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Waldo Lake motor ban a good decision for a special place

BY MEG MITCHELL

Waldo Lake is a large, deep blue, largely undeveloped area where more than 86 percent of visitors prefer to paddle or sail its exceptionally clean water.

On Jan. 14, the Oregon State Marine Board ruled in favor of a ban on the use of gas motors on the lake. The ban goes into effect now, but most visitors will have to wait until late June or July when the summer sun frees the area of snow.

Here on the Willamette National Forest we're pleased by the Marine Board's decision and appreciate the leadership of the state over the past several months.

This is a case of the federal and the state governments jointly responding to the will of

the people on behalf of a place people deem worthy of special treatment.

There's been widespread support for this decision and extensive public outreach and debate over two decades. During the public outreach for the 1990 Willamette National Forest plan, we got more comments about Waldo Lake than any other place on the forest.

These comments encouraged us to manage Waldo for its unique scenic beauty and solitude. The state of Oregon recognized similar values when it declared Waldo a state scenic waterway.

Over the years, the state and the Willamette National Forest took several steps to protect the quiet setting and outstanding water quality. Motors are no longer allowed on the shores

of the lake, and the sanitation systems for camping have been upgraded to meet or exceed water quality standards.

After several years of public outreach and analysis, the Willamette National Forest issued a decision in 2007 to prohibit gas motors on and around the lake. One party filed a lawsuit, and in July 2009, the courts found that the Forest Service didn't include enough analysis of navigability and overturned part of our decision to regulate motors on the lake.

At the request of the governor, the directors of the Marine Board and the Oregon Department of State Lands developed a memorandum of understanding with the Forest Service and agreed to work together toward consistent regulation of Waldo Lake. The purpose of this agree-

ment was to develop the language necessary to bring a proposal to the Marine Board. The board took up the proposal and initiated rule-making and additional public outreach. Now the Marine Board has issued its decision prohibiting gas motors on the lake. This unifies federal and state management of land and water.

As with any important decision, there are different and opposing opinions, all of which had some influence. By allowing the use of electric motors on Waldo Lake, there is an option for those who want assistance of a motor while reducing disturbance to others. The decision continues to allow emergency landings by float planes and gas motors for search and rescue, law enforcement and firefighting.

One percent of Oregon's waters are closed to motors, while state surveys show non-motorized boating increasing 138 percent from 2003 to 2007, compared to a 4 percent increase in motor boating.

From a holistic public policy standpoint, Waldo Lake is a good place to balance this growing public interest while minimizing the impact this choice has on the legitimate interests of motor boaters who predominantly use other places.

On behalf of the Forest Service, I look forward to continuing to work closely with the state and all the users of Waldo Lake who all care passionately for this special place.

Meg Mitchell is supervisor of the Willamette National Forest.

Crater Lake beats Waldo

While I don't think anyone would argue with the fact that Waldo Lake is a gem, The Register-Guard's Jan. 16 editorial regarding the statistics of the lake is far from being the truth. True, it is a high, clear lake, and pretty good sized. However, one only has to look down the Cascade range to Oregon's only national park to find a lake that beats it in all categories.

The editorial stated that Waldo Lake's depth and clarity are unsurpassed anywhere in the world. Crater Lake is the seventh deepest lake in the world at 1,949 feet, compared to Waldo Lake at 420 feet. The average depth of Crater Lake is 1,148 feet, compared to 128 feet at Waldo. Using a device known as a secchi dish a world record for clarity was set at Crater Lake in 1997, 142 feet. Crater Lake has 20.6 square miles of surface compared to 10 at Waldo. The surface of Crater Lake is at 6,178 feet elevation, and the Waldo surface is at 5,414 feet.

I'm not trying to demean Waldo Lake, I am just trying to set the record straight. We are very fortunate to have all of the gems in our state, and fortunate that we have Crater Lake, the deepest lake in the United States and also the clearest.

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