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Editorial: Cleaning up Fiorito Lakes will take everyone's help

Joanna Markell
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The arrival of spring brings longer days, budding trees and warmer temperatures. It also is a reminder of all the things we could be doing outdoors, as pursuits such as fishing coax us from hibernation. The Kittitas Valley has numerous places to bring a rod and reel, and Fiorito Lakes is one of the area's more popular fishing holes.

It might be a little too popular.

There's been an ongoing problem with trash at Fiorito Lakes, particularly from May through September when visitors crowd the recreation area to fish for trout, camp and have a good time.

The lakes are along Interstate 82 about four miles southwest of Ellensburg. North Fiorito Lake is about 39 acres and the south lake is 24 acres. They are separated by a thin strip of land.

With easy highway access, the area's popularity has grown. Free overnight camping is allowed for a maximum of 72 hours, as long as the campers have a fishing license and/or a state vehicle access permit.

The lakes are managed by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife with assistance from the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club. Club members agreed to clean up the area through an "adopt-an-access" program with the state. It's a good deal for the state and for users, except the volunteers are getting overwhelmed, especially during the busy summer season when garbage abounds.

With state funds strapped, there are no trash receptacles or garbage pick up, which adds to the problem. All it takes is one camper to leave a pile of trash to make others think it's OK. Volunteers have hauled out mattresses, broken barbecues, screen doors and all types of camping and fishing equipment.

Access is another issue. On one busy summer holiday weekend, there were more than 64 RVs, truck campers, tents and other camp sites in use around the two lakes. There also were another 119 vehicles around the lakes, making it difficult for someone just there for the day to get to the shoreline, according to the club. Many RVs park parallel to the shoreline.

Adding trash containers to the lakes seems like a pretty good idea, though funding will need to come from somewhere. Cleaning up Fiorito also will take cooperation from users. We all learned in kindergarten to pick up after ourselves, but sometimes a reminder is in order.

If you are interested in the future of Fiorito Lakes, one easy option is to take an online survey at www.kittitasfieldandstream.org. The results will be compiled and given to state fish and wildlife officials for their consideration.

Many thanks to the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club for taking the lead on the effort, and for making the area a priority.

Share your thoughts

An online survey about improving Fiorito Lakes is posted at www.kittitasfieldandstream.org.

Ideas include making Fiorito Lakes a no-camping area or having the state charge a fee for overnight camping.

Other questions:

- How do we get a handle on the issue? Should RVs park farther away from the shore and not parallel with it? Should all overnight camping be restricted or a designated camping area be created? What about charging a fee and using the revenue to monitor the campground?

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