

Boating on the Wallowa and Grande Ronde Rivers

The river corridor between Minam, Oregon, and Heller Bar, Washington includes the lower ten miles of the Wallowa River and the lower 81 miles of the Grande Ronde River. Public lands in this river corridor are managed in part by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and the States of Oregon and Washington. The river canyons in Oregon have been designated as both *National Wild and Scenic Rivers* and *Oregon State Scenic Waterways*, in recognition of their unique natural character and outstanding fish, wildlife, scenic, and recreational resources.

The “upper river” between Minam and Troy consists of steep, basalt canyons and ascending ridges within dense evergreen forest, many portions of which are only accessible by boat. The meandering curves of the “middle river” parallel seldom-traveled County roads, through the rural community of Troy and nearby ranches, as the canyon begins to widen and the forests gradually yield to open ridges and steep range lands. The “lower river” section in Washington is characterized by sparsely-vegetated, rugged terrain, and contains the history of ancient peoples and pioneer homesteads amongst a few active ranches. The entire river corridor is a complex ecosystem rich in unique natural features, history, spectacular scenery, and a wide variety of plant and animal life.

Each year the area receives thousands of visitors seeking the beauty and diverse outdoor recreation opportunities that the rivers offer. Where road and trail access is most limited, well-prepared whitewater boaters travel the river using a variety of specialized watercraft. A typical float trip begins at Minam on the Wallowa River and lasts two to three days, “taking out” on the Grande Ronde River downstream. Shorter or longer trips are possible with proper planning. Other popular river access points include Wildcat Bridge, Mud Creek, Palmer Junction, Troy, State Line, Cougar Creek, Boggan’s Oasis, Shumaker, and Heller Bar.

Early spring and autumn attract anglers in search of elusive steelhead trout. Peak recreational boating season occurs between May and July, although river trips are possible throughout the year, depending on river conditions. Because the rivers are primarily free-flowing, water levels and river character change dramatically with the seasons and local weather patterns. Higher, faster river flows typically occur in the spring and early summer, as warmer temperatures and increased rainfall melt high mountain snows. As the season progresses, the river level gradually drops. By August, river flows are typically very low, with shallow water and exposed rocks being common. Low water levels usually remain throughout the fall and winter months. Boaters are strongly advised to obtain up-to-date river conditions and weather forecasts when planning their trip.

Elevation ranges from 2,500 feet at Minam to 825 feet at the Snake River. Average river gradient is 19 ft. per mile, and numerous rapids are common. Primary rapids are rated Class II-III on the American Scale of Whitewater Difficulty, and require some technical maneuvering to navigate safely. “The Narrows” Rapid on the Grande Ronde River in Washington is rated Class III+-IV, and may require lining or portaging. Scouting of all rapids is strongly advised. Recommended watercraft include high-quality, multi-chambered, inflatable rafts, drift boats, and whitewater kayaks. Poorer quality rafts and float tubes may be dangerous and are best left at home. Canoes are not recommended, unless specifically designed for whitewater use and operated by boaters with advanced whitewater skills and specialized equipment.

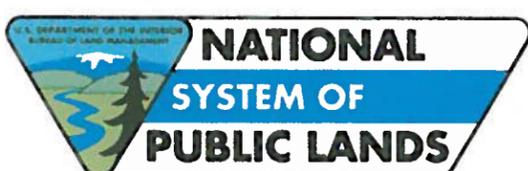
In keeping with the natural character of the river, amenities and developed facilities are few. Natural and man-made hazards do exist, including falling trees, rapids, wildlife, bridge abutments, inclement weather, rugged terrain, and challenging access. Search and rescue assistance is difficult, dangerous, costly, and time-consuming. Visitors should plan ahead and be prepared for the unexpected, taking every safety precaution. Remember to always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.

Primitive, undeveloped river camping is available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Visitors are required to follow low impact, “**Leave No Trace**” practices to minimize the impacts of their stay, and help preserve the natural resources. Mandatory use of fire pans and portable toilets, as well as packing out all garbage and treading lightly on vegetation, helps keep the river corridor clean and healthy for the next visitors and future generations. To prevent over-crowding and further reduce visitor impacts, boaters are strongly encouraged to plan their trip to avoid busy weekends and holidays whenever possible.

Backcountry roads are often unsigned and primitive, and may require good map reading skills and GPS to follow. Some roads may be unmaintained or impassable; always inquire locally for current conditions. Gasoline, food, and other services are often not available in rural areas. Cell phone service is often unreliable or unavailable for long periods of time. Drivers should be well-rested and prepared, and carry extra fuel, food, water, and a good spare tire. Stay alert for traffic, road hazards, and animals on the roadways.

