

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Snake River Powerboaters Guide



- Hells Canyon Creek Launch, Oxbow, Oregon: 541-785-3395
- HCNRA Snake River Office, Clarkston, WA: 509-758-0616
- HCNRA Idaho Office, Riggins, Idaho: 208-628-3916
- Wallowa Mountains Office, Joseph, Oregon: 541-426-5546

This Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA) Snake River Powerboaters guide is provided to help you organize and plan for your float trip.

Powerboat permits are required year-round. During the primary season, reservations are required seven days a week in the Wild River section and Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Holidays in the Scenic River section.

The Primary HCNRA Powerboat Season extends from the Friday preceding Memorial Day through September 10th each year. Secondary Season extends from September 10th through the Thursday before Memorial Day each year. Self-issue river permits are available at the HCNRA river portals.

- Reservations are secured through www.recreation.gov and self-issue permits are available at the HCNRA river portals.
- The 5 powerboat reservation descriptions are as follows:

SCENIC: These reservations are only required Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Holidays with 18 available reservations per day. This allows river access from the Cache Creek, Dug Bar or Pittsburg portals for the Scenic River section only. This Scenic river section is between Cache Creek boat check-in station to Pittsburg boat launch. A Scenic reservation also includes Salmon River access.

WILD: These reservations are required 7 days a week with 6 reservations available per day. This allows both wild and scenic river access from any HCNRA/ Snake River portal. The wild and scenic river section is from Cache Creek boat check-in station to Hells Canyon Dam.

SALMON ACCESS-DAY USE: These reservations are required Friday through Sunday, and Holidays with 5 reservations available per day. This allows access to the Salmon River from the Cache Creek or Dug Bar portals for Salmon Access only. No overnight use is allowed with this reservation.

LIMITED WILD RIVER NORTH: These reservations can be used to access some of the Wild River section during the non-motorized periods with 5 available per day. This allows limited wild river access from the Pittsburg portal to Kirkwood Ranch. Motorized craft is not allowed in the wild river segment between Kirkwood Historic Ranch and Wild Sheep rapids with this reservation.

LIMITED WILD RIVER SOUTH: These reservations can be used to access some of the Wild River section during the non-motorized periods with 2 available per day. This allows limited wild river access from Hells Canyon Creek Launch to Wild Sheep Rapids. Motorized craft is not allowed in the wild river segment between the top of Wild Sheep rapids to Kirkwood Historic Ranch with this reservation.

Each trip leader must reserve their own reservations and cannot make reservations for other trip leaders. To secure a reservation, the online system requires a user account which includes an email address and password.

Rules of the Road

- You must initiate your trip and submit your river permit on the same date as your reservation.
- The total amount of launches a user can reserve are unlimited throughout the season. However, the online system only allows for 3 reservations to be held at one time. Reservation permits can be printed 14 days (or less) prior to the launch.

