

APPENDIX 8-1 RECREATION OVERVIEW

SUMMARY: Recreation and tourism are increasingly important parts of Wallowa County's economy. Overall tourism and recreation spending has doubled over the last ten years, with an increased emphasis on conventional tourism (As opposed to more traditional recreation such as hunting, fishing and backcountry trips, conventional tourism is more centered on nice lodging, fine dining, shopping and sight seeing). People come to Wallowa County for scenery, solitude, camping, picnicking, boating, snow and water skiing, snowmobiling, auto touring, hiking and backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, and to visit the shops, galleries and restaurants in the Joseph and the Wallowa Lake area.. Recreation is centered around Wallowa Lake and the Eagle Cap Wilderness and to a lesser extent the streams and rivers of the County including the Snake River and the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. Tourism is centered around Joseph and the Wallowa Lake area.

PAST AND PRESENT: Recreation and tourism are considered a primary part of the County's economy , and are the fastest growing segment of the economy. Wallowa Lake and Joseph are the center of tourism in the County and the State Park at Wallowa Lake is a major attraction. The Joseph Economic Improvement District and resultant improvements has turned Joseph into a center for tourism, and has led to a doubling of businesses on main street.

This industry is highly seasonal and operates from late May to mid October, with peak activity from the first of July to mid October. The tourist facilities at the lake, including the State Park parking area, the moorage and docks, short term rentals, the motels, and the restaurants, now stand idle during the winter months. There is some snowmobiling and cross country skiing in the winter, but the economic impact is comparatively small. There is a need to extend recreation and tourism into the shoulder and winter months to even out the economic activity. Tourist spending in the County has doubled over the last ten years and has made up for some of the employment lost in other sectors.

Wallowa Lake State Park operates at capacity during the summer months, however, only a very limited number of sites are open during the winter months. The State Park at Wallowa Lake is the most extensive of the State developments with 89 tent sites, 121 trailer sites, 3 group camps and two yurts plus other recreational opportunities. It is a well-developed and maintained park providing an ideal stepping stone to a number of other recreational possibilities. Oregon State Parks also operates a campground at Minam and a Wayside along the Wallowa River. The Department of State Parks and Recreation has developed, in concert with the County, a State Parks Master Plan for Wallowa County.

Other large campground developments include the Boy Scout Camp and the Methodist Camp,

both located above and south of Wallowa Lake on the west side of the Wallowa River.

The Wallowa Lake Yacht Club has had a consistent presence at the lake and have been mooring their boats at their 40 slip private dock since the early 1950's.

The economic impact of both hunting and fishing, within Wallowa County has declined significantly over the last twenty years. This is particularly true of hunting where Elk harvest is down approximately 75% and deer harvest is down approximately 50%. This decline may be due to a combination of the policies of the Oregon department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W) and the passage of a State initiative limiting the hunting of cougars and bears with dogs. ODF&W's Elk Nutrition and Mortality Study is ongoing and preliminary results indicate that cougars and bears may have caused high mortality among young elk..

Hours spent fishing is also down locally, as it is nationally, and this trend is expected to continue. However, a bright spot in this picture is the increased attention Wallowa Lake has received for producing large Kokanee, including the State record, and the recent increase in Salmon and Steelhead runs. As a result, the Imnaha River was recently reopened to the harvest of Salmon. Increased interest in catch and release flyfishing, and Salmon and Steelhead fishing, will provide some economic benefits. Perhaps the most significant economic impact related to fisheries is the number of people recently employed to work on the "Salmon Habitat Recovery Program" and other endangered fish species/water quality programs. These include Nez Perce Tribe personnel as well as government employees and private consultants.

Over half of the County is under United States Forest Service ownership: 18 percent is designated as Wilderness and an additional 34% is National Forest. Most of the County's recreational activities take place on State and Federal lands, including a number of campgrounds located in the Wallowa Whitman and Umatilla National Forests. It is hoped that more private commercial recreation activities and facilities can be developed, in so far as it would be compatible with the County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. An increase in the length of the season of present day recreation could provide the County with added economic benefits.

Recreation in Wallowa County has historically centered on the Wallowa Lake Basin located at the foot of the Wallowa Mountains/Eagle Cap Wilderness. The majority of hikers entering and leaving the wilderness do so on the trails that converge at the head of the Lake. The Lostine River and Hurricane Creek trails are also popular Wilderness access points. Access to the Hells Canyon area is through Joseph and the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road. Due to USFS road maintenance policies, access to some of the County's more remote areas such as Hat Point and Dug Bar is limited.

However, the secondary road system on National Forest lands is a valuable resource. It is used for access to locations for hunting, fishing, firewood collection, berry picking, mushrooming, Christmas tree collecting, bird watching, ATVing, horseback riding and just

viewing the scenery.

The east side of Wallowa Lake is bordered by approximately 4 1/2 miles of public highway. Public access to the lake from Highway 351 is very poor except for a public boat dock and County Park at the north end. Also, bicycling, jogging, and hiking along Highway 351 from the City of Joseph to the south end of Wallowa Lake is popular pastime. The shoulder width is inadequate and a hazard to those who choose to jog, hike, or bicycle on Highway 351.

