

IT SEEMS like everything here is larger than life. Cast your eye about, and you see a sweeping, elemental kind of beauty that both beckons and cautions. Vast, near vertical canyons cast deep, black shadows on the river below. Color is everywhere: spectacular summer skies, the burnished golds and browns of the rangelands, the silver, greens and gray of sagebrush, 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 sprawling 8,000-plus acres is

largely composed of grasslands, sagebrush shrub-steppe, river bottomlands and deep canyons. The highest point within the park is the Canyon Overlook area at 1,920 feet.

The main stem of the Lower John Day River—about 16 miles of it—curves 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.



HOW COTTONWOOD CANYON WILL BE

This is a remote, open place. 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 rugged character of this special place should not be lost. Camping and other development is minimal.



OPRD thanks the following partners for the time, enthusiasm and funding that allowed Cottonwood Canyon State Park to become a state park: Western Rivers Conservancy, Lower John Day Conservation Work Group, City of Condon Chamber of Commerce, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Travel Oregon Rural Tourism Studio Program, Sherman County Historical Society, Gilliam County Weed Management, Sherman County Soil-Water Conservation District.



Cottonwood Canyon State Park
99989 Highway 206, Wasco, OR 97065



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



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Cottonwood Canyon State Park



RECREATION

Hiking

Rough, old ranching roads wind through the land, reborn as trails for hikers, horseback riders and serious back country campers. The park offers miles of trails, in canyon, 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 restroom. Potable water is available in the campground. All sites are first come, first-served. Check in at the information station for more info.

Hunting and Fishing

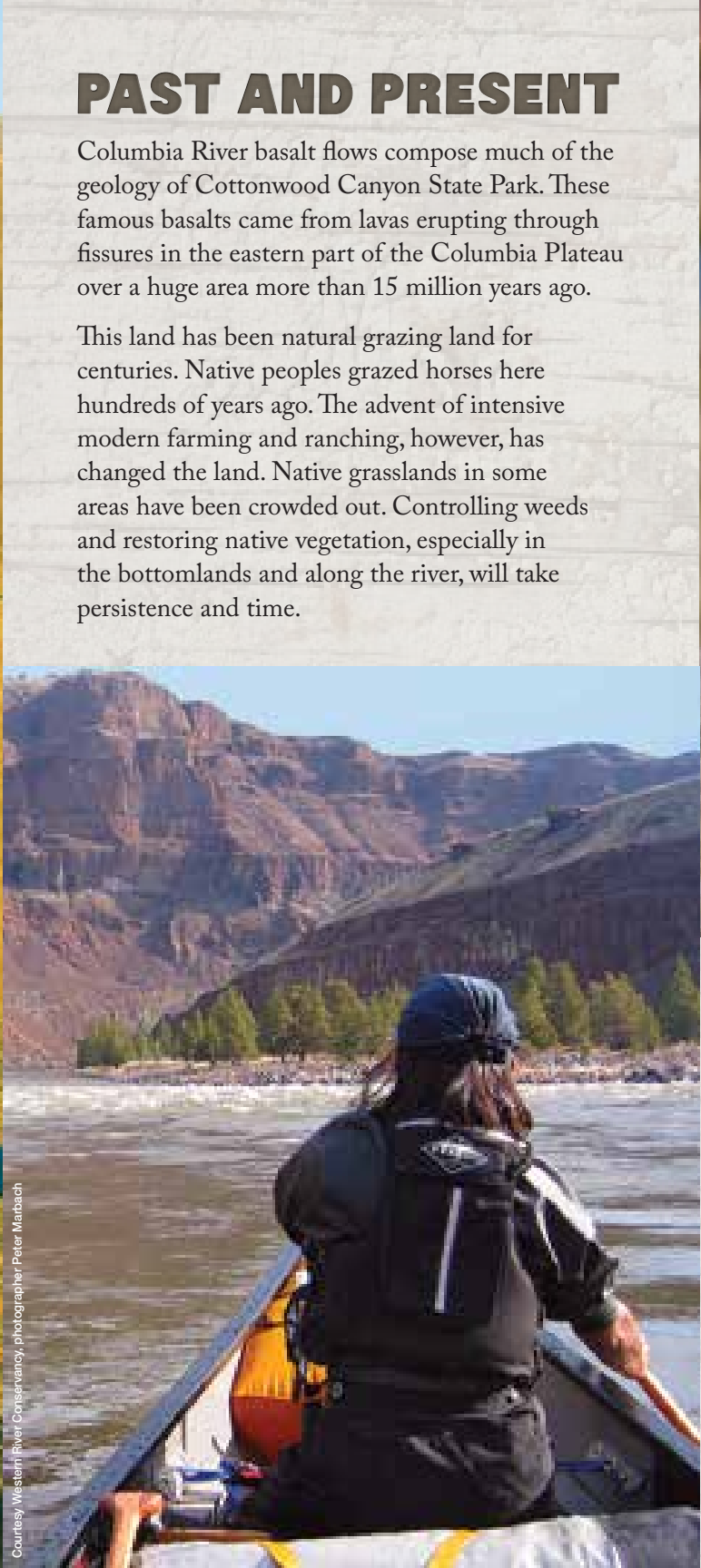
Populations of Chinook salmon, steelhead, catfish, carp and especially the smallmouth bass in the lower John Day attract a wide variety of anglers. The park is also open to hunting outside the developed area; check at the visitor station for information and regs from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

