

RECREATION REPORT

DEADLINE FOR SPRING BEAR APPLICATIONS

The application deadline for controlled spring bear hunts is Sunday, Feb. 10. Hunters can apply online (make your choices during check out), at a license agent or at an ODFW office that sells licenses.

PHILLIPS RESERVOIR

Current reservoir storage is at 9 percent of capacity. The reservoir is fully ice-covered and ice fishing is underway. The perch are larger this year, averaging about 9 inches. Rainbows range from 10 to 20 inches. Construction of the new boat launch surface at the Mason Dam Boat Launch is now complete and the launch has re-opened to public access. Access has been good, but may be impacted by recent snowfall.

PILCHER CREEK RESERVOIR

Ice fishing is underway and rainbow trout fishing has been good. Ice thickness is 12 to 14 inches. Fall sampling by ODFW shows that good numbers of rainbow trout and black crappie are available. Rainbows range from 8 to 15 inches and black crappie from 6 to 13 inches. Four-wheel drive is advised for accessing the reservoir.

IMNAHA RIVER

Some reports of steelhead being caught but overall fishing has been slow. The daily bag limit of one hatchery steelhead will continue through the end of the season on April 30. Bag limits were reduced to protect limited numbers of wild fish returning to the Snake River Basin and to ensure hatchery programs meet production goals.

KINNEY LAKE

Ice fishers have found success at Kinney Lake catching rainbows to 16 inches. Fishing should remain good until ice out in the spring. Access can sometimes be difficult when snow drifts over the road.

SNAKE RIVER BELOW HELLS CANYON DAM

The one fish daily bag limit for steelhead has been extended through the end of the season on April 30. Bass fishing should be good and remain good. Look for bass near steep banks and structure. During colder weather anglers should fish slow retrieves in deep water.

WINTER TRANSFORMS A MOUNTAIN STREAM INTO A SERIES OF TEMPORARY SCULPTURES



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Wintry temperatures have created a variety of icy sculptures along Pine Creek, in the Elkhorn Mountains west of Baker City.

ICE ART



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

A mountain stream is the artistic virtuoso of the natural world.

During summer the cascading water gives a constant concert, a stirring performance that spans the musical scale from the treble tinkle of a rattle to the thundering bass of a plunge pool.

In any season the interplay between flowing water and sunlight paints ever-shifting scenes, none of which is ever duplicated.

But in winter the brook adds to its repertoire the skills of a sculptor.

Prolonged periods of chilly weather transform even the most modest of streams into a series of ice sculptures, their shapes as eclectic, and ephemeral, as those of clouds.

I was reminded of this particular attribute recently while snowshoeing beside Pine Creek, one of the prominent streams draining the east slopes of the Elkhorn Mountains near Baker City.

The temperature was in the low 30s — this was several days before the current batch of arctic air barged into our region — but Pine Creek, as is common with mountain streams, lies in a narrow canyon where



ON THE TRAIL

JAYSON JACOBY

sunlight penetrates for just a few hours during the already abbreviated midwinter day.

The creek — or “crick” as the word is often pronounced hereabouts — meandered between rocks which, with their 18-inch-thick cap of snow, looked to me like nothing so much as marshmallows.

(Or in a few cases, toadstools.)

The variety of the frozen concoctions, in shape and in size, was considerable.

In several places where the stream narrowed — Pine Creek is rarely more than 15 feet across anyway — it was bridged by snow.

On the downstream side of these bridges the melting snow had frozen into a staggered row of stalactites.

Some of these were the classic dagger-shape familiar from limestone caves, but in several places the thin shaft widened at its bottom into a fan that dipped into the water and created a miniature, and musical, eddy.

In the case of rocks that barely protruded above the stream's surface, the water that occasionally surged over the stones prevented snow from sticking — or so I surmised. These boulders were mantled instead by a scrim of ice, in some places perfectly transparent and in others turned a milky shade of silver by embedded bubbles.

We learn at quite an early age, of course, what sustained freezing temperatures do to water.

But it seems to me that we never completely lose our fascination with, and appreciation for, the unique shades, textures and forms that result from a confluence of frigid weather (even if it's the artificial environment inside your freezer) and water.

I walk often along the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway, the paved path that parallels the Powder River through Baker City, and in the cold months I'm always eager to see what a polar spell has wrought.

The Powder is a sluggish stream during winter, as much of its flow is held back by Mason Dam. Its gradient, as it runs through Baker Valley, is also much flatter than Pine Creek and other mountain creeks.

As a result the Powder frequently freezes from bank to bank.

This isn't quite as fetching, perhaps, as Pine Creek, with its series of minor ice-encrusted waterfalls.

But the Powder's solid layer of ice can yield its own interesting phenomenon — especially if the ice isn't buried under fresh snow.

Earlier this winter I watched, while crossing the river (on a sturdy steel bridge; I have no interest in testing my ability to extricate myself from a hole in the ice), as a single cottonwood leaf, trapped beneath the crystalline ceiling, tumbled downstream, its pale yellow edge brushing occasionally against the imprisoning ice above.

It was an otherwise ordinary episode — rivers tend to be bordered by trees which release leaves into the water, after all — turned into a slightly peculiar, and thus compelling, one by a simple, natural process.

This week's ongoing stretch of chilly weather, even as you read these words, no doubt is redesigning streams across the region, from the littlest rill to mighty rivers such as the Grande Ronde and the Willowa.

Which means you won't have to go far to enjoy this seasonal show.

MAGNETIC NORTH POLE MOVING FASTER THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

Polar shift affecting accuracy of navigation

How will the change affect me?

As mentioned in the story at right, the increase in the speed at which the magnetic north pole is moving could affect the accuracy of the compasses in smartphones and other electronic devices. Both Android and iOS operating systems use the World Magnetic Model to ensure accuracy. Experts say the effects of the comparatively speedy shift in the magnetic north pole is more of an issue for navigation north of the 55th parallel. That's a long ways from Northeastern Oregon — about 690 miles. We're near (and in the case of people just south of North Powder, almost exactly on) the 45th parallel.

The shifting pole does — and always has — had a more significant effect on people who navigate by means of a magnetic compass (like the one in the photo above, at right) and a paper map. That's because the compass needle points to magnetic north, while maps are based on geographic north, a point hundreds of miles away (and getting farther). To account for this difference — known as the “declination” — you have to adjust your compass heading. How much depends on your location. There are many declination maps available online.

By Seth Borenstein
AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON — North isn't quite where it used to be.

Earth's north magnetic pole has been drifting so fast in the last few decades that scientists say that past estimates are no longer accurate enough for precise navigation. On Monday, they released an update of where magnetic north really was, nearly a year ahead of schedule.

The magnetic north pole is wandering about 34 miles a year. It crossed the international date line in 2017, and is leaving the Canadian Arctic on its way to Siberia.

The constant shift is a problem for compasses in smartphones and some consumer electronics. Airplanes and boats also rely on magnetic north, usually as backup navigation, said



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Compasses point to magnetic north, but it's a moving target — and it's been moving faster recently.

University of Colorado geophysicist Arnaud Chulliat, lead author of the newly issued World Magnetic Model. GPS isn't affected because it's satellite-based.

The military depends on where magnetic north is for navigation and parachute drops, while NASA, the Federal Aviation Administration

and U.S. Forest Service also use it. Airport runway names are based on their direction toward magnetic north and their names change when the poles move. For example, the airport in Fairbanks, Alaska, renamed a runway 1L-19R to 2L-20R in 2009.