It seems that everything here is larger than life. Cast your eyes about, and you see a sweeping, elemental kind of beauty that both boggles and captivates. Visit, near vertical canyons cut deep, black shadows on the river below. Color is everywhere: spectacular roadside flowers, the burnished gold of the rangelands, the silver, greens and gray of sagebrush shrub, steppe and rocks. Tiny bright wildflowers dot the spring landscape in yellow, orange, red, purple.

This is Cottonwood Canyon State Park. Visitors should expect an natural experience, a mirror of the landscape. The spreading 6,000-plus acres is largely composed of grasslands, sagebrush shrubs, river bottoms and deep canyons. The highest point within the park is the Canyon Overlook area at 3,190 feet.

The main stem of the Lower John Day River—about 18 miles of it—cours through the park. Four major side canyons empty into the John Day within the park: Hay Creek Canyon, Esau Canyon, Rattlesnake Canyon and Cottonwood Canyon. More than 10,000 acres of public land surround the park. The climate is arid, with cool winters and hot summers.

Recreation

This is a remote, open space. By design, and in spite of its vastness, Cottonwood Canyon State Park offers a recreation experience that protects the treasured roughness of the place. While its 6,000-plus acres are an Oregon State Park, public consultation reaffirmed that the rugged character of this special place should not be lost. Camping and other development is minimal.

HOW COTTONWOOD CANYON WILL BE

This is a remote, open space. By design, and in spite of its vastness, Cottonwood Canyon State Park offers a recreation experience that protects the treasured roughness of the place. When its 6,000-plus acres became an Oregon State Park, public consultation reaffirmed that the rugged character of this special place should not be lost. Camping and other development is minimal.

In the canyon, the river is free-flowing (undammed) for a relatively intact natural river system. With a free-flowing length of 252 miles, the John Day is the longest such reach of river in the Northwest.

Most commercial outfitters paddle from Clarno to the canyon's mouth in 3-5 days. Visitors may launch at J.S. Burres day-use area, on the south side of the river, just off highway 206. Boating the river is popular by raft, kayak, canoe, or driftboat. Visitors may launch at J.S. Burres day-use area, on the south side of the river, just off highway 206. Water levels fluctuate more than most rivers; peak flows are usually March-May. The boating season varies. During low flow years, the season can end as early as mid-June.

Local middle-school students took part in designing a "brand" for Cottonwood Canyon State Park. This winning design was submitted by several students.

Camping

Camping is a popular activity in Cottonwood Canyon State Park. The park offers 21 primitive sites, 7 hiker-biker sites, and 1 group camping area and a restroom. Potable water is available in the campground. All sites are first come, first-served. Check in at the information station for more info.

Recreational Facilities

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How Cottonwood Canyon will be Past and Present

How Cottonwood Canyon will be

Cottonwood Canyon will be a quiet remote area. By design, and in spite of its vastness, Cottonwood Canyon State Park offers a recreation experience that protects the treasured roughness of the place. When its 8,000-plus acres became an Oregon State Park, public consultation reaffirmed that the ruggedness of the place, and within the park: Hay Creek Canyon, Esau Canyon, Four major side canyons empty into the John Day River—Overlook area at 1,920 feet. This land has been natural grazing land for hundreds of years ago. The advent of intensive persistence and time. changed the land. Native grasslands in some modern farming and ranching, however, has other development is minimal. Cottonwood Canyon State Park. This winning design students. Cottonwood Canyon State Park designing a “brand” for students took part in Local middle-school Cottonwood Bridge. Cottonwood Bridge.

RECREATION

Hiking

Rough, old ranching roads wind through the land, routes at trails for hikers, horseback riders and serious back country campers. The park offers miles of trails, in canyons, upland and riverside terrain. Horse trails are limited to the Gilliam County side of the river. A short interpretive trail that begins near the park’s west entrance highlights the land’s ranching past.

Camping

The park offers 21 primitive sites, 7 hiker-biker sites, a group-camping area and a equestrian. Potable water is available in the campground. All sites are fee-paid, first-come, first-served. Check in at the information station for more info.

