

RECREATION
REPORT

Marine patrols
will focus on
intoxicated
boaters
over holiday
weekend

The Oregon State Marine Board, marine law enforcement from 18 county sheriff's offices, Oregon State Police, and five Oregon U.S. Coast Guard stations will be participating in Operation Dry Water during the weekend of July 3-5, as part of a nationally coordinated effort to reduce the number of accidents and fatalities related to Boating Under the Influence of Intoxicants (BUII).

"We have multiple patrols scheduled this season to catch impaired boat operators," says Randy Henry, boating safety program manager for the Marine Board. "We also have new tools. The Legislature gave us the authority in 2020 to take your boater education card for up to three years, if convicted."

Impaired boaters can expect to be arrested or face serious penalties. In Oregon, the consequences of being convicted of BUII include the possibility of jail time, \$6,250 in fines, loss of boating privileges and a one to three-year suspension of the boater education card and potentially being court-mandated to take another boating safety course. Marine officers can arrest boaters on observed impairment and can legally obtain blood, breath or urine if a boater fails field sobriety testing. Officers have already arrested three people for BUII this year and at least two fatalities appear to have involved alcohol or drugs.

FISHING FORECAST

GRANDE RONDE
RIVER

Warmer weather has resulted in increased flows and the river will be off-color for a bit. Success may still be found depending on water clarity. Use natural baits or large dark artificials until water quality improves.

WALLOWA LAKE

Fishing has been good at Wallowa Lake for kokanee, rainbow trout and lake trout. Kokanee over 12 inches have been common with a few very large fish available.

SNAKE RIVER

Salmon fishing is open from the boat ramp at Dug Bar upstream to the deadline below Hells Canyon Dam. The daily bag limit is four hatchery chinook per day of which only one may be an adult hatchery chinook.

CAMPERS FLOCK TO FORESTS AFTER A SPRING OF PANDEMIC-PROMPTED CLOSURES



Jayson Jacoby / Baker City Herald

Dennis and Michaelle Saranto, of Walla Walla, Washington, set up their trailer this week at Union Creek Campground. The couple brought along their dogs. Kia, who's a little more than a year old, stands beside Dennis on the picnic table, and 12-year-old Lucy stays nearby.

Clamoring To Camp

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

The sky is unblemished blue, the gentlest of breezes is whispering through the ponderosa pines, and Dennis Saranto is smiling.

He's happy to be outside. In particular he's happy to be sitting at a picnic table among the pines at Union Creek Campground on a peaceful and mild Thursday morning in late June.

This U.S. Forest Service campground, on the north shore of Phillips Reservoir about 17 miles southwest of Baker City, is managed by Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

Union Creek opened for the season on June 8.

That's later than usual — a common situation in the year of the coronavirus pandemic.

This belated beginning to the camping season is one reason Saranto and his wife, Michaelle, who live in Walla Walla, Washington, were eager to haul their 30-foot travel trailer to this shady campsite.

And the couple are hardly alone.

Most of the 20 or so sites on this loop at Union Creek are also occupied on this morning even though the weekend is a day away.

Dennis Saranto said it's been difficult to find campgrounds that aren't already booked, something he attributes to the pent up demand after most camping areas were closed the majority of the spring.

Union Creek has had "a steady stream of folks" since the campground opened 3 weeks ago, said Chelsea Judy, marketing director and assistant operations manager for Anthony Lakes.

"People are just itching to get out," Judy said.

The three other Forest Service campgrounds that Anthony Lakes manages in the Sumpter Valley — two on the other side of Phillips Reservoir, and McCully Fork a couple miles from Sumpter — have also been busy, Judy said.

"It's pretty normal for this time of year," she said. "We've had a lot of reservations."

Union Creek is a popular campground in part because it's a rare Forest Service facil-

"People are just itching to get out."

— Chelsea Judy, marketing director for Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, which manages Forest Service campgrounds in Sumpter Valley and at Anthony Lakes

ity that has campsites with water, sewer and electrical connections for trailers and motor homes.

Union Creek also has sites that can't be reserved, and are instead available on a first-come, first-served basis, Judy said.

Staff at all four campgrounds are frequently cleaning restrooms and other facilities, and asking campers to comply with social distancing.

That's not much of a challenge, Judy said, since there's considerably more distance between each campsite.

Saranto said he has no trepidation about camping during the pandemic.

"Outdoors I don't have any concerns," he said. "That's why camping is popular."

It's been part of Saranto's life since he was a boy.

Saranto, 60, said his parents bought their first trailer in 1969.

He said his family camped at Union Creek several times when he was growing up, but until last year he hadn't been to the campground for more than 40 years.

