

State parks draw a crowd, topping 3 million visitors

By JAMIE HALE

The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon state park campgrounds were packed in 2021, as locals and tourists alike left the comforts of their homes to sleep under the stars, among evergreen forests and beside the ocean.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department reported a total 3,026,756 camper nights last year, far outpacing the pandemic-impaired numbers from 2020, and eclipsing the 3 million mark for the first time, the department said.

In state park parlance a “camper night” is one camper spending one night at a campsite. A family of four spending two nights in a tent, for example, would equal eight camper nights. And since virtually every campground saw a dip in numbers during statewide park closures in 2020, it’s more useful to compare the recent numbers to those in 2019, when state park campgrounds were in the midst of a huge surge in popularity.

Most of the growth in 2021 came on the Oregon Coast, which saw a 9% increase in camper nights



Jamie Hale/The Oregonian

Rustic cabins at Cottonwood Canyon State Park offer a nice overnight option at the remote park site along the John Day River.

over 2019 — the only region in the state to see an overall increase last year. More than a third of that increase came from the massive campground at Fort Stevens State Park outside Astoria, which saw 343,485 camper nights last year, far more than any other.

Parks department spokesman Chris Havel said the data show a continued trend of midweek camping in the summer, as well as weekend and holiday camping in the fall, winter and spring. The numbers also continue a significant uptick in state park camping that began in

2012, a trend that park officials see as a win.

“Hooray for people continuing to realize enjoying the outdoors is good for body and mind, and good for both the individual and the community.” Havel said in an email Wednesday. “As people continue to look for places to experience in our centennial year, we hope they branch out to look for places new to you, and take the time to prepare well.”

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2022, marking the occasion with special events that might

draw even more people to parks across the state.

The centennial celebration of the National Park Service in 2016 led to record numbers of national park visitors that year.

At state park campgrounds on the Oregon Coast, securing campsites might be competitive for the centennial this summer — at least if last year’s numbers are any indication. Almost every state park campground on the coast saw more camper nights in 2021 than in 2019, and while the most popular campgrounds got a little more popular, the biggest

increases by percentage were at two of the smallest places: Umpqua Lighthouse and Humbug Mountain state parks.

Minam sees big jump

Smaller campgrounds in Eastern, Central and Southern Oregon also saw big increases last year, continuing a trend from 2020 that saw people looking for more remote getaways amid the pandemic. Some of the least-visited state park sites in recent years saw huge jumps in camper nights in 2021, including Red Bridge State Wayside and Hilgard Junction State Park outside La Grande, as well as the tiny, remote Minam State Recreation Area along the Willamette River, which saw a 254% increase last year, going from 5,498 camper nights in 2020 to 19,460 in 2021.

Willamette Valley campgrounds, meanwhile, saw their camper nights down compared to 2019, almost across the board. Increases at the popular L.L. Stub Stewart State Park, as well as the state park campgrounds of the Columbia River Gorge, were outweighed by decreases at places like Milo McIver,

Willamette Mission and Detroit Lake state parks.

Some decreases were due to campground closures that followed wildfires, windstorms and flooding.

Money that has been earmarked for Oregon state park improvements will go to both adding new campsites and moving existing ones out of harm’s way, as campsites in some parks are currently threatened by eroding cliffs, rising rivers and wildfires. In 2021, the state Legislature approved a \$50 million bond to upgrade Oregon’s state parks over the next two years, a plan that will include new campsites at some of the state’s busiest parks, in addition to infrastructure and other projects.

That may help alleviate crowds in the state’s busiest campgrounds, but not if crowds continue to grow, an issue the parks department said it is keeping an eye on.

“It’s a concern,” Havel said of the overcrowding at campgrounds. “Planning, designing, and building new sites takes a couple of years, in some cases more time than the three year limit on the bonds, so we’re still in pursuit of a long-term solution.”

Advocates seek state support to fight dementia

By BRITTANY FALKERS

KGW News

PORTLAND — The toll of Alzheimer’s and other dementias goes beyond the emotional and physical impact for families facing a diagnosis. In 2021, Alzheimer’s and other dementias cost the U.S. \$355 billion dollars for things like health care and long-term care, according to the Alzheimer’s Association.

Unless a treatment to slow, stop or prevent the disease comes along, by 2050 Alzheimer’s is projected to cost more than \$1.1 trillion dollars, and that’s before adjusting for projected inflation.

“It impacts all of us. If you are a resident of the United States you are affected by the cost of dementia,” local Alzheimer’s Advocate Jenn Cook-Buman said.

Next month, Cook-Bauman and 61 other Oregonians will meet with Oregon lawmakers to push for more resources to find a cure.

More than 6 million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s, around 69,000 people in Oregon and 120,000 in Washington, according to the Alzheimer’s Association’s latest research.

One in three seniors will die from a form of the disease. It kills more people than breast and prostate cancer combined.

“We are one of the lowest funded causes and yet in the top 10 causes of death and most expensive,” Cook-Buman said.

She knows the pain behind the numbers firsthand. Several of her family members suffer from Alzheimer’s and other dementias and their diagnosis has often been early onset.

Cook-Buman also works in the senior long-term care industry.

“I see the impact on the families that I work with constantly. It’s very devastating,” she said.

She will be one of 62 Oregonians to meet Feb. 8-10 virtually with legislators to share personal experiences and ask for legislative support in the fight against Alzheimer’s and all other dementia.

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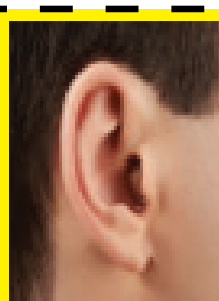
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