Projects restrict fishing on Columbia jetty, hunting on North Fork Toutle mudflow

Local News

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OLYMPIA – Public access to a jetty used for fishing at the mouth of the Columbia River and a hunting area below Mount St. Helens will be closed through September during sediment-management projects now under way by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

At the mouth of the Columbia River, the North Jetty and Benson Beach have been closed to public access since July 17, when work began on a project to reinforce beaches ravaged by winter storms.

Meanwhile, more than a thousand acres of land above the Corps’ Sediment Retention Structure on the North Fork Toutle River have been closed to public access for a project designed to trap sediment on the mountain before it gets carried down the river.

Both projects have been publicized by the Corps, but resource managers at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) want to make sure anglers, hunters and hikers understand what those area closures will mean to them.

“We don’t want people to be surprised if they see ‘restricted access’ signs in their favorite recreational areas,” said Guy Norman, WDFW regional director for southwest Washington. “Those access closures take precedence over the fishing or hunting rules in those areas.”

In most years, the North Jetty gets the heaviest use by anglers during the popular Buoy 10 salmon fishery, which extends from the mouth of the Columbia River 16 miles upstream. This year, that fishery gets under way Aug. 1.

“The North Jetty provides the only real bank access to salmon fishing in that area, so bank anglers will need to make other plans,” said Pat Frazier, WDFW regional fish manager. “The timing of the closure is unfortunate, but public safety has to be the Corps’ first priority.”

The jetty also provides access to fishing for crab, rockfish, lingcod and surf perch, although anglers can catch surf perch along the entire Long Beach Peninsula, Frazier said.

A map of the area affected by beach reconstruction is available on the Corps’ website at http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/North_Jetty_Security_Zone.pdf.

Fishing is not an issue in the construction zone along the North Fork Toutle River, but hunting is, said Brian Calkins, who manages WDFW’s St. Helens Wildlife Area. Fishing is prohibited year-round in that section of the river, but the area will open to bowhunting in early September before the access restrictions are lifted later that month.

Calkins said the construction zone straddles two game management areas – Toutle and Margaret – upriver from the Corps’ existing Sediment Retention Structure on land acquired by WDFW last year as fish and wildlife habitat.

“The area closed to public access is just a small fraction of the Toutle and Margaret game management areas,” Calkins said. “We urge hunters and other visitors to that area to stay out of the construction zone – both for their own safety and for the safety of the workers in that area.”

Additional information about the sediment-management project, including a map showing the location

of the restricted-access area, is available on the Corps’ website at www.nwp.usace.army.mil/projects/mountsthelens.asp.