Snake River Floaters Guide

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area
Dear Snake River Floater,

This HCNRA Snake River Floaters guide is provided to help you plan your float trip.

For more Hells Canyon information visit
www.fs.usda.gov/detail/wallowa-whitman/recreation.com

**ACCESS**

- **Hells Canyon Creek Recreation Site** is the primary launching point for float trips and is the only location in Hells Canyon where the Snake River is accessible by a two-lane paved road. This site, 23 miles north of Copperfield (Oxbow), OR, is accessible year round via a paved Idaho Power Company road.
- **Pittsburg Landing**, accessible year-round via a 19-mile single lane gravel road (FS#493, the Deer Creek Road). Turn west off of US Highway 95, south of Whitebird, ID and cross the Salmon River bridge.
- **Dug Bar**, on the Oregon side is north from Imnaha, requires a high clearance, 4WD vehicle. This road is not maintained and should be driven with extreme caution. Please contact the Wallowa-Whitman Joseph, Oregon Forest Service office for road conditions: 541-426-5546.
- **Heller Bar** takeout near the mouth of the Grande Ronde River is 23 miles south of the town of Asotin, WA via a paved and gravel county road.

**Launching and Takeout**

- **Hells Canyon Creek Recreation Site** has a Visitor Information Station, toilets, paved parking and a concrete ramp. Please call prior to launch for an update on the status of the launch facilities. Parking space is limited and anyone planning to launch directly from a trailer should have a vehicle with good traction, as the ramp is steep. At flows sometimes below 6,000 c.f.s. the ramp is unsuitable for launching boats that require the trailer to be in the water.
- **The launch/takeout site at Pittsburg Landing** has a Visitors Contact Station, toilets with changing area, a double concrete ramp, float apron, paved parking and a 28 unit campground.
- **Dug Bar** launch/takeout has a single concrete ramp and toilet, however this site is not well maintained.
- **Heller Bar** launch/takeout has a double concrete ramp and toilets. Although this site is larger than the others, it is also more heavily used.
- Be organized before you get to the ramp so your group can launch and take out quickly. The following chart provides the information for floaters launching from Hells Canyon Creek. Afternoon winds blow upriver and can lengthen float times in quiet sections of the river.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>River Portal Takeout locations</th>
<th>MILES</th>
<th>DAYS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PITTSBURG LANDING</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUG BAR</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELLER BAR, ASOTIN</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEWISTON, ID/CLARKSTON, WA</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Camping is allowed at designated, dispersed sites only. Reference a copy of the Snake River guide for the location of these sites. Most campsites are on grassy benches, limited in number (especially in the upper river) and are on a first-come, first-served basis. Party size at campsites should never exceed 24 people. Prior to your launch, campgrounds are available on Hells Canyon Reservoir for camping the night prior to the launch. **Camping is prohibited at the Hells Canyon Creek Recreation Site.**
Camping in the river corridor is limited

- 1 night only per party at Granite Creek and Oregon Hole
- 3 days and 2 nights per site in the wild river
- 4 days and 3 nights per site in the scenic river
- maximum party size is 24 per camp site

Navigating the river

- **The degree of difficulty** in normal summer flows varies from Class II (International Scale) to Class IV. However, difficulty varies with water volumes. Flows may be as low as 5,000 cubic feet per second (c.f.s.) in summer to 80,000 c.f.s. or more in the spring runoff.

- **Since the river flow is controlled by dams**, releases can vary from day to day and hour by hour. Rafting the rapids of Hells Canyon is not recommended for the inexperienced or poorly equipped. Portaging or lining through or around many rapids is difficult, if not impossible. Major rapids should be scouted before running.

- **For flow information**, call Idaho Power at 1-800-422-3143 or call [www.idahopower.com](http://www.idahopower.com) or view flow monitors located at Hells Canyon Creek, Pittsburg Launch, Cache Creek and the Clarkston, Washington Forest Service office.