The Eagle Cap Wilderness is Oregon's largest, and wilderness camping and travel are receiving increased attention. The Wilderness offers magnificent scenery, natural history, solitude and spiritual renewal. USFS surveys show that more than 20,000 backpackers visit the Wilderness each year. They travel a mean distance of about 350 miles to get here, with some coming from 2000 miles away. Fourteen outfitter guides operate in the Wilderness. During the summer season, the Wilderness is heavily used. Some visitors express concerns about the quality of their visit and the impacts on the Wilderness due to heavy usage.

The Hells Canyon National Recreation Area has 20 + trailheads in Oregon plus the Hells Canyon Launch at Hells Canyon Dam. Peak backpacking season for the Canyon is March through May, but even then, the Canyon is not as heavily utilized as the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

Although wilderness campers and hikers spend less money than most tourists staying at Wallowa Lake, local services and facilities are often used, resulting in additional income. Also local outfitter guides benefit from Wilderness pack trips and drop camps. However, activity within the Eagle Cap Wilderness and other Federal Lands, including the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, is regulated by the US Forest Service whose goals are not necessarily shared by the County.

An increase in float trips on the Snake and other rivers has occurred over the past years. Some local guides and services are benefitting from this. Housing, meals, and gas are used by floaters traveling to and from the rivers.

FUTURE: The recreation and tourism industry is shifting more toward conventional tourism and is increasingly important to the County's economy.

As the tourism season is from late May to mid October, with peak activity from the first of July to mid October, initiatives to establish small or medium-sized winter facilities could lessen seasonal variations in employment. This type of capital investment would definitely allow increased usage of already existing motels, restaurants, etc. and would stabilize recreational employment and income. By focusing on a market somewhat larger than the County (regional) and staying moderate in size, such winter facilities should not cause large dislocations in the economy or contribute to the inherent problems of large resort areas. It is in the County's interest to support the development of a regional ski area, convention facilities, and destination resorts.

As the majority of wilderness access is from only a couple of points, efforts should be made for a better distribution of recreational activities and facilities. Most of the tourism business is centered around Wallowa Lake and its Wilderness trail heads. The Lostine and Hurricane Creek trail heads are also heavily used. Development of other Wilderness access points, such as the Minam River or Bear Creek, could take some of the pressure off the more heavily used trail heads. In addition, to expand the backcountry season and to take pressure off the Eagle Cap Wilderness, the County should promote and work with the Wallowa Whitman National Forest to facilitate increased backcountry usage of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. Also, the north County area could be developed for more ATVing, snowmobiling, and cross country skiing.

It remains a goal of the County to pursue development of a pedestrian/bicycle path along Highway 351 from the Chief Joseph Monument to Wallowa Lake Park. The County will promote driving tour routes and facilities development, including Hat Point, Cow Creek and the Lower Imnaha River, Highway 3, Lostine River, the Buckhorn - Wellamotkin Drive, the Powatka - Flora Loop and the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road, to take pressure off the Lake area.

According to the USFS, Heritage tourism is one of the most popular and growing forms of tourism. One of the attributes that Wallowa County has to offer is the powerful Nez Perce history of this area. The County should make every effort to promote the link between the Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark for the upcoming Bicentennial and to facilitate the Nez Perce Cultural Center. Pioneer history and the history of Bonneville, Astor, the Hudson's Bay traders, and the Nez Perce War are also valuable heritage assets. The Wallowa County Museum provides for a valuable look into the County's history. These stories are compelling and can offer the heritage tourist a wide range of experiences as they visit the authentic locations where history was created. The County also recognizes the sensitivity of cultural assets and will work with the USFS, NPS, and the tribes to protect these assets.

The County expects to continue to play a role in USFS decisions that effect tourism and recreation, including road closures and maintenance. It is in the County's interest to advocate for the outfitter guides for more USFS permit days, and to lobby the ODF&W for policies more favorable to hunting and fishing in the County. This includes effective control of predators such as cougars, bears and wolves. In addition, the outfitter guides should be encouraged to operate more in the shoulder seasons and should investigate less traditional trips such as birding, cattle drives or photography.

The County should coordinate with the responsible agencies to achieve changes in their policies which effect recreation and tourism, including access. Access includes not only roads, but trails, cat roads, access easements, and other means of access.

Overall tourism and recreation will continue to grow in importance to the County's economy. The natural beauty of this vast County, including Wallowa Lake, the Eagle Cap Wilderness, Hells Canyon National

recreation Area, numerous Scenic Rivers, and the area's forests and streams in general will continue to drive tourism and recreation. However, today's vacations are also driven by a desire to relax at resorts with attractive amenities, and to spend time enjoying high quality or unique shopping and dining opportunities. For this reason, the commercial development occurring in Joseph and planned for Enterprise, must go hand in hand with overall recreation and tourism strategies. The newly reactivated railroad also has tourist potential. Once tourists are settled in, they will look for daily activities, which increase the demand for guided horseback rides, flyfishing and scenic float trips, wildflower and bird outings, and cross country ski trips, to name a few of the available activities. Dude ranching is another possibility. As more people are exposed to the beauty and recreational opportunities of the County and to the Wallowa County lifestyle, we can expect demand to grow for second homes, time share condominiums, and housing for retirees, telecommuters, and newcomer entrepreneurs. These people and their skills and investments will add significantly to the County tax base, and help support local businesses.