

Recreation, wildfire – 2.0

Though we've already written about these topics in recent months, here are a just a few more things about recreation and wildfire season in Harney County:

Recreation in Harney County: On May 31, the Harney County Chamber of Commerce hosted a recreation open-house at the Community Center. Staffs from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service, and Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation were on hand to hear from the public about the types of recreation opportunities they currently or would like to enjoy in Harney County. Those who attended provided great input about snowmobiling, Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use, hiking, biking and horseback riding. Loop trails were a definite 'must have,' both close to town (paved or well-groomed) and in more remote areas. Motorcycle and bicycle clubs were suggested, along with more designated or developed routes, regular route maintenance, and more (are there any now?) bike racks within city limits. More access for winter activities – namely snowmobiling – was also recommended. Thank you to those who participated and gave such terrific feedback. More discussions and planning will be held throughout the coming months.

What else is happening with recreation 'round these parts? The Steens Mountain Loop Road opened to Fish Lake Campground on June 9. Visitors can now access the site for fishing, camping and even swimming if you are bold enough to brave the cold water. Access to South Steens Campground and Riddle Brothers Ranch came mid-May. BLM staff is working to clear the remaining snowdrifts in the higher elevations in order to get the entire Steens Mountain Loop Road open before Independence Day. On the horizon: Chris Miller Memorial Steens Rim Run and Walk – August 6, 2016 (details at www.steensrimrun.com).

Wildfire: It's officially wildfire season. You may have noticed the first big storm of the season on Tuesday, June 7. If you missed all the thunder and lightning, perhaps you were out of town or sound asleep! Fortunately, we received only three smoke reports out of the storm's nearly 400 lightning strikes in Harney County – and only one of those resulted in a fire (less than one-quarter acre). Although Harney County has enjoyed some late-spring moisture and the onset of green-up in recent weeks, the entire area remains in a drought and fuel conditions will return to seasonal dryness sooner than later. Fire danger is likely to increase more quickly than usual in June due to anticipated warmth, and normal fire season levels are expected by month's end.

Fire danger in Harney County is currently MODERATE and the Industrial Fire Precaution Level (IFPL) is ONE. Activated when needed during the summer fire season, IFPLs are an activity closure system to reduce wildfire risk. By law, the system applies to woods workers and other industrial forest users on public lands. IFPL one doesn't limit operations but does require a fire watch after the shutdown of power-driven equipment. No public use restrictions are currently in effect – campfires are welcome on public land, but encouraged to be within a developed fire ring and must be cold to the touch when left. Be careful with fire!

Questions about recreating on public lands or wildfire activity? Call your local BLM office at (541) 573-4400 or stop by the office at 28910 Hwy 20 West in Hines.