- **Cancellations must be made no less than 7 days prior to the launch date to avoid a penalty.** If there is an unavoidable emergency that may cause a “no-show” or not allow a cancellation within the 7 day policy, please contact the USFS Snake River Administrative Office @ 509-758-0616.
- **The NO SHOW policy is as follows:** When a reservation is not canceled on the rec.gov website the penalty is the trip leader will be unable to place reservations for the remainder of the season and unable to make reservations the following season.
- **A powerboat permit allows up to 14 consecutive days of use.** However, there are overnight campsite restrictions. During the **primary season**, stay lengths of three days and two nights per campsite in the **wild section**, and four days and three nights per campsite in the **scenic section**.
- **Powerboating the rapids of Hells Canyon are not recommended for the inexperienced or poorly equipped.** 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 (CFS) in summer to 80,000 CFS or more during the spring runoff. Open bows on powerboats, overloaded boats and boats designed for flat-water fishing can be extremely hazardous in rapids.
- **Children 12 years or younger are required to wear a personal flotation device (PFD) at all times while rivercraft is under way.** A Coast Guard approved PFD is required for each person on any rivercraft.
- **All river users are required to carry out their human waste.** Be prepared to show that you have this available for use before your launch. An approved, washable, leak-proof, reusable toilet system that allows for the carry-out and disposal of solid human body waste in a responsible and lawful manner is required. The system must be adequate for the size of the group and length of the trip.
- **Practice No-Trace camping.** Keep trash bags handy during the day for empty beverage cans and incidental litter. Never sink cans or bottles in the river. Before leaving camp, make a final check for small trash, including fishing line. Do not bury any trash. No facilities for garbage pick-up are provided at any of the launch or takeout sites.
- **No campfires are allowed within the river corridor from June 1st through September 30th each year.** If you plan to burn wood when the restricted fire season is not in effect a firepan with sides at least 3 inches high is required. Cutting firewood for camp use, including driftwood and down dead material, is not allowed. Pack in your own wood, pack out your ashes.
- **Camping during the primary season is limited to 3 days and 2 nights** per site per party in the Wild River and 4 days 3 nights per site per party in the Scenic River. Only one night per party can be spent at Granite Creek, or the Oregon Hole. Camping is also prohibited at Hells Canyon Creek Launch and Cache Creek Administrative site. During the secondary season, camping is limited to 14 days and 13 nights. You may have multiple powerboats in your camp overnight if the total number of people does not exceed the maximum party size of 24 people.
- **Pittsburg Campground is the only developed** campground of its kind in the Snake River Corridor. This 28-unit facility is a great location to base from while enjoying the many recreation opportunities in close proximity. When camped at Pittsburg or above Hells Canyon Creek Launch Site at Eagle Bar, powerboaters can pull their boats out of the water each night and camp in the campground without ending their trip and re-launching their boat with the same permit the following day.
- **Fireworks are banned year-round.** Most campsites are located on or close to grassy benches creating an extreme fire hazard in the hot, dry months of summer, especially if there is any wind.
- **Licenses are required** to hunt and fish in each state because the Wild & Scenic Snake River forms the boundary between the States of Oregon and Idaho. Bag limits for game species, seasons, and other requirements vary between the states. Only one state's license is required to fish the river when the person fishing is in a boat that is afloat, even

when tied to the shore. However, when standing on the shore or having one foot on the shore you must have the fishing license for the state you have committed to.

- **Hells Canyon is rich in both historic and prehistoric cultural resources.** 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.
- **Motorized rivercraft must be at least 12 feet in length.**

Valid Motorized Rivercraft: Valid motorized rivercraft will be defined as rigid hull craft with water-cooled exhaust (inboard shall have through-the hull exhaust) that are driven by propellers or jet pump(s) that are equipped with mufflers and/or other noise reduction devices.

Valid Non-Motorized Rivercraft: Valid motorized rivercraft shall be defined as sweep boats, pontoons, cat-a-rafts, inflatable rafts, rigid hull and inflatable kayaks, canoes, dories, and drift boats. Rivercraft must be controllable by paddles, oars, sweep, or outboard motors limited to 15 hp (if motors are used, the boat must meet State and Coast Guard licensing specifications). Motors are restricted to downstream propulsion and maneuverability. Rivercraft are not capable of being mechanically propelled through rapids.

Non-Valid (Motorized and Non-Motorized) Rivercraft: Non-valid non-motorized rivercraft shall include wind surf boards/sail boards, sailboat, or rivercraft that are not under maneuverable control. Non-valid motorized rivercraft would include water-skis, airboats, motorized surfboats, hover craft, winged craft, any powerboats not equipped with a water-cooled exhaust, amphibious craft, mini-submarines, powerboats under 12 feet length, and rivercraft that must be straddled when ridden by the operator/passenger.

Retrieval of sunken or disabled boat vessels are the responsibility of the boat owner.

Points of Interest

- **Kirkwood Ranch located on the Idaho side of the river corridor and at river mile 220.** This historic site offers a taste of canyon life in the 1930's. Kirkwood is hosted by USFS volunteers year-round. 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. Primitive camping sites and a picnic area are nearby as well as the Snake River trail#102. Public restrooms are available but not potable water.
- **Cache Creek Ranch located on the Oregon side of the river corridor,** one mile south of the Washington/Oregon border (about 7 miles upriver from Heller Bar) is at river mile 177. This administrative site is powerboat permit check-in station and hosted by USFS volunteers year-round. Cache Creek is well known for one of the best river views in the canyon. It includes a visitor center with interpretive exhibits, picnic area and public restrooms. No camping or potable water is available.

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area is managed by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Like many of the national forests, parks and public resources, the host positions include volunteers. They are dedicated to maintaining the resource and providing support to the visitors. We appreciate their time and efforts and hope that you will enjoy the diversity they bring to the program. If you are interested in becoming a part of the HCNRA volunteer community, please contact the Snake River Administrative office at 509-758-0616.