

RECREATION
REPORT

**Ladd Marsh
Bird Festival
canceled**

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Friends of Ladd Marsh have canceled the 2020 Ladd Marsh Bird Festival scheduled for May.

ODFW has canceled all of its outdoor education events through May 31 and that includes the festival.

Next year's event, the 15th Ladd Marsh Bird Festival, has been scheduled for May 14-16, 2021.

More information about the festival can be found on the Friends of Ladd Marsh Facebook page.

**Watercraft
still required
to stop at
inspection
stations**

SALEM — While the state of Oregon is currently not recommending out-of-state residents visit the state for recreation due to the governor's Stay Home, Save Lives order, all watercraft entering Oregon are still required to be inspected at an aquatic invasive species station when the stations are open. This includes commercial watercraft, which will account for most of the inspections while the stay-at-home order remains in effect.

Stations are open if large, orange "Boat Inspection Ahead" signs are posted on highways followed by "Inspection Required for All Watercraft."

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife inspection stations in Ashland and Ontario are open year-round. Seasonal stations open May 12 in Brookings, Klamath Falls, Lakeview and Umatilla.

Inspections for aquatic invasive species typically take five to 10 minutes. ODFW staff working at the stations are taking necessary precautions to protect themselves and others against the spread of COVID-19 by wearing proper protective equipment and maintaining physical distance from others.

Drivers are not required to get out of their vehicle at the inspection station and ODFW encourages all people riding in the vehicle to stay within the vehicle and to communicate through their window if they have questions about the inspection.

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.

Social distancing made simple

■ Northeastern Oregon's bounty of public land is a boon for people who want to get in a hike while still seeking to keep the coronavirus at bay

When you're serious about social distancing — as we all should be — it's helpful to live where public land is measured in the millions of acres.

Where the only large group you're likely to see is a herd of deer or elk.

Where the nearest person might be a couple of miles away, far enough to leave even a robust virus wheezing if it tried to bridge the gap.

(I suspect viruses don't actually wheeze, being that they're not really alive, but it pleases me, in these troubling times, to imagine virus particles prostrate and in agony, tiny tongues lolling.)

I strive to comply with social distancing guidelines.

It strikes me as a relatively simply precaution, and one that can stem the spread not only of coronavirus but of other less virulent but still unpleasant afflictions.

I came down with one of those brief bugs a month or so back — the sort that turns your stomach into the equivalent of a stubborn toddler who flings his dinner plate across the room — and I'd just as soon not spend any of my quarantined days slumped in front of the toilet.

I've had little trouble adjusting to social distancing.

I go for a walk every afternoon, and on weekdays my route usually follows a series of streets and sidewalks in Baker City.

Most days I see only a handful of pedestrians or bicyclists. In the carefree pre-virus era I rarely thought it necessary to yield a sidewalk unless, say, there was a stroller involved, or a couple of young kids who looked as though they were occupying the full width of concrete.

But now, even if I see only a lone walker heading my way, I detour onto the street so as to maintain at least a 6-foot spacing. As we pass, each of



ON THE TRAIL
JAYSON JACOBY

us presumably outside the effective droplet range, we exchange a half-wave/half-nod gesture, usually accompanied by a rueful smile. This seems to me one of the symbols of the new society we have so unexpectedly found ourselves in.

My favorite pastime — hiking — hasn't required even this modest accommodation.

And this has much to do with my original point about the benefits of living in Northeastern Oregon, where the population density is more akin to the 19th century than the 21st.

On the vast majority of my hikes I don't see another person.

And when I do there's such a surplus of space that we needn't get close enough that we could (not that we wish to) hurl stones at each other, never mind the much less aerodynamic virus particles.

Although prior to social distancing these encounters were so rare that I usually felt compelled to hail the other person, if only to find out how we ended up sharing such a tiny patch in a veritable ocean of land.

Nowadays I take solace in that cushion, knowing that it allows me to get my boots dirty, out in the spring sunshine, without sully my status as a responsible citizen.

Since the virus-related restrictions began, my wife, Lisa, and I have taken our kids, Olivia, 12, and Max, 9, on a few weekend hikes that were completely compliant with coronavirus-defying advice.

This required no special planning — these were the sorts of trips we made in previous years, when we took the solitude for granted rather than appreciating its



Lisa Britton / For EO Media Group

Arch Rock, on the Malheur National Forest southwest of Baker City, is a short and easy hike along a National Recreation Trail.

epidemiological benefits.

Our first destination was Arch Rock National Recreation Trail on the Malheur National Forest of Grant County.

The namesake arch is smaller than those at Arches National Park in Utah, but it's still a fascinating natural phenomenon well worth the modest hike. The trail is just half a mile, with a moderate uphill grade.

We didn't see a single person, despite parking about a mile and a half before the trailhead in deference to lingering snowdrifts, which means we hiked farther on a road than on the trail itself.

This past weekend we snowshoed on the Elkhorn Crest Trail near Anthony Lake on Saturday, and hiked along the Deer Creek Road, near the Burnt River Canyon in southern Baker County, on Sunday.

Again, social distancing was a snap.

We didn't encounter anyone on the Elkhorn Crest Trail. On the Deer Creek Road we saw a convoy of ATVs but naturally we had to step off the road to let them pass, creating the all-important distance. Most of the riders and passengers were wearing helmets in any case — and they passed us at rather more than walking speed.

Although most public land



Lisa Britton / For EO Media Group

The buttercup — a sure symbol of spring.

If you go....

- Arch Rock. From Baker City, drive Highway 7 for about 49 miles to the Middle Fork John Day Road. Turn right at a sign for Bates State Park. Follow the paved road 18 miles and turn left onto Forest Road 36, a gravel road that crosses the Middle Fork and heads south. Follow Road 36 for about 5.2 miles, then turn left at a sign for Arch Rock. The trailhead is about a quarter mile up Road 478.
- Deer Creek Road. Exit Interstate 84 at Durkee, about 23 miles southeast of Baker City. Turn right and drive one-third of a mile to an intersection. Turn right on Old Highway 30. Drive 1.5 miles then turn left on Burnt River Canyon Road. The paved road turns to well-graded gravel. Follow the road about 8.7 miles. Deer Creek Road starts on private land — the Lost Dutchman's Mining Association — but the road is public.

remains open, including roads and trails, designated

recreation sites, including campgrounds, are closed.



Lisa Britton / For EO Media Group

Gunsight Mountain rises above the Anthony Lakes basin in the Elkhorns.



Lisa Britton / For EO Media Group

Max and Olivia Jacoby walk the Deer Creek Road near the Burnt River Canyon in southern Baker County.