

# Nature Viewing by District

## Cascade

The Cascade District includes a Chinook salmon viewing platform which offers a fantastic opportunity to see the big fish jumping up the falls as they migrate upstream to spawn (numbers usually peak in late June, early July). The Chinook are the largest Pacific salmon species. On average, Chinook salmon are 3 feet long and approximately 30 pounds. But some Chinook salmon can grow to over 5 feet long and 110 pounds!

The **Rice Peak Trail (103)** is a steep hike, but rewards with magnificent views from the top. From Cascade, drive about 25 miles east on Warm Lake Highway. At Stolle Meadows, turn south on Forest Road 474 to its junction approximately 7 miles later with 478. Continue on 478 for about 4 miles until reaching the end of the road and the trailhead. Hike about .25 mile to Rice Lake, then go approximately 1 more mile, mostly uphill, to Rice Peak at about 8,700 feet elevation. You will have stunning views of Warm Lake, Long Valley, Deadwood Reservoir, the Frank Church Wilderness and multiple mountain ranges. This is also the location of the historic Rice Peak Lookout. The present building was built in 1940, but has not been staffed for several years. You can also reach the Lookout via the 102 Trail and from the Landmark-Stanley Road via the Switchback Trail (009) over to 102 Trail. Be aware these are all single-track trails that are also open to motorcycles.

## Emmett

**Highway 55 and the Banks-Lowman Road** travel through a canyon that offers many scenic views of the Payette River. North of Banks on Highway 55, visitors delight at the sight of the adventure-loving kayakers riding the Class V rapids on the North Fork Payette River. In fact, many river-runners consider the North Fork Payette River to be one of the most feared and respected Class V rapids in the world. On the Banks-Lowman Road at Banks, the South Fork Payette River views are a stunning mix of emerald green waters and whitewater rapids. A large turnout halfway between Banks and Garden Valley provides an easy stopping place to view kayakers attacking the well-known and extremely challenging Staircase Rapids. A stopping place along the Banks-Lowman Road provides a roadside scope where visitors can look out across the South Fork Payette River and into some pasture land where elk reside during the winter and spring seasons. Elk and deer are also commonly seen from Garden Valley to Lowman.

On **Middle Fork Road (Forest Road 698)** visitors enjoy spectacular views of the Middle Fork Payette River and Six Mile Creek Falls, a waterfall that stair steps several hundred feet from Six Mile Creek cascading into the Middle Fork Payette River.

## Idaho City

At over 7,800 feet, **Sunset Mountain** presents extensive views of the Boise Mountains and the forest opening up before you. Its summit is home to a fire lookout that is staffed during the summer months. On clear days, you may also see the Trinity Mountains to the southeast and Shafer Butte and Mores Mountain above the Boise Basin to the southwest. From Idaho City, take Highway 21 east to Mores Creek Summit, just past milepost 52. Turn right on Forest Road 316 and proceed for 4 miles. High-clearance vehicles are recommended on 316. Visitors should also be aware of snow conditions at the higher elevations before heading out.

**Thorn Creek Butte Lookout** sits at approximately 7,500 feet and affords fantastic 360-degree views of the forest, mountain peaks, lakes and rivers. From Idaho City, go one mile east on Highway 21. Turn right on Forest Road 203. Go 8 miles, then turn right on Forest Road 203L for one mile. The road makes a loop. High-clearance vehicles are recommended on 203 and 203L. Visitors should also be aware of snow conditions at the higher elevations before heading out.

From the **Graham airstrip**, visitors can get a birds-eye view to the east across the wilderness to the stunning Sawtooth Mountain Range. From Highway 21 at Edna Creek, go east on Forest Road 312. A high-clearance vehicle is recommended on 312.

## Lowman

One of the gems of the Lowman Ranger District is the large **roadless area** that exists throughout the district. The 80,000 acre roadless area in and around Red Mountain includes beautiful alpine and deep canyon terrain inhabited by elk, bear, and mountain goats. The lakes in Red Mountain are nestled in glacially scoured cirque basins, with scenery similar to the nearby Sawtooth Mountains. Elevations in the Red Mountain area range from 4400 feet near the South Fork of the Payette River to 8722 at Red Mountain. Visitors should understand that the Red Mountain Lakes are located near the large Red Mountain Fire, which burned approximately 40,000 acres in 2006. Large tracts of white trunked snag trees are visible in some areas, but ground cover is returning nicely with a mixture of shrubs and grasses. Huckleberries can be found in many of the burned areas, and flowers are abundant at different times during the summer. Snag trees can be dangerous and visitors should be extra careful if in those areas, particularly during windy days. However, snags can fall at any time with no warning, so camping near them is strongly discouraged.

## Lowman (conti)

The **Bear Valley** area is rich with gorgeous scenery and enjoyable recreation opportunities. The big open meadows coexist alongside stands of pine trees and the winding Bear Valley Creek, which is a major headwater for the Middle Fork Salmon River. Elk are often spotted in Bruce Meadows and a no-fee, non-reservable campground is located off Bear Valley Road on the Forest Road 579D loop. As you travel the roads in this area, you may note that vast tracts of land have been burned with historic large fires. The most visible is the recent Red Mountain Fire, which burned in 2006. Fire ecology in this area, especially for dry years, leads to crown fires on many days that while killing the standing trees, helps clear the forest of excessive wood and prepares the forest for new growth. Lodgepole pine, the predominant tree in the area typically is short lived and fire opens up the pine cones and releases seed which begins the rejuvenation of the forest again.

**Deadwood Reservoir** has long been a favorite of Forest visitors. The 3,000-acre body of water is about 25 miles southeast of Cascade via Warm Lake Highway. The scenic high-mountain reservoir was created by the construction of Deadwood Dam, completed in 1931. The reservoir has 21 miles of shoreline and is popular for hiking, boating (all types), camping and fishing, particularly salmon fishing. There are 4 campgrounds in the area.

The **Payette River Corridor** contains some of the best whitewater rafting and kayaking in the West! Even if you're not the adventurous type, the rapids are exciting and beautiful to witness. One of the classic runs treasured by whitewater enthusiasts (and therefore a great place to watch) is from Grandjean to Kirkham Hot Springs.

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