Rules of the Road

- **Plan your assembly of boats** and gear in such a manner as to clear the ramp area as quickly as possible.

- **Craft traveling downstream, both powered and non-powered, generally have the right-of-way** but don’t have a right to intentionally block navigation.

- **When you see a powerboat coming**, if possible, pull to one side of the channel and let it by.

- **Keep your float party together instead of strung out over a long distance on the river**.

- **Kickers (outboard engines) on float craft may not be used in the wild river year-round**, but may be used in the scenic river and they do need to be licensed.

- **Fuel carried for kickers must remain on the boat at all times**.

- **On-river fueling must utilize fuel absorption material at all times during any fueling operations**.

- **Trip leaders are responsible** for the conduct of the members of their party during the entire trip and each member is also accountable for their own conduct.

- **We strongly recommend that you and your party take time to watch the Whitewater Boating Safety and Etiquette video available for viewing at both the HCCL and Cache Creek**.

- **Fire pans are required yearlong for anyone planning to have a campfire**. Campfires built in rock fire rings are no longer authorized. A fire pan must have sides 3” high to be adequate to contain all ashes and charcoal, which must be carried out with you. **The practice of cutting firewood for camp use is no longer allowed. Pack in your own firewood.**
• Public drinking water is not available in the river corridor including HC Visitor Center. Plan accordingly by carrying ample water supplies or purification equipment.

• Human waste must be carried out from river corridor. This equipment will be checked prior to launch. Equipment that is compatible with disposal at an RV or trailer dump station is the most versatile when looking for approved, off-site disposal facilities.

• Trash---Pack it in, pack it out!

• Retrieval of overturned or wrecked boats, gear etc.is the responsibility of the boat owner.

• Hells Canyon is rich in both historic and prehistoric cultural resources. These sites are fragile and irreplaceable. Enjoy them but leave them intact for visitors who will follow you. All artifacts and cultural sites in the canyon are protected by law with severe penalties for violators.

• Beware of natural hazards in the canyon. Rattlesnakes, spiders, scorpions and poison oak and ivy are common in the canyon.

• Only one state’s license is required to fish the river when the person fishing is in a boat that is afloat, even if the boat is tied to a particular side. However, when standing on the shore or having one foot on the shore you must have a fishing license for that state you have committed to.

HCNRA Snake River Float Information Summary

• **THE PRIMARY SEASON** extends from the Friday preceding Memorial Day weekend May 27th through September 10th.

• **THE SECONDARY SEASON** extends from September 10th through the Thursday before Memorial Day.

• **WILD RIVER RESERVATIONS** – from Hells Canyon Dam to Upper Pittsburg Landing – are required for the issuance of a trip permit, *seven days a week during the primary season*. There are three private permit launches each day. These reservations can be obtained either through the 4 rivers Lottery or by picking up a cancellation once the lottery reservations have been allocated. Both processes can only be done through the website [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) or by calling Reserve America at 877-444-6777. **Cancellations need to be made no later than 15 days prior to launch.**

• **SCENIC RIVER RESERVATIONS** – from Pittsburg Landing and Dug Bar – are required for the issuance of a trip permit on *Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays during the primary season*. These reservations are not made through recreation.gov and can be reserved by calling the Clarkston Forest Service office at 509-758-0616. The permit will be mailed to you along with boat tags. Scenic River launches Monday through Thursday (except Holidays) do not require an advance reservation and can be self issued. Self-issue permits must be completed at a permit station at Pittsburg Landing or Dug bar.