He enjoyed his trip last year so much that Union Creek was an obvious choice for him when the pandemic restrictions began to ease.

Saranto said camping with a fully stocked trailer is particularly attractive during the coronavirus era in part because he and his wife don't need to worry about such things as restaurant occupancy restrictions or concerns about going into grocery stores.

"We're completely self-contained — you can eat, sleep and cook in your own home on wheels," he said.

Saranto said modern trailers, with their soft and well-padded recliners, showers and DVD-connected flatscreen TVs, are considerably more sumptuous than the ones he remembers from his childhood.

"We're not roughing it any more," he said with a grin. "They've come a long ways.

It's not really camping."

State parks

Many campgrounds at Oregon state parks reopened June 9 after being closed since March.

Mac Freeborn, manager at Wallowa Lake State Park, which has a 209-site campground, said the facility has been busy.

And with the majority of the sites already reserved for the summer, that situation will continue.

"We're experiencing a full campground pretty much through August," Freeborn said. "And we're still getting phone calls from people asking if we have openings."

Wallowa Lake does have a small number of first-come, first-served sites, available for one night only, but Freeborn recommends people call the park first, at 541-432-4185, rather than driving to the park and hoping to find a vacant spot.

Freeborn doesn't think the pandemic has much to do with the crowds at Wallowa Lake.

That's the normal situation for summer.

"I think here, because we are such a destination park, that didn't play out here," Freeborn said, meaning an influx of campers champing at the bit to set up their trailers or tents after being stuck at home the previous three months.

He said the campground was perhaps a bit busier than he would have expected for the first couple weeks after it opened — particularly since the weather was frequently cool and rainy.

Typically the busiest season commences in late June, he said.

But the pandemic has had other, significant, effects at Wallowa Lake, Freeborn said.

Handling the usual summer bustle has been much more challenging than usual because the state park staff, normally 21 or 22 people, has been slashed to just six, he said.

Umatilla National Forest
opens more campgrounds

PENDLETON — The Umatilla National Forest this week reopened five developed campgrounds where crews have completed annual start-up preparations. Some campgrounds and all cabin rentals remain closed.

Forest staff will reopen additional campgrounds as crews complete site preparations, which includes access to the sites, removing hazard trees and mitigating other safety issues. Decisions for reopening additional sites will also depend on the availability of necessary cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment required to complete basic start-up tasks. Some campgrounds may remain closed longer due to snow, or flood damage.

The following campgrounds are now open:

- North Fork John Day Ranger District: North Fork John Day, Bear Wallow, Welch Creek
- Pomeroy Ranger District: Tucannon
- Walla Walla Ranger District: Mottet

Many other campgrounds have already been opened on the forest. A full list of open campgrounds is available at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/umatilla/home>. Information about campgrounds on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is available at www.fs.usda.gov/activity/wallowa-whitman/recreation/camping-cabins/

Campgrounds not listed as open on the Forest website remain closed until further notice. As sites reopen services may not be available, including restrooms or trash collection.

The reason is the \$15 million budget shortfall the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has incurred.

The main factor, he said, is plummeting revenue from the Oregon Lottery, the main source of money for the parks department. With bars closed much of the spring, the video poker games that are a major source of income for the Lottery didn't produce any money.

Because of the reduced staff, some of the restrooms at Wallowa Lake are closed, as is the entry booth, Freeborn said.

Campers who have reservations can go straight to their site, and other campers can use the self-pay kiosk.

Freeborn said he hopes he can hire more employees later this summer, but he's not optimistic that will happen.

Blue Mountains

Two parks with primitive campgrounds — Catherine Creek near Union and Hilgard west of La Grande — opened on May 28 and were among the earliest state park campgrounds to open, said Mark Miller, manager of the parks department's Blue Mountains Management Unit.

Both parks had "very, very limited visitation" for the first few weeks after they opened, Miller said.

He attributes this in part to the lack of amenities — the parks don't have the power and water hookups that many trailer campers want — and the periodically cool, damp weather that prevailed, particularly on weekends, the first half of June.

Two other campgrounds — Emigrant Springs near Meacham, and Red Bridge, near Hilgard — opened June 9.

Miller said he anticipated an influx of campers at Emigrant Springs, as it has sites with utility connections.

But for the first two weekends that didn't materialize. "It was fairly slow," Miller said.

Occupancy at Emigrant Springs rose last weekend, and Miller expects the campground to be full, or nearly full, during the Fourth of July weekend.

That's typical, though, for this time of year, and Miller said he didn't see any evidence that restrictions related to the pandemic prompted large numbers of campers to visit the parks he manages.