

Recreational fishing closures devastate coastal Oregon business

By NICHOLAS A. JOHNSON
The (Coos Bay) World

CHARLESTON, Ore. (AP) — This time of year the Charleston Marina is usually a bustling place with sport fishers taking advantage of the good weather before the rains come, but recent bottom fishing closures have driven much of that business away.

"On a beautiful day like today the marina parking lot should be filled with trailers and boats, but there's hardly anybody here," harbormaster John Buckley said recently.

Bottom fishing has opened back up with the restrictions.

Anglers going bottom fishing must be outside of the 40 fathom line, and use long leader gear. However, the economic damage to the Charleston community has already been done.

"I've counted the number of trips that I've lost and canceled, and the dollar figure on that is right around \$4,000 worth of trips. That doesn't include trips I would have booked in the future. We work all year long and we meet our expenses, but the end of the season is when we're counting on making our profit that we're going to live off of. That just didn't happen this year," said captain John Blanchard, owner of Sharky's Charters.

Many of these Charleston businesses are upset with the closure because of the lack of communication they've had with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"We didn't get any warning essentially that this closure was going to happen. All of a sudden we get two days' notice that they're going to close the season. There was no warning, we weren't able to plan for it," Blanchard said.

Notice of the closure did come abruptly. The press release from ODFW about the closure came out Tuesday, Sept. 12, and the fishery was closed by Sept. 18.

"This has been an absolutely devastating hit to us. We went from



In this Friday, Sept. 29, 2017 photo, Charleston Marina is quieter than usual this time of year after the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife closed bottom fishing in Charleston, Ore. Bottom fishing was closed because quotas were reached much faster than expected, and they're trying to protect yellow eye rockfish populations. Bottom fishing has opened back up with the restrictions that fisherman going bottom fishing must be outside of the 40 fathom line, and use long leader gear.

the busiest time of year, where we make money that pays our bills and keeps our employees paid, to losing 90 percent of our overall income within about 36 hours," Rob Genserek owner of Basin Tackle said.

After months of continuous growth the closure forced Genserek to lay off all of his employees. Luckily he was able to stay open, but business has come to a grinding halt.

"It's just me, and I'm not even paying myself a wage anymore," Genserek said.

The recreational fishing industry in Charleston has a wide reach economically. Local restaurants, like Crabby Cakes Bakery, have also seen a slowdown since the bottom fishing closure.



In this Sept. 29 photo, Rob Genserek's business Basin Tackle has remained open despite losing 90 percent of his business' overall income after ODFW closed bottom fishing in Charleston.

"There's no sportsmen in town at all, so nobody comes here for their coffee in the morning like they were," Crabby Cakes Bakery owner Marvin Terry said. "This time of the year is normally some of our busiest time of year. We've lost half of our business."

Bottom fishing was closed because quotas were reached much faster than expected, and they're trying to protect yellow eye rockfish populations.

"That yellow eye rockfish is a long-live species, they claim it lives 100 years plus," Blanchard said. "It takes a long time to reproduce and grow. It's essentially the spotted owl of the recreational fleet. It's doing exactly what the spotted owl did to the timber industry."

At a public meeting in early August, ODFW had a discussion about bottom fishing nearing quotas, asking members of the public what they think should be done about it.

According to Blanchard, the fishermen at the meeting were adamant about not closing the fishery, instead proposing that bag limits be lowered.

"We're not fighting a lack of resources; we're fighting politics and management," Genserek said. "There's a lot of fish out there, but they've set up a quota system that I think is inherently flawed. We're not protecting fish with this, we're just simply hurting people. If it was hurting the fish, and the stocks were down, I'd be one of the first people rallying to do something, because that's our business."

This is the first time in 15 years that a total bottom fishing closure has been put in place.

Bottom fishing quotas were met so much faster because salmon and tuna fishing have been poor this year.

"The culture of fishing out here is so huge, it's so ingrained in these people. Whether they're tourists that come from afar, or locals that recreate, it's been taken away, and that's devastating," Genserek said.