In 1987, federal and state agencies started a River Program for the cooperative management of the river corridor. Agency staff make periodic river trips to fulfill administrative functions, perform various work projects, monitor river conditions, and provide information and assistance to visitors. Please take time to read the bulletin boards provided at the primary river access points. These boards are posted with important information, seasonal restrictions, and special notices to help you have a safe and enjoyable visit.

For more information, please contact the Bureau of Land Management at 541-523-1256, or learn more online at: www.rivers.gov



Things to Know Before Your River Trip

The Willowa and Grande Ronde Rivers in Oregon are designated **State Scenic Waterways** and **National Wild and Scenic** rivers. **Special rules apply** for public recreation use of the lands and waters within ¼ mile of the rivers in Oregon, and when using Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands above the average high water mark in Washington. These rules are in place to protect and preserve the waterway's outstanding scenic beauty and natural resources, while maintaining the river's wide range of recreational opportunities for present and future generations. Please practice "**Leave No Trace**" (www.LNT.org). Thank you for your help in keeping the river clean for everyone.

RIVER PERMITS

Every boating party must obtain a Self-Issue River Permit prior to launch, available at most public river access points. Permits are free, and do not restrict number of trips you make, or limit trip itineraries. Permits provide essential river use data, as well as crucial information in the event of a Search and Rescue emergency. (Note: commercial outfitters and guides may also need to obtain a Special Recreation Permit. Call the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) at 541-523-1256 for details on outfitters and guide services.)

PORTABLE TOILETS

A portable, containerized toilet must be carried and used during float trips, and at all times when developed toilet facilities are not provided. Do not leave, deposit, or scatter human waste, toilet paper, or items used as toilet paper, on the ground. Portable toilets may only be dumped at designated locations and fixtures provided for that purpose. *Please help stop "white flowers" on the river!*

FIREPANS

When not prohibited, all fires must be contained in a fireproof container (i.e., "fire pan") with sides of a height sufficient to contain all ash and debris, and all ash and unburned debris removed from the river corridor. Please do not construct or use rock fire rings, and dismantle those that you may find. *Fireworks are prohibited year-round.* Check bulletin boards for seasonal fire restrictions and special notices.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES PREVENTION PERMITS

These permits are required for *all watercraft* 10 feet or longer in Oregon. For motorized boats, the permit is automatically included with boat registration in Oregon. Permits are available for purchase online and at Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) licensing agents.

OTHER REQUIRED EQUIPMENT (Oregon and Washington)

✓ Life Jackets:

One U.S. Coast Guard approved Type I, II, III wearable personal flotation device (PFD) of suitable size for each person on board. PFD's must be kept readily accessible, and

- Children 12 and under **must wear** PFD's while boats are underway;
- In Oregon, all boaters operating in Class III or higher white water rapids **must wear** an approved U.S. Coast Guard Type I or III PFD, or Type V PFD that is suitable for use on whitewater rivers;
- In Oregon, a Type IV throwable device is also required for boats 16 feet and longer, except canoes and kayaks.

✓ Sound signaling device, such as a whistle or compressed air horn.

✓ Lantern or flashlight showing white light (between sunset and sunrise, and during periods of restricted visibility).

MOTORIZED WATERCRAFT

Motorized watercraft (including "kicker motors") is prohibited on the Grande Ronde River in Oregon between Sheep Creek (river mile 80) and the Oregon-Washington state line (river mile 38.5). Motorized watercraft is prohibited on the Grande Ronde River in Washington from September 15 through March 15, unless the river is 3000 cf/s or higher.

GROUP SIZE and CAMPING

No group greater than 25 persons, including guides and trip leaders, may launch, float together, stop or camp together. Primitive camp areas are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Please select durable campsites appropriate to your party size, and be considerate of other visitors. Please make every effort to pack out all garbage and micro-trash, and leave your campsite in a clean, natural condition, better than you found it. To prevent over-crowding and reduce visitor impacts, plan your visit to avoid busy weekends and holidays if at all possible.

MOTORIZED EQUIPMENT

All motorized equipment, including chainsaws, generators, etc. is prohibited on the Grande Ronde River in Oregon within 1/4 mile of the river between the Forest Service boundary near Sheep Creek (river mile 80) and the mouth of Wildcat Creek (river mile 53.5). *It is unlawful to carry, use, transport, or possess any motorized equipment within this section of river.*

RIVER MAPS

In keeping with the primitive nature of the river corridor, amenities and signs along the river are few. Detailed river maps and GPS will be very helpful when planning trips, and in locating public lands, camp areas, landmarks, and rapids. River maps are available at some local businesses, online, and at land management agency offices.

Violations are punishable by law. For more information, please contact the Bureau of Land Management at 541-523-1256, or visit:

www.rivers.gov