



Friends of the Metolius

Protecting The Metolius Basin
since 1990

Fall Newsletter, August – 2021
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Getting a Handle on Dispersed Camping in the Basin

In 1997, under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the US Forest Service adopted a Metolius Management Plan with the purpose of gathering information and developing management direction to protect the special values of the river. Under the Plan, the Metolius was divided into two segments – the Recreational segment from the headwaters to Bridge 99, and the Scenic segment from Bridge 99 to its confluence with Lake Billy Chinook.

To ensure that the unique character of the river is preserved, the Plan limits the number of dispersed camping sites to 10 sites in the Recreational segment and 20 sites in the Scenic segment. These 30 dispersed, primitive sites are in addition to the developed camping areas maintained by the Forest Service (e.g., Candle Creek, Smiling River). The Plan requires the closure of any dispersed sites that result in unacceptable impacts on the river, such as devegetation, loss of soil stability, or erosion.

This summer, Friend’s Board members and other volunteers assisted the Forest Service in conducting an inventory of dispersed camping sites in the two segments. Volunteers were provided with GPS-enabled tablets that supported the capture of location data, photos, and site-specific information (e.g., size, condition, vegetation coverage). The goal of the inventorying process was to update the previous inventory (2016) and generate data on existing sites in anticipation of the Forest Service’s closure of

multiple sites to meet the Plan’s 30-site limit. The site closure process will include restoration and revegetation of the areas to, over time, return them to a natural condition.

The inventory process identified almost 200 dispersed camping sites within the two segments. As the graphic shows, the west side of the Scenic segment alone includes almost 50 dispersed sites.



Volunteers identified multiple sites that appeared to present unacceptable impacts on the Metolius and its tributaries, including significant human waste, trash, devegetation, erosion, soil loss, and tree damage. Several sites were located within 100 feet of the river or its tributaries in violation of the Plan’s restrictions.

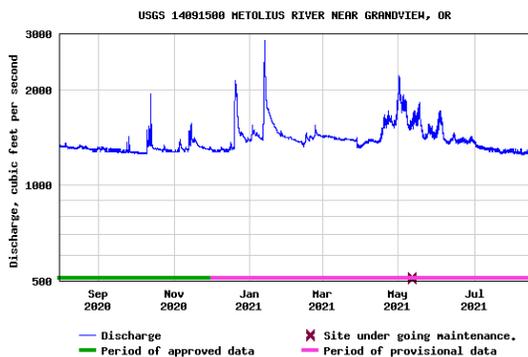
With the initial data collection complete, the Forest Service can now begin developing a plan to assess and close sites in conformity with the Plan. Given the scope of this project, Friends anticipates the need to work closely with the Forest Service to ensure that momentum is not lost.

President's Corner

Like everyone, I had hoped that by this time the pandemic might be in the rearview mirror. For a lot of reasons it hasn't worked out that way. But even as COVID continues to frustrate daily life, projects that *Friends* is working on have not been put on hold and we continue to make progress toward sustaining our mission of protecting the Metolius basin. You can read about some of those projects in this newsletter, and also on our website at www.metoliusfriends.org. I also want to introduce our newest board member, Kathy Herrmann. Kathy is an avid fisher who is passionate about protecting the Metolius, and she brings extensive experience working with nonprofits. She will be a great addition to our board. Welcome!

Everyone reading this newsletter is familiar with Wizard Falls. But some of you will notice something new in the photograph of Wizard Falls on the preceding page: there is actually a bit of a falls. According to the Oregon Water Resources department, the outflow from the Metolius Springs at the headwaters is 50% less than the outflow three years ago. Of course, there are numerous other springs and tributaries that contribute water to the Metolius river; the flow gauge at Grandview reflects that the volume is near historical lows but not far out of what might be considered normal. But by any measure, however, the river is low. This is concerning on many levels.

Discharge, cubic feet per second
Most recent instantaneous value: 1260 08-15-2021 08:00 PDT



A handful of years ago we could rationalize that climate change was not having a big impact on the Metolius basin. We now know that climate change is here and is probably the most significant challenge we face. We are experiencing

unprecedented heatwaves, tinder-dry conditions in the forests and ground water levels that have dropped rapidly. Wildfires over the past few years have intensified to the point where they make the national news cycle daily. At the same time, the number of visitors to the Metolius basin continues to increase lockstep with the population growth of nearby communities.

Addressing these and other challenges cannot be done by conservation groups such as Friends alone. We continue to work with the primary land manager, the US Forest Service, on many initiatives, but every one of us needs to be involved and contribute to the solution. Perhaps the first step is recognizing and acknowledging that the problem exists. That should be easy these days. Then, commit to doing something. It doesn't have to be something huge. There are many things every one of us can do individually. Local action is best and is well within the reach of every one of us. That is exactly what Friends does: we work very locally and do what we can.

