned storm that rolled over the Fanny rim above Cove and then rattled the high country eastward. Out of the swirling clouds to the north came a high string of ravens — dozens and dozens — winging southward over the foothill scarp. A storm-flight of black birds, some of which angled off to spiral in front of the tempest face of Mount Fanny. The sort of sight that burns into the brain for keeps, needless to say.

I also spent a mostly sleepless August night on a subalpine ridge — really not a super-great campsite, all things considered — when a potent low cooked up one nocturnal thunderstorm after another. A relentlessly flashing, rumbling, basically dusk-till-dawn show I had bleary-eyed front-row seats for, given more than once I ditched the tent in the teeth of things for what I hoped was a safer low spot outside.

Speaking of backcountry T-storm safety, now’s the time for outdoorsy folks to give themselves a refresher

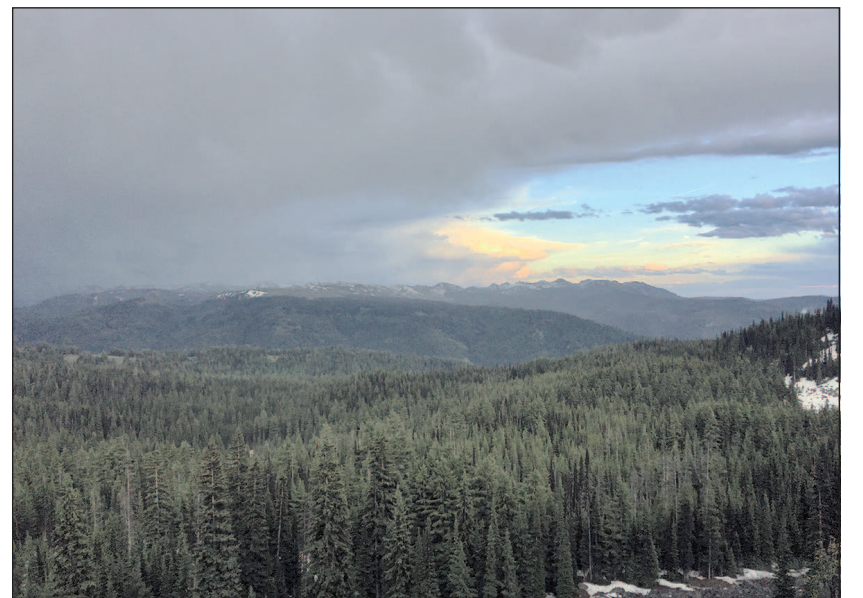


Photo by Ethan Shaw

course. Rather than diving in here, I’ll close with a quick rundown of some fieldmarks of a developing thundercloud: useful, maybe, for your own quick-and-dirty forecasting out camping, climbing, bowhunting, or fishing.

Fleets of cumulus are regular fixtures on summer afternoons, but on days ripe for T-storms they often show up for the morning shift. Such early appearance of these puffball clouds should put you on notice:

They’re symptoms of a sky potentially moist and unstable enough to breed up some electricity later on. In such conditions, cumuli deepen as midday and afternoon heat builds, with fist- or horn-like turrets surging up from their tops. These cloud-pillars often fade or collapse, but successive generations may get taller and taller, and start to converge in the ramparted form of

so-called towering cumulus (cumulus congestus).

A thunderhead coming into its own shoves above the freezing level, losing its sharp definition up top as ice crystals form in the upper dome and lend it a wispy, smeared profile. That blurred look is a critical threshold in the cloud’s evolution, betraying imminent electrification. Collisions between those ice particles and graupel — ice-glazed snowflakes — give them opposite charges, and as positively charged ice crystals concentrate in the top of the storm and negatively charged graupel tumbles downward the stage is set for lightning: mostly within and between the thunderclouds, but also zapping the ground, which develops a positive charge below the storm-belly.

Keep an eye to the skies, as they say, and enjoy the show.

Is dad an outdoorsman? Here’s Father’s Day gift ideas

I remember as a kid giving a 2-inch tall porcelain skunk to my dad and telling him I wanted to give him something but I didn’t want to spend much. It cost 25 cents.

I wasn’t very smart or tactful I guess.

But cut me a little slack. I was only about 4 years old. Maybe 6. But regardless, we don’t want to be that kind of gift giver, especially for Father’s Day! (Since my wife or daughter might be reading this article).

As you can imagine, being an outdoor writer I get to test a ton of gear every year. For AmmolandShootingSportsNews alone I test and write Product Reviews on 52 knives each year. So with that said, here are some items I think the dad in your life may enjoy. Everyone is on a budget so I’ve tried to list items to fit everyone’s budget.

FISHING

- Ask him specifically which lure(s) he wants.



BASE CAMP
TOM CLAYCOMB

Check vfydealfies.com, you can buy quality flies cheap here.

- Dip net
- Rods/reels
- Smith’s Consumer Products fish fillet knives.
- Frogg Togg rain gear.
- Tackle boxes
- Pautzke Bait Co. Fireball bait

HUNTING

- Riton Optics scopes and binoculars.
- Swab-Its gun cleaning swabs.
- Smith’s Consumer Products 6-inch diamond stones.
- Knives of Alaska Pronghorn or Elk hunter knife.
- Browning hiking socks.
- Crosman airgun. Check out the Steel Eagle.
- Ammo. I’ve been testing some CCI and Federal .22, .22 mag and .17 HMR ammo. All three are great

for whistle pig hunting.

- Buy him a couple of passes to the upcoming Great Northwest Outdoor Expo in Nampa. Buy two and maybe he’ll take you with him! Devious but a smart move!

- <http://www.ictickets.com/events/the-great-northwest-outdoor-expo-1>
- Otis gun cleaning gear.
- Quaker Boy calls
- Walker hearing enhanced ear muffs

BACKPACKING

- Adventure Medical kits. I love their foot care items.
- Aquimira water filters. They have straws, bottles and pumps.
- XGO base layers.
- Irish Setter boots. They have many options but check out their Drifter or Ravine models.
- Waterproof matches and Fire-starter.
- Compass.
- Cook gear
- Smith’s Consumer products everyday carry (EDC) knives.
- Small ditty bags for segregat-

ing items. Campmor has some nice ones.

- Backpacking meals
- Browning hiking socks

CAMPING

- Alps Mountaineering tents, sleeping bags and pads.
- Lodge Dutch ovens and black skillets.
- Tarps
- Lantern
- ASP XT-DF flashlight
- Cooler
- To hold down his four-wheelers check out Shock Strap — www.shockstrap.com

GOLFING

No, bad gift buyer. Do not buy them anything golf related! This is not an outdoors sport. This is something made up to pass time for people who don’t fish and hunt.

GRAND SLAM GIFTS

- Here’s an item you could really impress him with. A Henry’s lever action .22 mag. or a .22. They are

some super cool rifles. In fact, it might even be a cool Mothers Day gift because Katy is trying to steal mine.

- A fishing trip to the historic Plummer’s Lodge in the Northwest Territory. My daughter and I are going up there in July. It is a premier fishing spot. (204) 774-5775 • 1-800-665-0240 U.S.

If he is just flat out hard to shop for have him pick 10 items out of his favorite outdoor catalog. That way when you pick one or two of the items it will be what he wants but still be a surprise. Or what about a gift card at his favorite outdoor store? Not as personal as an actual item but he could use it to buy exactly what he wants.

And if you flat out don’t have any money for a gift, I bet if you hug him and tell him you love him and how appreciative you are that he always works so hard to take care of the family, I bet that will mean more to him than any gift in the world.

Happy Father’s Day to all of you guys out there.