

RECREATION
REPORT

FREE FISHING
WEEKEND SET FOR
SEPT. 1 AND 2

Sept. 1-2 is a Free Fishing Weekend in Oregon — you can fish, crab or clam anywhere in Oregon without a license or tag.

NO BAG LIMITS
AT THIEF VALLEY
RESERVOIR

Dry conditions in Eastern Oregon and declining water levels in Thief Valley Reservoir have prompted local fish biologists to remove daily catch limits on the reservoir through Sept. 30. The reservoir is about five miles east of North Powder, accessible via Highway 237 and Government Gulch Road. The daily bag and possession limits for trout are removed with no minimum size. Harvest methods may include hand, dip net or angling.

BROWN LEE
RESERVOIR

Fishing has been good for both catfish and bass. Good numbers of large bass are being caught. Fishing for crappie is slow, but the fish are large. Trolling rapalas deep is a way to pick up some of the large crappie available.

OXBOW RESERVOIR

Anglers have recently reported good fishing for small-mouth bass (up to 2.5 pounds) with a lot of topwater action on lures and flies. Catch rates for crappie have been moderate but are making up for it in size with many fish reaching the 12-inch mark. Anglers are having best success for crappie while angling away from the shore.

WALLOWA LAKE

Fishing for rainbow trout has been good. Some surplus production of rainbow trout resulted in additional fish being released into the lake. Expect fishing to remain good through the end of summer. Kokanee fishing has improved recently and large fish are being caught. A reduction in the population size has allowed for fish to grow larger and anglers are catching fish up to 20 inches.

WALLOWA COUNTY
PONDS

Kinney Lake has been drawn down for irrigation and there have been recent reports of a fish kill. The reservoir will likely not begin to refill until October. Expect fishing to be poor until later this fall. Marr Pond repairs are complete and it has been stocked with legal and trophy trout. Drawing down the pond for repairs killed a lot of aquatic vegetation, which makes fishing easier.

BASKING IN THE RELATIVE COOLNESS OF THE HIGH WALLOWAS DURING A RECORD-SETTING HEAT WAVE



Lisa Britton/ForWesCom News Service

Water from a spring along the Copper Creek Trail in the Eagle Cap Wilderness trickles through the patch of yellow monkeyflower at the bottom right of the photo and continues down to join Elkhorn Creek, center.

RETREAT FROM THE HEAT

It happened that on the hottest day ever in Baker City I was wading knee-deep in a spring-fed mountain brook so chilly that it dimpled my thighs with goosebumps.

That I had to hike about five miles to get there, and mostly uphill and almost constantly dusty miles they were, seemed a pittance to pay.

Indeed it struck me, in those gloriously refreshing minutes while my lower extremities were submerged in Copper Creek, in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, that it was the grandest bargain I was likely to ever broker.

I didn't learn until the following morning of Aug. 11, when my phone briefly latched its digital tentacle to some distant tower, that the temperature had reached 109 degrees at the Baker City Airport the day before.

I had scarcely had time to adjust to the new meteorological reality when it hit 108 on Aug. 9. The previous record temperature — 106 degrees — had lasted almost exactly 57 years.

Its successor couldn't hold on for as long as two days.

None of these statistics seemed especially vital, though, as I splashed about in Copper Creek, a tributary of the West Fork of the Lostine River. We picked the alpine meadow through which the stream



ON THE TRAIL

JAYSON JACOBY

flows as the basecamp for our annual August trip into the Eagle Cap.

The site is at an elevation of about 7,300 feet. That's almost 4,000 feet higher than Baker Valley, a difference all but certain to lop off quite a number of degrees during even the most dire heat wave.

It was still quite warm for the high mountains. The cheap plastic analog thermometer clipped to my pack briefly rose into the low 80s, but the instrument is so small — perhaps half the size of a Post-It note — that I couldn't make out the reading with any precision.

Yet even at the apex of the afternoon's heat the puny patch of shade cast by a stunted whitebark pine had much the same effect as standing in front of an air conditioner.

And Copper Creek's crystalline water carried away any residual heat, so that when I trudged back across the meadow to our tents, still dripping, I felt the sense of comfort and contentment unique to places far beyond the sight of any road.

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Lisa Britton/ForWesCom News Service

Monkeyflower blooms along Elkhorn Creek in the Wallowa Mountains.



ARCHERY SEASON OPENS SATURDAY, CONTINUES THROUGH SEPT. 23

Weather shift could benefit archery hunters

By Jayson Jacoby
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Archery hunters who head out when the month-long season opens Saturday morning might have an advantage due to the region's scorching and dry summer.

Elk and deer appreciate cool shade, green grass and cool water as much as hunters do.

And probably more, what with the scarcity of water faucets in the woods.

"Deer and elk will be concentrating on grass and shade — moist meadows, north aspects," said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Baker City office.

Although the summer has set a

passel of temperature records — the Baker City Airport broke its all-time high of 106 with 108 degrees on Aug. 9, then broke it again the next day at 109 — Ratliff said the desiccated conditions aren't especially unusual for late August.

"Typically archery season starts dry," he said.

It might not stay dry for long, though.

The National Weather Service is predicting a significant change starting Sunday, with the coolest weather since mid-June and a moderate chance for rain showers continuing into early next week.

Rain would improve stalking conditions, and Ratliff said cooler tempera-

tures should encourage animals to forage longer each day rather than seeking a cool place to bed down.

Ratliff said archers should have a better chance of bagging a buck this year compared with last.

The region's deer herds are slowly recovering from the hard winter of 2016-17, when hundreds died.

"We are seeing more deer, and those forked horns should start showing up in the harvest again," Ratliff said.

As was the case a year ago, Ratliff said it's likely there will be somewhat more archery hunters than usual because ODFW has not increased the number of rifle deer tags for this fall's hunts. Due to the severe losses dur-

ing the previous winter, the agency cut tags by as much as 50 percent in some units for 2017.

As for elk, Ratliff said herds are generally doing well.

In most units in Northeastern Oregon, archery season is a general hunt for deer, with the bag limit being one buck with a visible antler in most cases.

The regulations are a bit more complicated for elk. It's also a general hunt in most units, with a bag limit of either one elk or one bull elk in most cases.

Details are available in the Big Game Hunting regulations and online at <http://www.eregulations.com/oregon/big-game-hunting/>