

## **Recreational Impacts in The Upper Klamath Basin**

**August 2020**

The COVID pandemic and the restrictions that have been placed on travel has caused an unprecedented amount of people seeking outdoor recreation. The amount of people that are showing up in outdoor recreation areas is causing negative impacts to the environments involved. The impacts include habitat destruction, littering, defecating in unapproved areas, harassment of wildlife, trespassing on neighboring private lands, among others. The stakeholders that have and should have concerns are the Public, US Forest Service, National Park Service, Oregon State Parks, Oregon Marine Board, Bureau of Land Management, Tribal Members, Property Owners, Klamath County Officials and Private Business Owners involved in recreation and hospitality.

The discussions that I have had with local and regional officials have mostly centered around Spring Creek and The Kimball Recreation Area which are both located in Collier Memorial Park but the issues evident are happening across our Nation and locally at Crater Lake National Park, Lake of The Woods and other outdoor recreational areas.

To help provide information that would be useful for entities to address the problems I have compiled some information to share.

Locally, Spring Creek and Kimball Recreational Area, The Wood River and the amount of people bringing watercraft into these waters is probably getting the most attention in regard to the impact, however Crater Lake National Park and Lake of The Woods has been having overflow crowds also.

It has been calculated by non-official counts that Spring Creek and The Upper Wood River has experienced approximately 400-600 watercraft per weekend collectively throughout July and into August. These numbers are starting to drop a small amount and should continue to as the school season starts, and winter arrives. July and August are typically the busiest recreational months for our area in the year with July being slightly higher than August.

Sky Lakes Wilderness Adventures reports their usage of these areas at 15-18 watercraft per weekend between Spring Creek and Kimball Recreation Area. There are several other outfitters and organizations who are supplying watercraft including Roe Outfitters, Wanderlust Tours, Collier Memorial State Park, The Ledge, Private Kayaking Clubs, and private owners of watercraft. Having been at these locations often I would guess that over 90% of the users of watercraft are from private ownership.

Kayak recreation and small watercraft usage of rafts, paddleboards, inner tubes have hit an all-time high in the past couple of years. I have spoken to multiple retailers who have sold hundreds if not thousands of watercrafts throughout the last couple years , most of which has been kayaks. It seems from what I am seeing that a large portion of these purchases have been by individuals who are new to the sport and some new to recreating in our outdoor spaces.

In my view a lack of education of proper outdoor etiquette and the sheer volume of users is causing the impacts we are seeing.

It has been discussed by some of the stakeholders that a first step will be to place signage in Collier Memorial Park at Spring Creek and The Upper Wood River to inform individuals of rules and proper etiquette while using these sites. Which I strongly agree with. Other options include instituting usage fees of the areas and restricted use which I also agree would help alleviate the impact issues. Improvement of the areas being used has also been discussed. With the new boater fees on watercraft that have been placed by the Oregon Marine Board designated for water access improvements and recently The Great American Outdoors Act passed by Trump money should be or become available to help in restoration and improvement projects for these areas, which I strongly encourage our government stakeholders to apply for as soon as they can.

As the only outfitter involved in the first discussions to the meetings I would strongly encourage that all stakeholders are contacted to inform them of what is going on. The outfitter, guides, resorts, lodges, vacation rentals, tourist agencies, and others are all promoting these areas and should be made aware of the impacts created and be asked to join our discussions and educate their customers.

My company, Sky Lakes Wilderness Adventures regards this as a serious issue and has moved forward to alleviate our impacts by restricting rental watercraft on the Upper Wood River, educating our clients through social media, our website, verbally and through policy sheet handouts. As this process moves forward and more input is received we will do our part to continue to work with our community members to help resolve the problems we are seeing.

Sincerely,

Mark Cobb

Sky Lakes Wilderness Adventures