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FISHING THE DESCHUTES ABOVE BEND

BY MARK MORICAL • The Bulletin

The Upper Deschutes below Benham Falls can be a productive place to fish during late winter in Central Oregon. The water flows are typically low there this time of year, affording the fish fewer places to hide and making the river easier to wade. Conversely, the Middle Deschutes, from Lake Billy Chinook to Bend, typically experiences higher flows through the winter, making it difficult to fish. Brown and rainbow trout constitute the majority of the catch on the stretch of the river from Benham to Bend, which is open year-round but restricted to artificial flies and lures.

Getting there: The best way to access the river below Benham Falls from Bend is to drive southwest on Century Drive. After about 7 miles, turn left on Conklin Road (Road 41).

Several left turns off Conklin provide access to the

river. Options include Lava Island Falls, Big Eddy, Dillon Falls and Benham Falls.

Parking: Northwest Forest Pass required for parking at trailheads.

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Bulletin file photo
A fly angler fishes the Upper Deschutes River between Lava Island Falls and Big Eddy.

Outdoor pick of the week: Crooked River Wetlands Complex

I love a good interpretive trail.

At the Crooked River Wetlands Complex about three miles northwest from the heart of Prineville, 13 well-designed educational kiosks are placed along the 5.4 miles of flat trails that surround 13 ponds that host a plethora of migratory and resident birds throughout the year. The kiosks all have a different informational theme, including animal and pollinator information, history and hydrology.

The complex is relatively new. It officially opened in April of 2016, and was created out of the city's need for a new wastewater treatment system. Instead of spending an estimated \$62 million on a whole new facility, the city went a different route, creating a manmade wetland where the wastewater would gradually and naturally be filtered before returning to the Crooked River, cutting the price tag down to \$7.77 million.

There are two trails, an inner and outer loop. The inner is 3.2 miles and completely paved, while the outer and full 5.4-mile track is a mix of pavement and gravel. The complex has a large pavilion with two picnic tables and a bathroom, while the walkways have benches throughout. Both trails bring great opportunities to not only learn, but to birdwatch as well. On a recent, very windy afternoon, my sister Heather and I spied several species including a red-tailed hawk, buffleheads, lesser scaups, dozens of northern shovelers, magpies, American coots, trumpeter swans and a great blue heron.

Getting there: From Prineville, travel west on U.S. Highway 26/Third Street and continue onto State Highway 126. Turn right onto the O'Neil Highway for 2.2 miles then turn right onto Rimrock Acres Road. The complex is immediately on the left. Open dawn till dusk.

— Makenzie Whittle, The Bulletin

The paved path along a pond at the Crooked River Wetlands Complex.

Makenzie Whittle/
The Bulletin



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