You can help and if you would like to volunteer with upcoming projects, please get in touch! You can always reach us at friendsofthemetolius@gmail.com.

You can also help *Friends* through your financial support. Sadly, we have had to cancel our biggest fundraiser – the Labor Day Pancake Breakfast – for the second year in a row due to the rise in COVID cases. We rely on your support through donations and if you can help us out, thank you. Please see the last page of this newsletter to learn how you can make a donation.

I want to close this message with a heartfelt tribute to Tom Landis, a longtime *Friends* board member who we lost earlier this year to a long illness. Tom was a tireless advocate for the Metolius. He was a man who chose his words carefully and used them sparingly. I learned to listen to what he had to say because it was always borne of razor-sharp insight. Tom was invaluable as a board member. He was a cornerstone of our small community. And he was a wonderful friend. We miss him greatly.

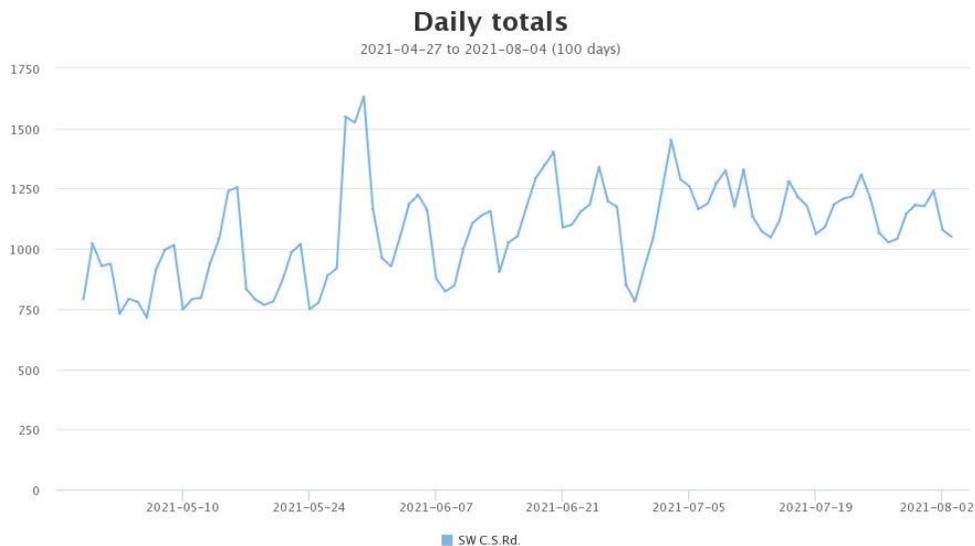
You can always reach us at friendsofthemetolius@gmail.com.

Data Collection to Support the Wild & Scenic Metolius River. Continued from last Spring...

In our last newsletter we highlighted efforts that *Friends* is taking to collect baseline data on how many visitors are arriving at the Metolius basin. As we began this project about a year ago, we were surprised to find that historical data on vehicle traffic entering the Basin is very sketchy at best. Indeed, no federal or state agencies seem to be able to find any reliable data on visitor numbers. The question remains: how rapidly is the number of recreational users increasing in the Metolius Basin? *Friends* data collection is ongoing and we are beginning to get the numbers we need to answer this question.

Earlier this year we purchased and installed a vehicle counting device on Camp Sherman Road (FS Road 1419). Every vehicle that enters the basin and passes the device is recorded. Although there are other minor entry points to the basin, 1419 carries by far the greatest number of vehicles and accumulated data will give a good indication of trends. It will provide a baseline and then track increases over time.

The graph below shows daily total vehicle counts for the period from April 27, 2021 through August 4, 2021. Memorial Day weekend was big for visitors with a whopping 1,600 vehicles entering on the 1419 road Sunday, May 30.



While vehicle counts are greatly reduced in the winter, we will continue to collect data year round (provided the snow cover isn't too deep for the electronics to function properly!). The traffic counting equipment is buried and therefore not visually obstructive. But it is doing its job every time a vehicle passes by.

Friends has also purchased two trail counters which are being deployed along the trails in the basin. We had initially used game cameras but distilling data from the cameras was difficult. The trail counters provide raw data on the number of hikers moving along trails and the data is easily managed. As with data from the vehicle counter, we plan to generate spreadsheets, share the results with the agencies involved, and upload it to our website at www.metoliusfriends.org.

Black Butte Restoration Work

If you've been following our previous communications about the Black Butte Cupola restoration project, you know that in 2019 volunteers repaired many of the structural elements of the cupola. During 2020 volunteer efforts were limited by COVID, but volunteers constructed furniture for the interior, designed interpretive signs on the lookout history of the Butte, and began work on a viewpoint at the end of an existing trail in the location of the old log cabin.

