

John Day Snake Resource Advisory Council Planning Subcommittee Meeting

May 20, 2020

Via teleconference

Meeting convened at 6:05 p.m. PT

Members present: Bob Krein, Jim Reiss, Greg Jackle, Steve Lent, Terry Drever Gee, Gary Gustafson

Agency Reps and others: Amanda Roberts, Central Oregon Field Manager, Prineville BLM; Heidi Mottle, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Prineville BLM; and Kirstin Heins, Assistant Field Manager for Recreation and Partnerships, Prineville BLM; Larisa Bogardus, Public Affairs Officer, Vale BLM; Art Waugh, pending RAC reappointee.

Topic: Discussion of expanding the fee season for the John Day River to include the fall months.

The public was invited to comment at various points during the call.

Presentation:

Amanda Roberts, Central Oregon Field Manager, Prineville BLM, explained this is a second proposal pertaining to boating on the John Day River. During the Feb. 21-22 JDS RAC meeting, the RAC endorsed a proposal to extend the spring fee season from May 15-July 10 to May 1-July 15 to better align with heavy river use. No changes were made to the fees themselves. They remain \$10 per group for day use or \$20 per group for overnight.

This time, the proposal is to add a fall fee season to Segment 1, from Cottonwood down to Tumwater Falls, from Sept. 1 and Nov. 30. Currently, there is no fee for that time frame, just the \$6 transaction fee for a launch permit.

All proceeds would go to Oregon State Parks to help offset the cost of Cottonwood State Park staff patrolling, cleaning, and educating the public around Cottonwood Bridge. In 2019, a total of 57 permits issued. Depending on the type of permit, the revenue for 57 permits would range from \$570 to \$1,140. It's not much, but it helps.

What is the capacity for the proposed fee season? The maximum number of permits per day is 6, so over the course of the 91 days, there is potential for a total of 546 permits. This should be adequate, since the most permits issued for any single day in recent years has been 4.

What's driving this proposal? Primarily steelhead runs and hunter access for deer and chukar. Typically the water levels are very low in September, which isn't conducive to rafting.

Can the number of permits be adjusted? The current river management plan sets the limit at 6. A plan amendment would be necessary to increase beyond that level.

The only reason for the limit is to provide management. As use increases, the fee is needed to cover some of those costs. Even the much busier spring season only generates about \$20,000 a year.

Will this impact people catching hatchery fish? No. ODFW was consulted during the drafting of the management plan and their comments/concerns were incorporated and addressed in the final document. Again, in recent years, the most permits issued for a single day has been 4. The maximum limit of 6 will not be a deterrent for anglers.

Why wasn't a fall fee season considered when the RAC discussed the management plan in 2014? During the environmental assessment (EA), there were no comments regarding fees because fees are not part of a NEPA analysis. The analysis did, however, address use limits.

Is there a need for the limit of 6? What happens when the 7th guy can't get one and complains? Based on use history, it is very likely a permit would be available to that person the day before or the next day.

Is an additional fee going to put a burden on users? They are already paying for a boat license, a steelhead tag and a fishing license. The fees are very friendly and shouldn't be a deterrent. Probably not, but we need to consider it.

Didn't the EA identify limiting use? Yes. Permits protect and enhance the angler experience. The BLM manages the habitat also the Wild and Scenic River designation. This segment needs some love. The fee will support our cooperation and collaboration with our State Parks partners. Adding the fall fee is a small step toward this.

Hiking and biking will still be open to the public along Segment 1 without a permit.

There's no public access to the river from Starvation Lane down to Rock Creek, is there? There's very little public land. That's why the fees go to state parks, because they manage it. The Cottonwood Canyon EA is basically an agreement to manage BLM land in this area. State Parks is entirely funded by fees and lottery revenue.

The six permits is already approved? Yes, the decision was signed. So basically, you're looking at expanding the fee to include 3 months in Segment 1? Yes.

It would be nice to know the hatchery numbers for that area.

The fee is fine. I'm not crazy about the 6 permit limit, but I understand that's already in place.

If the RAC formally recommends the addition of a fall fee season at the June meeting, we will be able to implement it this year.

Is there a way to build something in that stipulates that the number of groups will be addressed in the future? There are several things we will be considering in the future, but that probably wouldn't help at this juncture.

Does the group support the proposal, and if so, are you in favor of presenting it to the RAC? All RAC members on the call agreed. Art Waugh will draft the subcommittee's report to the full RAC for consideration at the June meeting.