

RECREATION
REPORT

ARCHERY ELK
HUNTING WILL
REMAIN GENERAL
SEASON IN 2021

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) won't change archery elk hunting seasons from general to controlled hunts until 2022 at the soonest.

The agency earlier this year announced that it would ask the Fish and Wildlife Commission at its Sept. 11 meeting to change archery elk and deer seasons to controlled hunts starting in 2021.

Although a decision on changes to the elk season is deferred, the Commission will, during its Sept. 11 meeting, consider the ODFW proposal to change archery deer seasons in Eastern Oregon to controlled hunts starting in 2021.

"The popularity of archery elk hunting in Eastern Oregon has led to significant management challenges in many wildlife management units," said Nick Myatt, ODFW's project lead for the review of big game regulations. "While these issues need to be addressed, based on hunter input received, we want to further refine proposed changes, collect additional information on archery hunter preferences around those changes, and expand involvement across all hunters. ODFW does plan on proposing changes for the 2022 eastern Oregon archery elk season, but the proposals will be taken to the Commission for consideration in 2021 at a time that does not overlap with archery season."

More information on the proposals can be found at <https://myodfw.com/articles/big-game-review> and further details will be available the week before the Commission meeting at the Commission page. To comment, send an email to odfw.commission@state.or.us or register to testify at the virtual meeting via Zoom.

IN THE YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC, MORE PEOPLE VISITING THE EAGLE CAP WILDERNESS, OTHER OUTDOOR DESTINATIONS



Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

From the trail just below Horton Pass the view includes two of the major drainages in the Eagle Cap Wilderness — the East Fork of the Lostine River at left, and Hurricane Creek at right — as well as the summit of the Matterhorn, the white peak at far right.

SPACE TO SPREAD OUT

By Jayson Jacoby
Baker City Herald

In the Eagle Cap Wilderness, social distancing is better measured in miles than in feet.

But the effects of the coronavirus pandemic have spread even to the Eagle Cap, Oregon's biggest federal wilderness at 365,000 acres and a place where it's not uncommon for visitors to pitch their tent several miles from the nearest person.

And possibly farther than that from the closest road.

The effects aren't dramatic, but they have been noticeable, said Sweyn Wall, the recreation, trails, wilderness and special uses coordinator at the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest's Wallowa Mountains Office in Enterprise.

Wall said Forest Service wilderness rangers and other employees have reported a significant rise this summer in the number of people visiting the Eagle Cap Wilderness and, to a lesser extent, the Hells Canyon Wilderness.

The Forest Service won't have detailed data until Wall tallies reports this winter.

But he said rangers have estimated visitor numbers have increased by 50% to 100% in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

And the trend isn't limited to the wilderness area, where motorized vehicles and bicycles are prohibited and visitors must either hike or ride a horse.

Wall said Wallowa-Whitman campgrounds have also been busier than usual this summer.

This pattern is hardly exclusive to the northeast corner of Oregon.

State parks departments, federal agencies and other entities nationwide have seen larger-than-normal crowds this summer as people who spent much of the spring staying home seek outdoor activities.

And more than usual, those people are choosing to drive to destinations

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— Sweyn Wall,
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

rather than fly, and staying in tents and campers rather than motel rooms and resorts.

"This summer, 97% of people who are traveling are taking that good old-fashioned American road trip," said Marie Dodds, spokesperson for AAA Oregon & Idaho. "People want to go places where they can avoid large crowds and do fun things in the great outdoors. Of course, here in Oregon and the West Coast in general, we have so many locations where people can do that."

That the Eagle Cap Wilderness, and the Wallowa-Whitman in general, are among those locations is not surprising, Wall said.

In a typical year, he said, 70% to 80% of visitors to the Eagle Cap Wilderness live outside the area, and many travel more than 300 miles.

"What we're seeing here mirrors what's going on in the rest of the country," Wall said. "There's a strong desire on the public's part to get out and recreate outdoors."

Wall said five wilderness rangers, who spend most of their time in the Eagle Cap but also travel in the Hells Canyon Wilderness, have talked with about 700 groups of wilderness visitors, totaling around 2,000 people.

In 2018, by comparison, four wilderness rangers visited with about 550 groups.

Based on this summer's reports, more people than usual are taking their first trip into the wilderness to

camp overnight, Wall said.

He said the number of cars parked at Eagle Cap Wilderness trailheads has been above average, with "cars lining roads approaching popular trailheads a common experience."

Wall said the pattern of use has been similar to past summers, with a large majority of people starting their trips at one of three trailheads on the north side of the wilderness — Wallowa Lake, Hurricane Creek and Two Pan (at the end of the Lostine River Road).

Wall said forest employees have seen several cars parked at other trailheads, including on weekdays, that usually are empty even during weekends.

Bear Creek trailhead south of Wallowa, for instance, has been much busier than usual this summer, he said.

The situation has been similar in other parts of the Wallowa-Whitman.

