



Deschutes River's life at stake

by Marsha Shewczyk

The Deschutes River once flowed untamed and unspoiled through rugged canyons, past the 43 miles of reservation land on to the Columbia River. Not many people contemplated riding its rapids.

In the quest for adventure and excitement and as a way to escape the environs of the city, great numbers of people now flock to the Deschutes River. For a few hours, nature is at its best as river rafters enjoy the jagged rock walls bordering the river. Instead of the constant hum of automobile traffic and industrial noise the serenity of the Deschutes River is relaxing. The beauty is breathtaking. At least it used to be.

Today there are problems. It is no longer a handful of adventurers who seek recreation on the Deschutes River. The numbers have increased to thousands.

The Deschutes River as a natural resource can give only so much before it begins to suffer. Only so many trees along the river can be cut for firewood, only so much litter can be deposited, only so much trampling of vegetation can occur before the Deschutes fails to provide beauty and continue to be a resource.

Representing the interests of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs the Warm Springs Recreation Committee is highly concerned with the heavy use of the Deschutes River. Spawning grounds along with cultural areas may be affected.

Through pressure, the Tribe has permitted rafting with the concession that power boats not be permitted over the section of the river owned by the Tribe. There remains the question of whether or not this concession is a forfeiture of rights.

The issuance of river permits along with a list of river rules and regulations for a user fee is an attempt to monitor the river. This, however does not limit the number of users on the river.

Money generated from the pass system is distributed by the State Parks Administration to provide for law enforcement

services, river recreation information and education, maintaining facilities along the river and for "enhancement and protection of the natural and scenic beauty of the Deschutes River Scenic Waterway..." as the law states.

The regulations to be observed specify provisions for campfires, litter and pollution, tree cutting, collecting souvenirs and relics, trespass and campsites.

In reference to reservation land the regulations state, "The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon have closed all reservation lands to public use except by permit."

Even with the rules outlined for boaters and fishermen, "The fee system leaves a lot to be desired," comments Recreation Committee chairman Louis Pitt, Jr.

"The tribe is an unofficial participant in the fee system. We didn't endorse it," adds Pitt. Oregonians and out of state travelers are invited to enjoy the wonders of the Deschutes River in the Oregon Scenic Waterways program voted upon by Oregonians.

The Oregon State Police cadets and the Warm Springs police patrol the river issuing citations if necessary. According to Bureau of Land Management area manager Zeek Ziegler, 74 citations were issued in the first two weeks of August. The citations were issued for illegal campfires, angling in the wrong places, no life preserver on the raft, mutilating game and fish and undersize trout. These citations are representative of those issued throughout the summer.

When it comes to trespass on Indian land, oftentimes the case is thrown out of court. According to Warm Springs police chief Jeff Sanders, "We lose because of the wording. We have to show intent." Even with many no trespassing signs lining the reservation side of the river "not enough information is given" for the people to know they are breaking the law, Sanders says.

The rafting business on the Deschutes River is definitely lucrative with so many people interested in rafting and

fishing. Kah-Nee-Ta is looking into sharing some of the revenue.

Kah-Nee-Ta general manager Garland Brunoe is studying the feasibility of offering raft trips at the suggestion of Kah-Nee-Ta's board of directors. It is only with a resolution from Tribal Council that the trips will be offered.

Contrarily, the Recreation Committee feels that increasing revenue for a single enterprise does not justify increased use and depletion of the river's resources. The aesthetics and fisheries are more important.

Public meetings are being planned for discussion of the Deschutes River. A meeting between the Bureau of Land Management, the Tribe, the State Police and the Scenic Waterway committee is scheduled for October 22 in The Dalles to discuss studies made on the river throughout the summer.

Waiting to see just how much the river can take seems to be an inadequate approach to preserving the Deschutes River for future generations. By the time the effects are seen, it might be too late.



NO TRESPASSING—Reservation land is off-limits to river users. That fact is stated in the regulations regarding river usage accompanying river passes. Signs are also posted liberally along the river's edge. But even with these, trespass on reservation land is common. Trespassers often claim ignorance to the fact that the land is Indian owned and off-limits.



CAMPFIRE CAUSED—This fire near Trout Creek started with a campfire. River users must follow regulations concerning fires and use of areas bordering the river. Increased use produces a higher possibility of damage to the river and adjoining land.

Spilyay Tymoo photos by Shewczyk