

Chewaucan Wild and Scenic River

The Chewaucan is not a big river, but it is enjoyable to fish with a fly rod. It's a pretty river, off the beaten path, and not very crowded.—Harry Teel, FLY FISHING CENTRAL AND SOUTHEASTERN OREGON (2005)



The Chewaucan in winter. Source: [Bureau of Land Management](#)

Description: The 53-mile long Chewaucan (CHEE-wah-CAN) River begins at the confluence of Elder and Dairy creeks. It flows northward toward Paisley where it becomes heavily dewatered and channeled to benefit livestock production before entering Lake Abert. The proposed wild and scenic river includes the most upper and the most natural segment and is mostly federal public land.

Recommended Length for Protection: 38 miles

County: Lake

Federal Administrative Unit: Fremont-Winema National Forest and Lakeview District Bureau of Land Management

Water Basin: Lake Abert

Outstandingly Remarkable Values Summary:

Recreation, Fish, Wildlife, Scenic

EPA Levels III (and IV) Ecosystems: East

Cascades Slope and Foothills (Fremont Pine/Fir Forest) and Northern Basin and Range (High Lava Plains)



Car camping opportunities abound on the Chewaucan River. Source: [USDA Forest Service](#)

The Proposed Chewaucan Wild and Scenic River				
Segment	Mile-age	Upper Terminus	Lower Terminus	Classification
Chewaucan River	23	Confluence of Elder and Dairy Creeks.	End of BLM land near Paisley.	recreational
Swamp Creek	9	headwaters	Confluence with Chewaucan River	scenic
Mill Creek	6	headwaters	Confluence with Chewaucan River	scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values



The Fremont National Recreation Trail and the Oregon Desert Trail cross the Chewaucan River.
Source: [USDA Forest Service](#)

Recreation: Recreational activities include fishing, hunting, hiking, birding, camping, pleasure driving, and just hanging out. The river is raftable in spring during high water. The [Oregon Desert Trail](#) follows along a portion of the river and the [Fremont National Recreation Trail](#) traverses the Chewaucan and its canyon. There are three Forest Service developed campgrounds (Marster Spring, Chewaucan Crossing, and Jones Crossing). There are also two primitive campgrounds on BLM holdings. The road along the Chewaucan is part of a mountain biking loop promoted by Travel Oregon.

Fish: The Chewaucan redband trout population is an evolutionarily significant component of the Oregon Closed Basins (West) grouping of Great Basin Redband Trout, which—along with Columbia River redband trout—is a subspecies of rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss gibbsi*). As Pleistocene Lake Chewaucan receded to today’s Lake Abert and Summer Lake, the Chewaucan redband evolved in isolation from other redbands. The Chewaucan redband are wild fish, not having been affected



The Chewaucan population of Great Basin redband trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss gibbsi) is evolutionarily distinctive.
Source: [Fish and Wildlife Service](#).

by the introduction of hatchery stock.



American pika is a sensitive species in Oregon. Source: [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife \(Keith Kohl\)](#)

Wildlife: The landscape and vegetative diversity of the Chewaucan corridor means a diversity of wildlife habitats (including, but not limited to: aspen woodlands, late-successional mix-conifer forests, ponderosa pine woodlands, flowing water and riparian, sagebrush, wetlands, expansive grasslands, wetlands [including ponds and lakes], and talus slopes and rock crevices). In addition to redband trout, sensitive species (state) or species of concern (federal) found in the Chewaucan Conservation Opportunity Area (see below) include silver-haired bat, northern goshawk, long-legged myotis, hoary

bat. great gray owl. California myotis. Swainson's hawk. western toad. white-headed woodpecker. olive-sided flycatcher. Lewis's woodpecker. flammulated owl, yellow rail, American pika. pallid bat, long-billed curlew, and black-backed woodpecker. The lower Chewaucan above Paisley is mule deer winter range.

Scenic: The landscape mosaic of ponderosa pine forests, western juniper woodlands, sagebrush-steppe, rocky rims, wet meadows, dry meadows and riparian vegetation all combine to be quite easy on the eye.

Other Information

Agency Consideration: The Forest Service has determined their portion of the proposed Chewaucan Wild and Scenic River to be "eligible" for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The agency identified recreation as an outstandingly remarkable value.



The redband trout can reach six pounds. No worms, flies only. Source: [USDA Forest Service](#)

The Fishing: According to the [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife](#): "The Chewaucan River offers quality wild trout fishing in a primitive setting. It's an excellent choice for introducing families to primitive style camping and to stream fishing. Getting here is part of the adventure. Fill up your gas tank whenever you find an open pump, and come prepared with all your camping needs, including water. Wild redband trout are abundant and can reach 6-pounds. There are brook trout in the higher reaches."

An ODFW Conservation Opportunity Area: The proposed wild and scenic river flows through the Chewaucan Conservation Opportunity Area (COA), identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife with recommendations to: "maintain or enhance in-channel watershed function, connection to riparian habitat, flow and hydrology; Maintain or restore existing stands of aspen woodland and ponderosa pine woodland to provide habitat for wildlife; and maintain or restore riparian habitat and ecological function, ensuring sufficient habitat complexity for wildlife." ODFW notes that the Chewaucan "[p]rovides important habitat for Oregon Great Basin Redband Trout."



The proposed Chewaucan Wild and Scenic River (including its Mill and Swamp creeks tributaries) overlays much of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Chewaucan Conservation Opportunity Area. Source: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Sources

- DeHaan, Patrick and Jennifer Von Barga. 2015. [Great Basin Redband Trout Genetic Status Assessment](#).
USDI Fish and Wildlife Service
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. [Chewaucan River Conservation Opportunity Area](#) (webpage)
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2005. [Oregon Native Fish Status Report-Volume II: Assessment Methods & Population Results](#).
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2005. [Oregon Native Fish Status Report-Volume I: Species Management Unit Summaries](#).
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. [Easy Angling in the Southeast Zone](#) (webpage.)
- Oregon Natural Desert Association. [Oregon Desert Trail: Where Recreation Meets Conservation](#) (webpage).
- Oregon Water Resources Department. 1988. Goose and Summer Lakes Drainage Basin Map.
- Patrick, Renee. Undated. [Exploring Eastern Oregon By Boat](#) (webpage). Oregon Natural Desert Association
- Peets, Scott and Tom Friedrichsen. 1999. [Upper Chewaucan Watershed Assessment: A Guide for Sustaining a Healthy Watershed for Future Generations](#). Paisley Oregon: USDA Forest Service.
- Travel Oregon. [Morgan-Butte-Chewaucan River Loop: A Tasty Sampler of South-Central Oregon Riding](#) (webpage).
- Teel, Harry. 2005. Fly Fishing Central and Southeastern Oregon: A No Nonsense Guide to Top Waters. Tucson, AZ: No Nonsense Fly Fishing Guidebooks.
- USDA Forest Service. undated. Candidate Wild and Scenic River Profile Report.
- USDA Forest Service. 1989. Fremont National Forest Plan.
- USDA Forest Service. 1994. Paisley Ranger District Map.
- USDI Bureau of Land Management and USDA Forest Service. 2016. Oregon Outback (South Half) Map.

For More Information

- Andy Kerr, The Larch Company, 503.701.6298 v/t, andykerr@andykerr.net