

## 7.4 Recreation Resources

### *Affected Environment*

#### Recreation Resources and Use in the Project Vicinity

The Lewis River Projects provide many recreation opportunities, one component of the large number of recreation facilities and opportunities in the Lewis River basin. Recreation development intensity and visitation at the three reservoirs range from more developed active recreation activities at Merwin and Yale, located closest to the Interstate 5 (I-5) corridor and Portland/Vancouver population base, to more primitive recreation activities at Swift, located farthest from the I-5 corridor.

Popular recreation activities at these projects include camping (RV and tent), picnicking, boat and bank fishing, hunting, hiking, power boating (including personal watercraft), sailing, wind surfing, swimming, water skiing, horseback riding, cycling (road and mountain), relaxing, and sightseeing.

Yale Lake recreation facility occupancy and use were examined during previous relicensing studies. The occupancy level at the three campgrounds is at 95 percent on weekends during the peak recreation period (July and August). From Memorial Day to Labor Day weekend, the weekly occupancy level ranges from 47–73 percent (PacifiCorp 1999). Day use site occupancy averages only 8–14 percent season long; however, overflow conditions do occur approximately five times annually, particularly on hot days.

Swift Reservoir has two developed recreation facilities at the east end of the reservoir, Swift Campground and Eagle Cliff Park. Swift Campground has 93 campsites, a 2-lane boat ramp with parking spaces, and a day use beach swim area. Eagle Cliff Park is located at the far eastern tip of the reservoir and has ten picnic sites, a restroom, and a parking area.

While the Swift No. 2 Project has no developed recreation facilities, the Swift No. 2 power canal does receive consistent use by bank anglers. In addition, an annual fishing derby for disabled recreationists is held at the Swift No. 2 power canal, which is stocked with fish for the event.

All PacifiCorp recreation sites are open to the public during the primary recreation season, while Merwin Park and Speelyai Bay Park at Lake Merwin and Yale Park at Yale Lake are open year-round. Cresap Bay Campground at Lake Merwin is generally open from Memorial Day weekend to late September. Saddle Dam, Cougar Park, and Cougar Camp on Yale Lake are open

from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend. Beaver Bay on Yale Lake is open from late April until mid-late September to accommodate spring fishing and fall hunting seasons. The use season at Swift Campground is also extended to accommodate fall hunter use and fishing, generally from late April until mid-November. Elk and deer hunting seasons for all types of hunts extend from September 1 through December 15 for management units in the immediate area. Peak hunting occurs during times when modern firearms are allowed; for elk this is November 6 through 14, and for deer this is October 16 through 31 (WDFW 1999b). Recreation use at Swift Reservoir is limited by low pool levels, fishing season closure, and road access during winter months.

The projects also provide non-shoreline dispersed recreation opportunities, such as trail use by hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers. Most of this use occurs along a trail running from Saddle Dam along the southwest shoreline of Yale Lake to the Speelyai Canal and along the International Paper (IP) Road at Yale Lake. Other smaller trails also exist.

Numerous examples of dispersed shoreline recreation use exist around the three reservoirs and along the Swift bypass reach above Yale Lake. Boat-in dispersed use occurs on all three reservoirs. Shoreline impacts have occurred because of this activity. As a result, PacifiCorp is increasing Marine Patrol activities and no longer permits overnight parking at its day use facility parking areas except at Swift. There is no fee for dispersed shoreline use; however, there is a fee charged for day use parking and for each watercraft trailered or hauled into PacifiCorp recreation sites, except for car-top watercraft.

Other dispersed recreation uses adjacent to the reservoirs include a number of sites relating to river recreation in the Lewis River corridor. Canyon Creek, which joins Lake Merwin just below Yale Dam, receives whitewater boating use primarily in the form of kayaking. This advanced-level run has been the site of a “kayak rodeo” in recent years. Many paddlers running the creek either take out well above Lake Merwin or descend to the reservoir and paddle to the nearest takeouts at the SR 503 bridge or Cresap Bay Park. Upstream of Swift Reservoir, the upper Lewis River is used for dispersed recreation, hiking, mountain biking, and non-motorized boating.

Over the last 15 to 20 years, recreation resource managers in the Lewis River corridor have witnessed increased use

levels at Merwin, Yale, and Swift reservoirs based on day use vehicle counts, campground occupancy levels, signs of environmental degradation along the shoreline caused by boat-in dispersed camping and day use activities, and other indicators. While these higher use levels are usually contingent upon weather conditions, increased use is generally attributable to: (1) Increased population growth in the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area and proximity to Interstate 5 and Lewis River Road; (2) increased publicity about Merwin, Yale, and Swift reservoirs; (3) creation of and increased popularity of the Monument, including increasing use of the southern scenic loop road (Forest Road 90, SR 503, and Lewis River Road) coupled with few overnight camping facilities within the Monument and GPNF; (4) increasing urban development in the Lewis River valley including new custom home development; and (5) increasing demand for lower cost recreation activities available at Merwin, Yale, and Swift reservoirs, and within western Washington State.

### *Environmental Impacts*

Recreation opportunities should be enhanced by measures that improve watershed conditions in the project area. Areas of the Lewis River are recognized as providing excellent sportfishing opportunities, as well as opportunities for boating, swimming, and wildlife observation. Improving watershed conditions and aquatic productivity should translate into enhanced recreational fishing opportunities, which should in turn provide greater recreational opportunities in an area near several large urban centers. However, greater recreational fishing opportunities also heighten the potential for anglers to catch and possibly harvest bull trout from reservoirs and streams. There is some evidence to suggest that bull trout are targeted and occasionally harvested by anglers even though fishing for bull trout is prohibited. Opening day creel surveys conducted by the WDFW on Swift reservoir and power canal have indicated that some bull trout are harvested in the Swift power canal (WDFW 2000). Large spoons and plugs are also sometimes found in the mouths of bull trout during annual bull trout surveys in the Swift reservoir (WDFW, 1999).

## 7.5 Aesthetic Resources

### *Affected Environment*

The natural setting of the study area is mountain rural with sweeping vistas