The new viewpoint observation deck was completed this summer and new directional signs were installed on the top of the Butte. As a bit of background, the new viewpoint is on the location of the old log cabin that was previously used as a residence for the lookout. The log cabin fell into disrepair and was burned in 2016, but the foundation piers remained. The new observation deck sits on these piers and hosts new mountain identifier signs. Also, this summer a new interpretive sign sharing the history of lookouts on the Butte was installed on the steps of the cupola.



Best View in Central Oregon!

If you get the chance, hike up the butte to see the improvements. And COVID-willing, are hoping to kick off a "docent for a day" program in 2022. If you are interested in participating in the program, please get in touch.



New Signage atop the butte

Interpretive Walks

We are pleased that our popular interpretive walks have been restarted this year. The walks were canceled last year due to COVID but our volunteer walk leaders pulled together to fill out most of a full two-month schedule of outings.

We see a variety of participants joining the walks. Some are local, some from Oregon, and some from far away. We were pleased to have a Sherman County wheat farmer and his wife join us this year. They were continuing a more than century long Camp Sherman tradition of farmers relaxing at their cabins after a long hot harvest season.

Over the years we have see changes in shrubs along the trails. Bitter brush is a case in point. There is a stage of the seed growth that has a beautiful deep red liquid contained in the small green husk. We have a July 23, 2010 video showing that liquid being squeezed from that green seed. This year the red liquid stage was there on the July 4th weekend. By July 30th the seeds had completed their development had dropped from the bush. We will continue to watch to see if that is a weather-based change this particularly dry year or a sign of progressive climate change

Check out the *Friends* website for the weekly schedule or find the list on the north side of the store on the bulletin board. Join us this summer if you can!

Bumble Bees!

Bumble bees are an important pollinator in the interconnected web of the Metolius ecological fabric, and their numbers have been in a steep decline. *Friends* is participating in the Pacific Northwest Bumble Bee Atlas with the goal of gathering information about these wonderful insects. Camp Sherman was selected as a survey site to perform a couple of simple capture and release surveys. Earlier surveys have been done in the area, but more information will help identify more species of bumble bees.

The meadow upriver from the Allingham Bridge was selected as the survey site because it has a fair number of blossoming wildflowers. Because of their large size, bumble bees are pretty easy to spot. A little practice with a butterfly net led to an easy roundup, done within a 45 minute timeframe. Once captured, the bumble bee is transferred from the net to a small bottle which is then buried in a cooler of ice. The chilled temperature induces a temporary hibernation-type state and the bee becomes inanimate. The chilled bee is placed on a flat surface for about three or four close-up photos, which will be used for an accurate identification by an expert. There are around 30 species in the Pacific Northwest with some of them looking very much alike.

The sun warms and revives the bees shortly after the photo shoot. After a brief grooming they perform a quick flight check and fly off to resume their duties flitting from blossom to blossom gathering nectar and pollen with seemingly little memory of their ordeal.

Information about each bee and a description of its location and surroundings is recorded on an online form and sent to the Pacific Northwest Bumble Bee Atlas program. The information is recorded, mapped, and sent to a central database. In about three weeks the survey is repeated at the same spot to check on changes. In early July, 10 bumblebees were captured and photographed. Later in the month only three were netted in that same place, as the blossoms were fading away fast.

The PNW Bumble Bee Atlas compiles the survey information to share with all who are interested. They are generating a baseline of information about different species and the type of plants that support them. It is so important to know more about these pollinators and how we can support their population.



Friends of the Metolius
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If you want to donate with a check:

Metolius (>\$1,000) ____
Mt. Jefferson (\$1,000) ____
Cougar (\$500) ____ Ponderosa (\$100) ____
Kokanee (\$75) ____ Penstemon (\$50) ____

Please include your contact information
including mailing address and email.

Or if you prefer to donate online, visit our
website at www.metoliusfriends.org and click
on the green "Donate" button on the top right
hand side of the screen.

Thank you for your support

Please Support Friends

When it comes to supporting nonprofits you have many good choices; there are lots of conservation groups that do fantastic work. But good work often comes at a high price to pay officers, staff, pay rent, and produce flashy publications that tout accomplishments to garner your support. Some of the donated money goes to feeding the nonprofit machine. Among conservation groups *Friends* stands out. Our work is limited to protecting the Metolius basin. We have no paid staff and directors receive no compensation whatsoever. We have no offices. Newsletters like this one are (obviously) put together by the board. We are all volunteers and your donations go entirely to supporting our mission.

Please consider supporting *Friends*. You can mail a check to us (see the last page of this newsletter), or donate online at www.metoliusfriends.org (click on the green "Donate" button).

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www.metoliusfriends.org