

Snake River Floaters Guide



Hells Canyon National Recreation Area



Dear Snake River Floater,

The following information is provided to help you plan your float trip on the Snake River in Hells Canyon. For more Hells Canyon float information visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman/>

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.**
- **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 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.

TAKEOUT	MILES	DAYS
• PITTSBURG LANDING	32	2-3
• DUG BAR	51	3-4
• HELLER BAR, ASOTIN	79	4-6
• LEWISTON, ID/CLARKSTON, WA	104	6-8

Camping

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.

- 1 night only per party at Granite Creek, lower Granite and Saddle Creek
- 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
- Camping is prohibited at the Hells Canyon Creek Recreation Site. However, campgrounds are available on Hells Canyon Reservoir for camping the night prior to the launch.

Degree of Difficulty

- 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 or view flow monitors located at Hells Canyon Creek, Pittsburg Launch, Cache Creek and the Clarkston, Washington Forest Service office.

Recommended Craft and Equipment

- A good, serviceable personal, U.S. Coastguard approved, personal flotation device (PFD) is required for each person on any river craft.
- Children 12 years or younger are required to wear a PFD at all times while rivercraft is under way. Coast Guard approved Type I and Type V- Whitewater jackets are recommended.
- The **Snake River Guide**, a water resistant, one inch=one mile, topographic river map with information on river rapids and campsites is available for sale at our Forest Service offices in Clarkston, Washington, Riggins, Idaho, Joseph, Oregon and at the Hells Canyon Creek Recreation Site. This map can also be purchased by phone with a Visa or MC by calling the **Float Reservation line: (509) 758-1957**

Getting on the River

Wild River Section (Hell Canyon Creek Launch to Pittsburg)

- Reservations needed 7 days per week during Primary Season
- 3 private launches per day, 2 commercial
- non-motorized window (see enclosed calendar)
- 8 craft 24 people trip limit
- Launch site: Hells Canyon Creek Launch
- **Reservations are required during the Primary Season** which is the Friday before Memorial Day through September 10th each year. Permits are required year round.

- **Float Reservations can ONLY be made by going to www.recreation.gov or by calling the toll free number at 1-877-444-6777.**
- These reservations can be obtained either by applying through the four rivers lottery process or by picking up a cancellation after the lottery is completed. The four rivers lottery application period begins December 1st and ends January 31st each year.
- The Snake River of Hells Canyon participates in the 4 Rivers Lottery Float Reservation System along with The Main Salmon, The Middle Fork of the Salmon, and the Selway.
- **Once the Lottery is run** all successful applicants will be notified by e-mail. Please follow the website instructions for reserving your Snake River launch. Even if you do not know the number in your party when accepting this launch, you must complete this portion of the web-based confirmation process. The permit can be changed up to 2 days prior to the launch date. Please remember that you will need your user ID and password to access your reservation. If you are unable to access a computer and would like assistance canceling your launch you can call the Snake River administrative office at 509-758-0616 or the HCNRA float information line at 509-758-1957. Please have your permit number ready.
- **There is a \$6.00 reservation fee to place a reservation. Cancellations are non-refundable and must be made at least 14 days prior to the launch.**
- **A Non-Motorized** period is in effect during the Primary Season. No Powerboat access is allowed in the Wild River between the top of Wild Sheep Rapids to the upper landing at Kirkwood Historic Ranch. This Period is Monday through Wednesday every other week, beginning the first Monday in June through the End of August.
- People who have a reservation, but fail to launch or cancel the reservation, will be penalized by being placed on a list of people ineligible for a permit for the remainder of the season and during the entire following primary season.
- **Trip Permits** are issued at Hells Canyon Creek seven days per week during the Primary Season from 8AM PTS till 4PM PST. Prior to the issuance of a trip permit, all members of a float party will receive a short orientation/education presentation from the Forest Service.
- **Confirmed reservations** will only be held until 4:00 p.m. PST on the assigned launch day. Reservations unclaimed after that time will be filled on a first-come first-serve basis by anyone waiting at the launch site.
- **Self-issue Permits** are required during the Secondary Season and are available at each river portal.

Scenic River Section (Pittsburg to Cache Creek)

- Reservations needed Friday, Saturday, Sundays and Holidays during Primary Season, please contact the Clarkston Washington office for your boat tags and permit at 509-758-0616.
- 2 launches per day
- permits required year-round
- no non-motorized period
- 8 craft/24 people trip limit
- Launch Site: Pittsburg Landing and Dug bar
- A state boat registration number is required on all float craft that use kickers in the Scenic River.

Rules of the Road

- Please 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.
- Fuel carried for kickers must always remain on the boat.
- On-river fueling must always utilize fuel absorption material 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.

Other Important Information

- **The burning of wood in open fires in 2021 – including fire pans – is prohibited annually from June 1st to September 30th. However, our river permits have not been updated with those closure dates.**
- **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 at Hells Canyon Creek, Kirkwood Historic Ranch, or Cache Creek Ranch. 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.** Enclosed is a list of manufacturers of solid human waste carryout equipment or businesses, which have this equipment available for sale. 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.
- **A commercial trip** is any trip for which consideration is paid, collected, received, or requested regardless of whether or not a profit is made. A non-commercial trip is a trip for which there is no payment, collection, receipt, or request for consideration. Illegal commercial outfitters using the river under the guise of being private boaters are stealing opportunities from the legitimate private sector, are not covered by insurance to protect their passengers, and may not be qualified to run safe trips. Floaters who use the river without a reservation or permit are also unfairly impacting the Canyon and could directly impact your recreation experience. Information resulting in convictions of illegal outfitters can lead to combined rewards of up to \$500.00.
- 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.**



Places to Visit during Your Trip

- **Kirkwood Ranch** 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. However, due to Covid constraints the museum is currently closed. 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 the points of interest such as Kirkwood and Cache Creek Ranch. 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**. **If you are interested in joining the HCNRA volunteer program, contact the Snake River Administrative office.**
- **Hells Canyon Creek Launch: 541.785.3395**
- **Snake River Administrative Office in Clarkston Washington : 509-758-0161**
- **Recreation.gov help desk 877-444-6777**
- **Snake River flow information 800-422-3143**



Wild Sheep Rapids

Enjoy your float trip 😊