River Recreation

The iconic John Day River is a long, remote 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, 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. Most commercial outfitters paddle from Clarno to the Cottonwood Bridge.

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.



Courtesy Western River Conservancy, photographer Peter Marbach

PAST AND PRESENT

Columbia River basalt flows compose much of the geology of Cottonwood Canyon State Park. These famous basalts came from lavas erupting through fissures in the eastern part of the Columbia Plateau over a huge area more than 15 million years ago.

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



Courtesy Western Rivers Conservancy, Photographer Peter Marbach.

WILD AND NATURAL

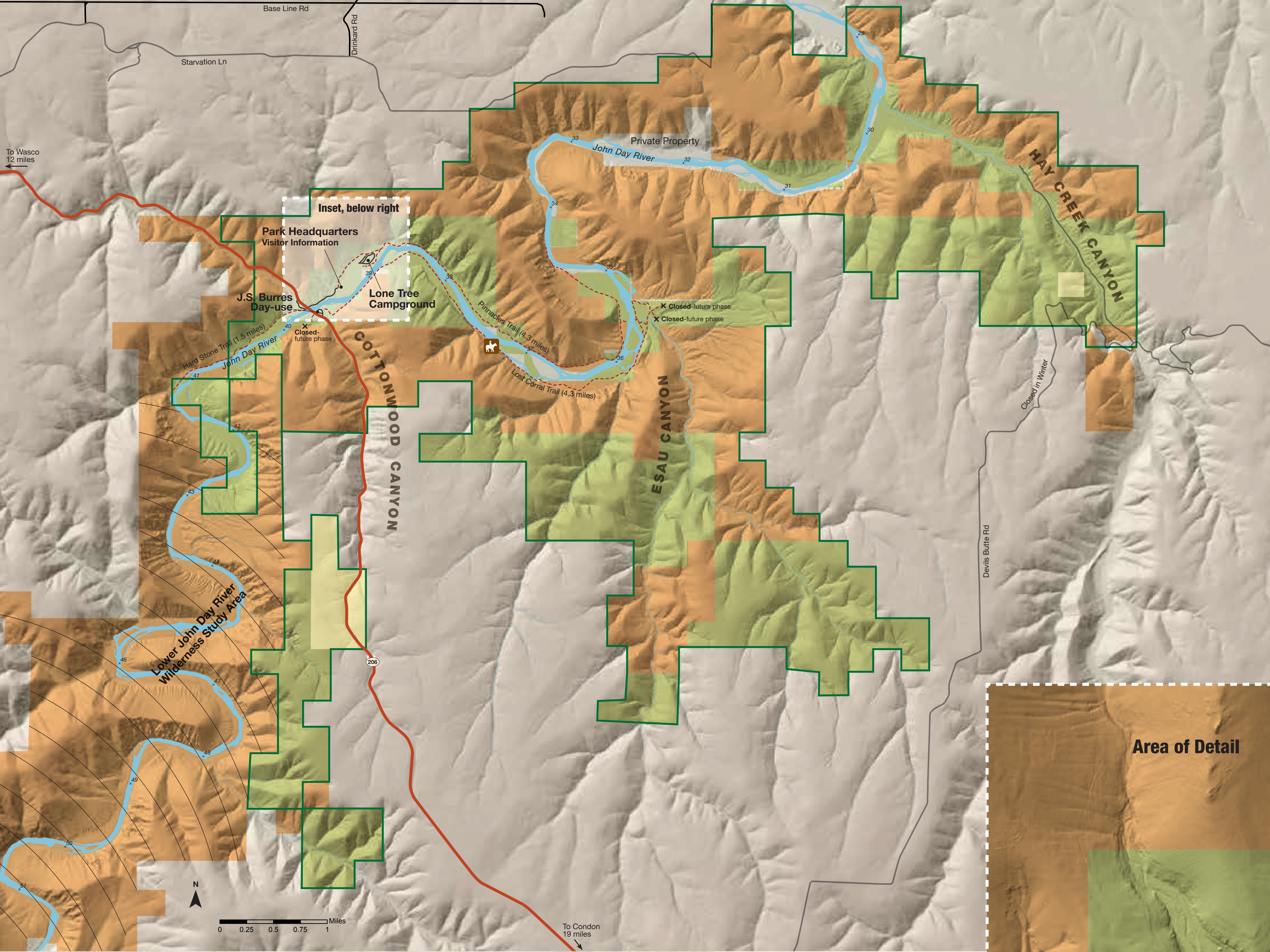
Wildlife abounds. The area boasts the largest herd of California bighorn sheep in Oregon, and the lower John Day River offers one of the best wild spring and fall Chinook runs in northeast Oregon. Visitors could see Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyotes, white-tailed jackrabbit, and all manner of smaller mammals.