Officials explain fire strategy to skeptical public

Chetco Bar fire cost \$61 million to fight, burned 18 days before it was noticed

By JEFF DUEWEL
The Daily Courier

AGNESS, Ore. (AP) — Forest Service officials spent over an hour explaining how the Chetco Bar fire went from the size of someone's backyard to a conflagration that was bearing down on the town of Brookings within five weeks.

"Point blank, the Forest Service does not have a let-it-burn policy," Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest Supervisor Ross McWhorter indignantly answered one of about 20 people at the Agness RV Park next to the lower Rogue River. "Does that answer your question? Our goal was full suppression."

Four such meetings were called late last week to deal with a public fed up with breathing wildfire smoke from multiple fires in southern Oregon and around the West, and to respond to previous meetings where politicians and citizens called for drastic changes in forest management and fire policies.

Across the U.S., 8.5 million acres have burned this fire season, including 16 percent of Rogue River-Siskiyou's 1.8 million acres.

Fire officials explained that steep terrain and extreme danger in fighting the Chetco Bar fire's early stages in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness kept them from snuffing it when it was less than an acre in mid-July.

Then when Chetco Effect winds started blowing toward the coast on Aug. 15, the fire went on a five-day rampage, doubling in size and overwhelming all planning and effort.

The Chetco Bar fire has now burned 300 square miles, and cost over \$61 million to fight. For a while it was the largest wildfire and the highest priority forest fire in the country.

"There's always going to be that 2 percent of fires, under extreme

conditions or complex terrain, or a combination of both, that we're never going to be successful in initial attack," said John Prendergast, National Incident Management Organization safety officer.

Curry County Commissioner Court Boice said that something needs to change.

"I don't know how much more wildfire we can handle," Boice said. "We're losing our timber and our watersheds."

Someone asked if the agency has learned anything from catastrophic fires, such as the Biscuit Fire in 2002 that overlapped the Chetco Bar footprint and was more than twice as big.

"What we've learned has been offset by climate change and lots of fuel buildup, and we have more severe fire than ever before," said Craig Trulock, deputy forest supervisor.

Trulock said after around the 1940s, annual wildfire acreage in the Siskiyou dropped from around 21,000 to 4,000 because of more aggressive suppression, allowing fuel to build up.

When asked whether environmental concerns kept firefighters from doing everything they could inside a wilderness area, McWhorter said they threw everything available at the fire other than bulldozers — because they had no way to get there anyway.

It all started with lightning storms on June 24 and 25.

It was another 18 days before a commercial airline pilot noticed smoke near the Chetco River at 2:43 p.m. on July 12. McWhorter said within 15 minutes firefighters were summoned.

The first day four members of the Siskiyou Rappelers began working on a landing zone for a helicopter, known as a helispot, critical for safety and for dropping firefighters. Helicopters dumped water on the fire.

Firefighters described how hard it was to walk on steep slopes with brush and slick madrone leaves. Snags from the old Biscuit Fire posed extreme danger of falling on firefighters.

Monty Edwards, fire management officer based at the Wild Rivers Ranger District in Cave Junction, showed photos on Day 1 and Day 2 of "rollout" fires, where burning material caused spot fires downhill.

Any benefit from water dumps was offset by those dumps knocking more fire down the steep hill.

There were also many Douglas fir trees over 3 feet in diameter starting to burn.

"I don't know how much more wildfire we can handle. We're losing our timber and our watersheds."

— Court Boice,
Curry County Commissioner

He decided against sending in two 20-person teams because of the safety concerns. Another group of rappellers made the same decision. At 4:38 p.m. on that first day all firefighters were called off.

There was no way to get tight to the fire, so an indirect strategy was adopted.

Had firefighters been sent forward and someone been hurt, "It would be difficult to look a parent in the face later and justify that decision," said Virginia Gibbons, forest spokeswoman.

The fire didn't grow much for a few weeks, but by Aug. 18 was up to 8,500 acres, after the Chetco Effect winds began on Aug. 15.

On Aug. 20, the wildfire advanced six miles and blew up to near 100,000 acres, doubling its size.

Prendergast said everybody and everything had to pull way back from the fire.

