

RIVER OF THE MONTH



John Day River

Oregon's John Day River is the longest free-flowing river west of the Rockies. Its lower reaches, which flow through some of the most stunning river canyons in the West, are designated **Wild and Scenic** for 147 miles. The river is crucial to fish and wildlife and nearly unparalleled in Oregon for remote, wilderness recreation.

Why It Matters

The John Day is a stronghold for summer steelhead and spring Chinook salmon and is home to the largest herd of California bighorn sheep in Oregon. It offers outstanding fishing, boating, hunting, hiking and birding in the rugged and scenic expanses of eastern Oregon's sagebrush-steppe. It is cherished by river lovers from all over the Pacific Northwest.



Fish

The John Day's steelhead have the best chance of recovery of any Columbia Basin fish listed on the Endangered Species Act. The river also has one the region's most important runs of spring Chinook, as well as native redband rainbow trout and threatened bull trout.



Wildlife


In addition to supporting Oregon's largest herd of California bighorn sheep, the John Day is home to pronghorn, mule deer, black bear, Rocky Mountain elk, peregrine falcon and golden eagle. Upland game birds include chucker, pheasant, quail and partridge.

How to See It


In 2013, Western Rivers Conservancy created [Cottonwood Canyon State Park](#), providing unprecedented new access to a 16-mile stretch of the Wild and Scenic River corridor. There are campsites, trails, interpretive sites, historic ranch buildings and access to fishing, hiking, hunting, boating, horseback riding and mountain biking.



Paddle

 From the park, float 10 easy miles to Starvation Lane (4 to 6hrs) or 20 miles to McDonald Crossing (overnight). May/June are ideal. **Minimal flows:** 200 cfs for kayaks, 300 for canoes, 500 for rafts, 800 for drift boats. Learn more at blm.gov/or/permit/.

Hike


 The state park has roughly 10 miles of hiking trails, most of which are along the river. Spring and fall are ideal. Summers can be brutally hot. Except during storms, winter can be beautiful and quiet, though definitely cold.

Fish

 The John Day is known for its summer steelhead (best from October through December) and non-native smallmouth bass fishing, ideal in spring and summer. The park offers excellent bank access for both.



Getting there

 The state park (open year-round) is immediately off of Hwy 206, which is accessed from Hwy 97 from both the north and south.

From Portland: 2.5hrs; **Seattle:** 4.5hrs; **Bend:** 2.5hrs
Best Times of Year to Visit: April - July

CONSERVATION
THE WRC STORY

Western Rivers Conservancy has been working for over nine years to conserve the lower John Day River and to protect crucial cold-water tributaries like [Thirtymile Creek](#) and [Hay Creek](#). We are currently working to conserve over 20,000 acres at Thirtymile Creek, the most important cold-water tributary on the lower river and a critical site for imperiled summer steelhead. Our effort will also conserve over 12 miles of the mainstem John Day and create the only viable public access to the river along a 70 mile stretch within the Wild and Scenic corridor. Cottonwood Canyon State Park lies at the downstream end and includes 16 miles of the river, 3 miles of Hay Creek and 16,000 acres of protected land.

[How to Help](#)



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