Chelsea Judy, the marketing director for Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, which manages three Forest Service campgrounds in the Anthony Lakes area and four others at Phillips Reservoir and near Sumpter, wrote in an email to the Baker City Herald that "we have seen a lot more traffic and people out recreating in general. Both the Anthony Lake and Union Creek complexes have experienced a higher volume of campers and day users."

Judy said visitor numbers are up by 15% to 20% at both complexes, with a "very large number" of guests from outside the area compared with the past two summers. The Forest Service awarded Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort the concession to operate the campgrounds starting in 2018.

Teresa Fraser, the camp host at the Wallowa-Whitman's Wetmore, Yellow Pine and Oregon campgrounds along Highway 26 west of Unity, said visitor numbers have been higher than usual there. Wallowa-Whitman employees have also reported more people than usual camping along the

South Fork of the Burnt River.

Although the Eagle Cap Wilderness has ample acreage for visitors to spread out, people tend to congregate at lakes, which usually have the best places to pitch a tent.

The most obvious problem resulting from this summer's increase in visitors is, to put it bluntly, poop.

More specifically, human waste that isn't buried as it's supposed to be — in a hole 6 to 8 inches deep and at least 200 feet from water sources.

This is not a new problem, to be sure, Wall said.

But he's heard more reports about the issue this summer than in the past.

Whether that reflects an influx of first-time wilderness visitors, who might not be familiar with the proper disposal technique, is not clear, Wall said.

Another effect that he attributes to this summer's pandemic-driven boost in wilderness visits has to do with a quota or permit system or some other way to limit the number of people allowed to enter the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

There are no such restrictions now. The Forest Service does limit the size of individual groups entering the wilderness to 12 people and 18 head of stock, and to six people and nine head of stock in the Lake Basin.

Wall said the number of questions wilderness rangers have fielded from visitors who advocate for controlling the number of people in the wilderness has been modest this summer, but it has been more common.

"Normally we have maybe only half a dozen folks" annually who ask about or suggest such limits, he said. "This year we've had maybe twice that number. It's not a large percentage by any means, but it stands out. It's relatively unusual to hear about in our part of Oregon."

Crappie fishing has been as hot as the weather recently

Used to be I'd catch crappie in Oregon until June 10. The last 4 to 5 years I'm still catching them up until I knock off fishing and start bow hunting, which is in September. I don't know what has changed. But who cares, the bite is real!

Of course, the technique to catch them changes as the year goes by. On a recent Monday at Owyhee Reservoir, Katy and I caught 114, and on Thursday 141 in 4 hours. And, she was reading a book for an hour or two both times. This year it seems like the red/white tube jigs are the hot ticket with a small jig head, but on that Thursday I switched to a Lake Fork Trophy Lures Baby Shad in their pearl color and it held its own.



BASE CAMP
TOM CLAYCOMB

Of course they aren't up right by the bank like in the spring when they're spawning. We're catching most of them out 50 yards from the bank and further. We'll cast out and let it sink to the bottom. If you're fishing with two rods cast out both.

Then pick up the first one and slowly pick up the tip of the rod and slightly reel. They start hitting right away. If not, repeat. Near dusk it is a hit every cast, literally. Reel it in, unhook your fish and by now another fish will be hitting the second rod.

Don't grab the second rod, though. Cast out the first one right fast so it can be fishing and then reel in the second fish. Unhook him right fast and then cast it back in and grab the first rod. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat until you're tired. Fishing is unbelievable right now. More than likely you'll only be able to handle one rod.

I don't have a depth finder on the Black Pearl (which the haters call the Edmond Fitz Terror due to a few mishaps) so I can't tell you what depth to fish in but I'd say out to 30 feet. We catch most of them deep but as soon as I say that we get a lot of fish not over 4 feet deep. Quite a few times we've had a jig by the side of the boat and caught a fish not 3 feet deep.

But big news, even though we've owned the Black Pearl for 34 years and she is very well weather worn, we did upgrade her recently. We put on a Honda BF2.3 gas motor. Ahh ... It is like a slice of heaven. No longer do we have to monitor the battery power level nor are we limited to staying within a couple of miles of where we launched. Nor do we periodically have to paddle back due to a dead battery. A couple of times in bad winds I've made it back within 50 yards of the dock only for the battery to die (curse of all curses) and get blown off into eternity.

The Honda BF2.3 motor pushes the BP about three times as fast as the electric trolling motor too. As soon

as I get a free moment, I think I'll go down to the courthouse and legally change her name to Suck My Wake! That definitely sounds more prestigious than all the other names that my disillusioned buddies have called her. Including The Coffin or Carp 1.

Now that I have a real motor and can fish more and will be paddling and cussing less, what am I going to do with all of the fish that that allows me more time to catch?

Yes, I am definitely on top of the world now that I have a gas motor. I'm thinking that I've reached the pinnacle of crappie fishing. And then I got sent to South Dakota for 2 weeks. I think the crappie had something to do with me getting sent!