"It wouldn't have mattered if that fire line was 1,000 feet wide, nothing was going to stop the fire that day," he said.

The meeting in Agness was mostly civil. A crowd of about 200 people at Brookings Thursday night proved more confrontational, Gibbons said.

"The people who stood up in Brookings lost homes; they suffered loss," Gibbons said. "It was an important first step in the healing process."

Afterward, Ed Weiseth of Agness said he thought fire officials explained themselves well, but hoped for a better outcome next time.

"I think it was a professional approach to a complex problem," he said. "I hope whatever the critique is, we can do better with our initial attack, hit the fires with overwhelming force."

Bill Scherbarth, fire chief in Agness, wasn't impressed.

"They didn't do enough, right off the bat," he said. "Granted, they couldn't put crews in there, but if you put enough water on it, eventually it's going to wash (the fire) out."

But fire officials were adamant that without ground crews, dropping water and slurry from aircraft wasn't going to be enough.

BRIEFLY

Timberline to open Palmer Snowfield on Saturday

Advanced skiers and riders, rejoice: Timberline will open Palmer Snowfield this weekend.

Weather permitting, weekend skier and snowboarders will be able to use the lift starting Oct. 7 and 8 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The lift will operate between those times on Saturdays and Sundays.

Tickets are \$61 each and will be available at guest services in Timberline's Wy'East Day Lodge. Season Pass holders may use their new pass.

Timberline recommends only advanced skiers and riders for Palmer. While there will be some snow grooming, conditions can still change rapidly with early season snow conditions. Skiers and riders are urged to use extreme caution.

Currently, the terrain parks are not scheduled to open. Sledding and tubing is not permitted yet either. Check Timberline Lodge's conditions page for operating times and the current lift schedule.

— Samantha Bakall, *The Oregonian*

DNA tests confirm gray wolf is roaming northwest Washington state

MARBLEMOUNT, Wash. (AP) — Federal officials say DNA testing has confirmed that a wolf is roaming on the west side of the Cascade mountains in northwestern Washington state.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says a GPS collar placed on the wolf captured in June shows it has remained in Skagit County.

Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Ann Froschauer says it's not clear where the gray wolf came from because DNA samples don't find a connection with known wolf packs in eastern Washington, Idaho or British Columbia.

Officials say the wolf is about 100 miles from the nearest known wolf pack.

Officials say no conflicts with domestic animals have been reported.

5 family members found safe in Mount Hood National Forest

PORTLAND (AP) — Two women and three children reported missing in the Mount Hood National Forest have been found safe.

The Clackamas County Sheriff's Office says deputies found the group camping earlier this week.

The sheriff's office sought the public's help this weekend after someone reported that a 51-year-old woman was overdue from a camping trip she took with her daughter and three grandchildren.

No increased danger after Yosemite rocks fall

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — A geological analysis Friday found there was no more danger than usual of another giant rock fall after two huge slides, including one involving a slab of granite the size of a 36-story building, occurred this week on the famed El Capitan rock formation in Yosemite National Park.

One person was killed and two injured in the successive rock falls last week at the climbing mecca.

"If we felt any area was unsafe we wouldn't be allowing people in there," Yosemite geologist Greg Stock said Friday.

He and a U.S. Geological Service geologist were studying the mountain after the rock falls that awed but did not deter people in the close-knit climbing community.

"It's kind of an inherently dangerous sport," Hayden Jamieson, 24, of Mammoth Lakes, California, said as he prepared to head up El Capitan early Saturday.

The park typically sees about 80 rock falls a year.

Elite climbers who make their way up the sheer rock faces with ropes and their fingertips understand the risk but also know it's rare to get hit and killed by rocks.

In addition, Stock said it's impossible to predict when and where a rock fall will strike. Detecting shifts in rocks could be a sign that one will break loose days or maybe years later, he said.

"They didn't do enough right off the bat ... if you put enough water on it, eventually it's going to wash the fire out."

— Bill Scherbarth,
Agnes, Oregon fire chief

Have an adventure story you'd like to tell, or a photo of your trophy animal you'd be willing to share?

Email outdoors editor Tim Trainor at ttrainor@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0835.