• **SELF-ISSUE RIVER PERMITS** are required for the entire river corridor during the secondary season, but do not require an advance reservation. They can be self-issued at any river portal. They cannot be used in place of a reserved launch in the Wild River between Hells Canyon Dam and Upper Pittsburg Landing during the primary season.
• **LIST OF REQUIRED EQUIPMENT INSPECTED AT HELLS CANYON LAUNCH**
  
  o Portable toilet system – make sure you have the carrying capacity for your group size.
  o Firepan
  o Aquatic invasive species sticker. Either Idaho or Oregon Aquatic Invasive Species Permits are allowed, if boating within the main stem of the Snake River. More information on the permits may be obtained through: [www.oregon.gov/OSMB/](http://www.oregon.gov/OSMB/) or [www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/activities/boating](http://www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/activities/boating)

• **In 2022, the first non-motorized period will be June 6, 7, and 8th.** If the 4th of July holiday falls on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, that week will be skipped and the non-motorized periods will continue the following week and every other week thereafter. There are 18 non-motorized days in the 2022 primary season. **The non-motorized section of the Wild River is from Kirkwood Historic Ranch to Wild Sheep Rapids.** Powerboat access will not be authorized during those times in that section of the wild river.

• **MAXIMUM PARTY SIZE** is 24 persons, including overnight use at river campsites. Multiple parties (float and/or power) may camp together as long as the maximum party size is not exceeded. **MAXIMUM NUMBER OF FLOAT CRAFT is 8 per party and includes kayaks and stand-up paddleboards.** All boats must carry at least one U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal floatation device for every person on board.

• **Overnight camping** is prohibited at the Hells Canyon Creek Recreation Site, Pittsburg Administrative Areas, Cache Creek Administrative Site and those areas under Special Use Permit – Sheep Creek and Temperance Creek.

• **Camping** for one night only is permitted at either at Granite Creek and the Oregon Hole during the primary season. All other sites have a two-night stay limit in the Wild River and a three-night stay limit in the Scenic River during the primary season.

• **SOLID HUMAN WASTE** carryout equipment and its use are required at all times in the river corridor.

• **The burning of wood in firepans is prohibited in the river corridor from June 1st through September 15 each year.** Gas stoves and charcoal in a fire pan or barbeque are acceptable. Fire pans are required yearlong and open campfires are no longer allowed. All firewood for camp use must be packed in. The use of chainsaws is prohibited.

• **Fireworks are prohibited yearlong.**

• **All garbage and trash must be packed out.**

• **Kicker motors** may not be used in the Wild River but can be used in the Scenic River.

• **Cultural Resources** are protected by law from vandalism, destruction or theft. Collection of historic and prehistoric artifacts is prohibited.

• **If you are planning to use an outfitter and guide,** be sure that person has the proper license. Licensing is for the protection of the public.

• **Trip leaders are responsible** for the conduct of the members of their party during the entire trip. Inappropriate behavior resulting in complaints from other river users can result in loss of access to the permit system. For more information contact the HCNRA Office 509-758-0616.
A point of interest is Kirkwood Ranch (pictured below) offers a taste of canyon life in the 1930’s. Visitors are welcome to stop at the museum and learn about ranching life in the canyon. A short ¾ mile hike up Kirkwood Creek takes you to the Carter Mansion, an unusual vertical-log home built in 1920.

Cache Creek Ranch is another location where visitors are welcome to take a break, picnic under the shade of the fruit orchard and visit the interpretive facilities. It is about one mile south of the Washington/Oregon border, 8.7 miles upriver from Heller Bar. This ranch was purchased by the US Forest Service in 1991.

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, like many of the forests, parks and public resources you will visit this year, will be utilizing the services of volunteers at many sites and on the river in support of patrols and maintenance. When you travel through Hells Canyon, you will often be greeted by these host’s whose purpose is to assist in making your visit a unique and special experience. They are dedicated to maintaining the resource and we appreciate their time and efforts and hope that you will enjoy the diversity this program brings to Hells Canyon—truly, a work in progress.

- Hells Canyon Creek Launch: 541.785.3395
- Snake River Administrative Office (Clarkston, Washington) 509-758-0616
- Recreation.gov help desk 877-444-6777
- Snake River flow information 800-422-3143