Hunting and Fishing

Populations of muledeer, cattle-crop, especially the smallmouth bass in the lower John Day attract a wide variety of anglers. The park is also open to hunting outside the developed area; check at the visitor stations for information and regs from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

River Recreation

The iconic John Day River is a long, narrow and relatively intact natural river system. With a free-flowing (undammed) length of 252 miles, the John Day is the longest such reach of river in the Northwest. Boating the river is popular by raft, canoe, kayak or driftboat. Visitors may launch at J.S. Burres day-use area, on the south side of the river, just off highway 206. Most commercial outfitters paddle from Clarno to the Cottonwood Bridge.

Wildlife abounds. The area boasts the largest herd of California bighorn sheep in Oregon, and the lower John Day River offers one of the best wild spring and fall Chinook runs in northeast Oregon. Visitors could see both migratory and resident bird populations are a treat, especially for trumpet-loud northern juncos, American redstart, Prairie falcon, swallows, American kestrel, Golden and only eagle has all-seeing eyes. Summer visitors include the lands harriers. Bullocks oriole, the
tri-colored blackbird, a colony of white-throated swifts, the yellow warbler and several species of sparrow. Upland game birds include the chukar, grey partridge, California quail, and ring-necked pheasant.

The rocky landscape invites reptiles, such as the western least six species of lizards. The river and bottomlands are a popular home to whitetail and mule deer, as well as greater prairie falcon, merlin, American kestrel, Golden and only eagle has all-seeing eyes. Summer visitors include the lands harriers. Bullocks oriole, the

This land has been natural grazing land for hundreds of years ago. The advent of intensive farming and ranching, however, has changed the land. Native grasslands in some areas have been crowed out. Controlling weeds and restoring native vegetation, especially in the bottomlands and along the river, will take persistence and time.

PAST AND PRESENT

Columbia River Indian forests cut deep into the geology of Cottonwood Canyon State Park. These faunal habitats came from lava streams through forests in the eastern part of the Columbia Plateau. This land has been natural grazing land for centuries. Native peoples grazed horses here for hundreds of years ago. The advent of intensive farming and ranching, however, has changed the land. Native grasslands in some areas have been crowed out. Controlling weeds and restoring native vegetation, especially in the bottomlands and along the river, will take persistence and time.

WILD AND NATURAL

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Things To Know to Stay Safe

Think ahead. Have a plan, and tell someone about it.

Stop at the information station and record your planned return time, especially if you are hiking alone. Important note: documenting your plan does not mean that Oregon State Parks is monitoring your trip. This is "passive" documentation only.

There is no cell phone coverage at the park, including the campground, day use area and river trails. Do not rely on cell phone service for emergency communications.

Back country fire closures Due to high fire danger, the John Day River corridor, including Cottonwood Canyon State Park, is closed to all campfires and charcoal fires from June 1 through September 30 each year. Propane charcoal, driftwood, or dead and downed vegetation. Rocks to prevent fire scars. Burn wood brought from home, not cut or gathered. All campfire residue must be carried out of the canyon.

Smoking is allowed in a closed vehicle, while standing in the water, or while in a boat on the water. Portable charcoal or gas grills are not permitted. Use of charcoal, driftwood, or dead and downed vegetation. Automated wood fired cookers and fire rings are not permitted. Ground fires and rock fire rings are not permitted. Fires and firepans: from June 1 through September 30 each year. Propane charcoal, driftwood, or dead and downed vegetation. Rocks to prevent fire scars. Burn wood brought from home, not cut or gathered. All campfire residue must be carried out of the canyon.

Tick bites are a fact of life here. They're most common in spring and early summer, and find their way to you in long grass and brush. The best defenses are vigilance, and simple avoidance.

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Rattlesnakes live here. Leave them alone, they will not bite unless threatened. Watch where you walk, and learn to look around obstacles before you walk over them. If you are bitten by any kind of snake, assume it is venomous and get to a hospital emergency room as quickly as possible.

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Campground fires are banned from June 1 to September 30 each year. Wildfires can move quickly and unpredictably, striking without warning. Please be aware of the park, especially in the summer. If you think there is a fire, leave the area immediately, and call 911.

Smart things to carry on a hike: water, a hat, first aid kit, large bandana, knife, flashlight, matches.

The closest source of potable water is in the campground/day use area.

Colorful lichen on craggy rocks are part of the subtle beauty of the park.

Evaluate the information station for latest information about wildlife, river conditions, fire danger and more.

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