

Your Lands, Your Wildlife

Your Lands, Your Wildlife, Your Story Contest

FISHING / ANGLING

Submitted by **Brendan Cushen – Eugene, Oregon**

Fly fishing the upper reaches of the emerald green McKenzie River in the Willamette National Forest is never a let down, no matter how productive or unproductive the fishing is. Lush greenery hugs the banks of this mystical river as it flows through the dense coastal forests of the Cascade Range.

Having camped out the night before, I was on the river at first light. I spent 20 minutes drinking instant coffee in the foggy morning haze and sitting on the bank scoping the bugs to see what was hatching. I waded out and made my first couple casts. Standing waist-deep in greenish-blue rolling water, I heard an osprey screech, and I glanced towards the tree tops. That's when I spotted the source of all the ruckus. It was a bald eagle and an osprey in the middle of a battle of the birds.

After swooping and diving at one another, and occasionally dunking themselves in the chilly morning water, the osprey flew upriver and accepted defeat. The bald eagle flew straight over my head, making a long swooping turn, and landed on a dead tree limb across the river. This massive skeleton of a tree stood only a couple hundred feet from my perch in the river. This was a postcard scene to say the least.

After picking my lower jaw up out of the river, I sat and watched this magical bird clean itself and dry off for a few minutes before gliding gracefully down river. Ecstatic with the raw display of beauty and nature I had just witnessed, I proceeded to catch and release a few native red side rainbow trout and considered the morning unforgettable. My love for this river and its wildlife was forever affirmed on that morning, and I hope this area can sustain its pristine and natural state for decades to come. Thank you, Oregon!