

OUTDOORS



Lisa Britton/EO Media Group

U.S. Forest Service officials are reminding visitors to the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur national forests to follow precautions when building campfires.

USFS reminds visitors about campfire safety

EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — U.S. Forest Service officials are reminding visitors to the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur national forests to follow precautions when building campfires.

All campfires should be in a fire pit surrounded by dirt, rock or a metal ring, in areas cleared of all flammable material within a three-foot radius from the edge of the pit, and free of overhanging material.

Campers should also carry a shovel and at least one gallon of water while building and tending campfires. These guidelines apply to the use of charcoal briquettes as well.

Although lightning starts most wildfires in the Blue Mountains, human-caused fires are unpredictable and can stretch firefighting resources thin, especially when lightning-caused fires require firefighters' attention at the same time.

As fire danger levels increase this summer, the three national forests in the Blue Mountains will announce Public Use Restrictions, also known as PURs, which limit the use of campfires, chainsaws, smoking and off-road motorized travel. PURs are imposed in phases, based on increased fire danger, hot and dry weather conditions and concern for public safety.

Forest officials recommend the following campfire safety precautions:

- Only adults should build and maintain campfires.
- Find a shady spot away from dry logs, overhanging branches, bushes, needles or leaves.
- Use existing fire rings where it is safe to do so. Don't build fire-rings in roads. (Note: within the Grande Ronde Scenic Waterway, campfires must be contained in a fireproof container (such as a fire pan) with sides tall enough to contain all ash and debris, and all ashes and debris must be removed from the river corridor. Do not use or construct fire pits or rock fire rings within the Scenic Waterway.)
- Keep campfire rings small and use wood no bigger than the ring.
- Keep tents and other burnable materials away from the fire.
- Never leave a campfire unattended. Those leaving campfires unattended can be billed for the cost of fire suppression.
- Drown the campfire with water and stir charred material.
- When leaving, make sure your fire is dead out. Very carefully feel all sticks and charred remains. Make sure no roots are smoldering. If it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.

Innaha, Wallowa rivers open for Chinook June 25

The Observer

ENTERPRISE — For the first time since 2016, anglers will be able to fish for spring Chinook in the Innaha and Wallowa rivers.

"All current projections indicate this year's run will exceed our preseason forecast and provide an opportunity to harvest spring Chinook locally," said Kyle Bratcher, an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife district fish biologist in Enterprise, in a press release. "In the past, these have been popular fisheries and we're glad to see numbers that allow anglers to get out there."

Adult Chinook passage at Bonneville Dam through June 1 totals 149,031 fish, which is 129% of the 10-year (2012-21) average cumula-

tive count and 210% of the 5-year (2017-21) average for the date.

The Innaha River opens from June 25 to July 10 from the confluence with the Snake River upstream to the Summit Creek Bridge.

The open season on the Wallowa River is from June 25 to July 24 from the lower fence of Minam State Park upstream to the confluence with the Lostine River.

Bag limits are two adult hatchery spring Chinook per day with five hatchery jacks. Anglers must cease fishing for salmon for the day when they retain two adult salmon and may not continue to angle for jacks.

Hook gaps may not exceed three-quarters of an inch, and all other statewide and zone regulations apply.

Catbird:

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unsure if it would return. When I purchased the property in 2016, cattle had been grazing the meager acreage and kept the brush tamped down in the now lush creek corridor and the birds have taken notice of the vegetation rebound. Bullock's orioles, yellow warblers, and even a varied thrush all appeared last spring, but their appearance in 2022 was uncertain.

I had stalked the catbird with my Nikon for a week and it proved formidable in the predator avoidance department. Wary and cunning, it would tolerate only fleeting glimpses, bolting the moment it realized I had established line-of-sight. The bird left me to log dozens of useless photos as my target acquisition skills had rusted since the upland bird hunting season closed.

I knew its namesake cat-like call, but the variety of other voices I thought I was hearing was the catbird proudly showcasing its robust vocal array. Kneeling by the paddock fence and peering through the lichen-encrusted rails and tree branches finally provided a couple moments to observe the wary bird.

Male catbirds sing a tune that can be minutes long and comprised of bits of other bird songs, even those of domestic chickens and frog ribbits. Tones of the American robin, red-winged blackbird, lesser goldfinch, House finch and House wren projected from the catbird's powerful vocal cords as I



John Benson/Contributed Photo

An excellent photo of the gray catbird exercising its vocal cords while perched on a branch.

photographed. All of these species were simultaneously present on the homestead, but had I never laid eyes on them, I would have been left to assume the catbird was putting me on.

While not as showy as beauties like the Bullock's oriole, the catbird is a beauty in its own right. If you believe the color gray can be rich and deep, then you've probably spied the

catbird at some point in time. Their plumage boasts a tinge of stormy blue with a coal-black cap and tail feather tips punctuating their otherwise modest appearance.

My difficulty in pinning down the bird for a few photos educated me to their elusiveness being partially owed to their dark coloring and propensity to inhabit the densest, shadiest parts

of the riparian. Catbirds prefer shrubby trees like dogwood, hawthorn, cherry, elderberry and viny plants like honeysuckle and blackberry for nesting. Their summer food sources consist of insects, fruits and berries, and I assume the increase in chokecherry and blackberry on the homestead have been the main draw to the catbird in recent years.

According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, females build open-cup nests made of twigs, straw, bark, and mud which have a finely woven inner lining of grass, hair, rootlets, and pine needles. Clutch sizes range from one to six and females can have two to three clutches per year. Eggs are turquoise in color and occasionally have red spots (which I have unfortunately never seen). Males aggressively defend their territory, even in winter, which is unusual among songbirds.

Next time you find yourself up a brushy Blue Mountain draw, keep an eye peeled for a flash of gray and an ear out for a raspy "mew." Aside from being unassumingly stunning, the catbird's photography challenge is worth pursuing as they move from tree to tree and branch to branch. If you stick with them, you just might nab a passable photo and hear their complex song long enough to realize you've been had by a master of mimicry.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

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