Both migratory and resident bird populations are a treat, especially for raptor lovers: northern harrier, Swainson's hawk, rough-legged hawk, red-tailed hawk, prairie falcon, merlin, American kestrel, Golden and bald eagles have all soared here. Summer visitors include the lazuli bunting, Bullock's 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, gray partridge, California quail, and ring-necked pheasant.

The rocky landscape invites reptiles, such as the western rattlesnake, various non-venomous snakes, as well as at least six species of lizards. The river and bottomlands are host to frogs, toads and waterfowl.

May and early June is the best time, generally, to see wildflowers. Balsamroots with their big, showy, sunflower-like flowers, and monkey flowers bloom in early May. The sagebrush blooms in October.



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



Cliff swallow nests are both eerie and compelling.

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 closure: 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 and white gas stoves and shielded lanterns are permitted. Smoking is permitted only in a closed vehicle, while standing in the water, or while in a boat on the water. Using or possessing fireworks is prohibited at all times. Firepans: Ground fires and rock fire rings are not permitted. Fires and ash must be completely contained in a metal firepan with sides at least two inches high. Locate the firepan near the

river, away from dry vegetation, and elevate the firepan on rocks to prevent fire scars. Burn wood brought from home, charcoal, driftwood, or dead and downed vegetation. Standing vegetation, either dead or alive, may not be cut or gathered. All campfire residue must be carried out of the canyon.

Campground fires are banned from early summer to late fall, typically July 1 to September 30 each year.

Wildfires can move quickly and unpredictably; strong winds buffet 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 bandanna, knife, flashlight, matches.

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

Always wear solid **hiking boots** or shoes.

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



Rattlesnakes live here. Leave them alone; they will not bite unless threatened. Watch where you walk, and learn to look around obstacles before you step 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.

Ticks are a fact of life here. They're most active in spring and early summer, and find their way to you in long grass and brush. The best defense is vigilance, and simple avoidance.

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| ADA Restroom | Recreation Area |
| Restroom | Paved Road |
| ADA Vault Toilet | Gravel Road |
| Parking | Trail |
| ADA Parking | Oregon Parks and Recreation Department |
| Information Station | Oregon Department of State Lands |
| Potable Water | Bureau of Land Management |
| ADA Picnic Shelter | Trailhead |
| Group Camping | Hiking Trail |
| Hiker-Biker Camping | Horse Trail |
| Boat Ramp | Shade Structure |

