

# CHETCO RIVER PADDLE GUIDE



THE  
OREGON  
COAST

# OREGON SOUTH COAST

The spirit of Oregon South Coast flows through its waterways, sharing common characteristics, offering similar bounties, yet each one distinct. Whether finding their sources high in the Cascades, like the Umpqua and Rogue, or rising from the rugged Coast Range, like the Coos, Coquille and Chetco, the rivers play a vital role, from wildlife and fish habitat to early-day transportation corridor and sport-fishing destination. For local tribes, "everything was about the river," and this profound connection is still very much a part of their culture. Today the rivers also enjoy a growing popularity with paddlers who have discovered these little-visited gems of Oregon South Coast.

Parts of Rogue and Chetco are federally-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, and the Umpqua, Coos and Coquille flow into wide-ranging estuaries as they near the sea, with inlets, sloughs, channels and quiet back waters to explore. The waterways teem with wildlife as well, and a quiet approach in a paddle craft is the perfect way to get an up-close view. Every season brings its own rewards and experiences in their recreational wonderland – so let's paddle!



Chetco River Estuary, photo by Priscilla Macy.

# CHETCO RIVER PADDLING

44.5 miles of the 55.5-mile Chetco river was federally designated Wild and Scenic in 1988. The 44.5-mile designated segment of the Chetco is located within Curry County in southwest Oregon on the Chetco Ranger District of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest. The Chetco heads in steep, deeply dissected, sparsely vegetated, mountainous terrain within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Over its 55.5-mile length, the Chetco drops from 3,700 feet to sea-level as it empties into the Pacific Ocean between the towns of Brookings and Harbor, about five miles north of the California border. In the upper section, the river floor is fairly narrow and boulder-strewn with numerous falls and rapids. As the river leaves the wilderness, its character gradually changes. The terrain becomes less dissected, the river gradient gradually becomes less steep, the river bottom widens and the surrounding hills become more densely forested.

Mandatory permits are required to float the Chetco through the Forest Service section for all users year round. Free, self-issuing permits are available at a boat registration station along the North Bank Chetco River Road (Forest Service Road 1376 a short distance past the Forest Boundary)

The Chetco River and its adjacent corridor offer a wide diversity of recreational opportunities. In winter, salmon and steelhead fishing and whitewater kayaking are the primary recreational uses. In summer, fishing, swimming, boating, camping, sightseeing and picnicking are the major attractions. The primary fishing season for steelhead and salmon is between November and March.

The Chetco's water quality was found to be an Outstanding Remarkable Value based on its striking color and clarity, its ability to clear quickly following storm events, its contribution to both recreation and fisheries, and its contribution of exceptionally pure and clean water for the domestic water supplies of both Brookings and Harbor.

## HISTORY & ECOLOGY

The towering mountains where the Chetco finds its source resulted from tremendous geological upheavals through the ages that forced sediment and minerals to the surface, and other times compressed them with other minerals or buried them deeply again. Volcanic activity and plate tectonics also upended the land, in some cases leaving parts of seabed and deeply-buried minerals atop the region's highest peaks and ridges.

Human activity goes back 3000 years, with the native population settling along the rolling prairies of the lower river and at its mouth near today's Brookings-Harbor. They thrived on the storied runs of salmon and steelhead, and a small tribe known as Chetco is said to have inspired the river's name. As was often the case, first European contact was with fur trappers, while later settlers sought mineral wealth. Limited mining continues, although proposed larger-scale operations have drawn controversy and have recently been permanently blocked.

The abundance of timber led to the town's founding in 1908 by lumber mill owner John E. Brookings, who hired San Francisco architect Bernard Maybeck to lay out the townsite. Its mild climate also supports commercial farms that grow lily bulbs, and the temperate weather, especially in winter, continues to draw new residents.

For many thousands of years before the first Europeans arrived, the native people of these lands lived and thrived off the bounty provided in the waters and forests. It is especially important to be sensitive to this cultural legacy when paddling along the banks of these rivers. Archaeological sites are protected in Oregon on both public and private lands and if you find any artifacts while using the river, be sure to leave them in place and to contact the local tribes or OPRD State Historic Preservation Office at (503)986-0690.

## RIVER ETIQUETTE

**Be Courteous:** Be considerate of other river users. Fishing and boating are popular on the Oregon South Coast, so before approaching ramps be ready so you can launch and take out quickly. Waterways have "lanes of travel" similar to a highway system, so move closer to shore to allow faster water craft to pass.

**Respect Private Property:** Public access is a privilege to us all. Out of consideration to private landowners, if you are unsure whether the land is private or public, please stay off. Public access is indicated on the maps within this guidebook.

## PADDLING SAFETY

Proper planning and preparation will ensure your paddling experience is a positive one. Being knowledgeable about local weather, tides and currents will assist in making good boating decisions. Conditions can change rapidly. Check the current conditions before you hit the water and include them in your trip planning.

There are many in-water hazards to consider; educate yourself about what these hazards are and learn their locations. Understand that new obstacles can arise at any time, such as log 'strainers' - downed trees in the water that can be life threatening. As the tide goes out, the water in the rivers moves rapidly, so plan to paddle incoming and slack tides. Pick activities that match your ability, and consider taking classes to improve your skills and knowledge. Wearing a life jacket is critical - adjust it so it's snug and comfortable. Anticipate the chance of getting wet and dress accordingly, avoid cotton that retains water and accelerates cooling when wet. Wearing bright, noticeable clothing makes you more visible to other boaters. At night, a white light must be shown toward oncoming traffic.

Rules and Laws change periodically. Please visit the Oregon State Marine Board website at [oregon.gov](http://oregon.gov) for current standards. Or call the Oregon State Marine Board at (503)378-8587.



Brown Pelican.

## BE PREPARED

- Wear your life jacket
- Carry proper safety equipment
- Preparation, knowledge and skill building is critical to safe paddling
- Beginners should consider paddling with a companion who knows local waterways and can assist in an emergency
- Let someone know where you are going and when you will be back
- Scout for river and water hazards
- Never grab a stationary object while moving on swift water
- Stay clear of a motor boats path
- Position your boat perpendicular to an approaching wake/wave
- Dress adequately for the water temperatures and weather conditions – avoid cotton
- Obtain an Aquatics Invasive Species (AIS) permit and carry on board. ([www.dfw.state.or.us](http://www.dfw.state.or.us))

## ITEMS TO BRING

- Life jacket/whistle
- First aid kit
- Extra paddle
- Extra clothes
- Map & this paddle guide
- Dry bags
- Rope/Knife
- Pump
- Hat with brim
- Drinking water/food
- Sunscreen
- Flashlight
- Cell phone w/ emergency numbers (coverage can be unreliable)
- Oregon Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) permit

## LEAVE NO TRACE

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on established surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly (pack it in, pack it out)
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors

**Site Conservation:** While enjoying the river, be aware of your direct impact on the surrounding area because your efforts will make a difference for the environment. When observing wildlife, allow adequate space so they are not disturbed. Do not remove rocks, plants, or other native objects, as these create habitat for the multitude of species living along these shores.

**Waste Removal:** Secure your garbage to your boat so that it cannot blow into the water and reserve restroom breaks for designated sites indicated on the maps. Strive to leave an area how you found it, or better.

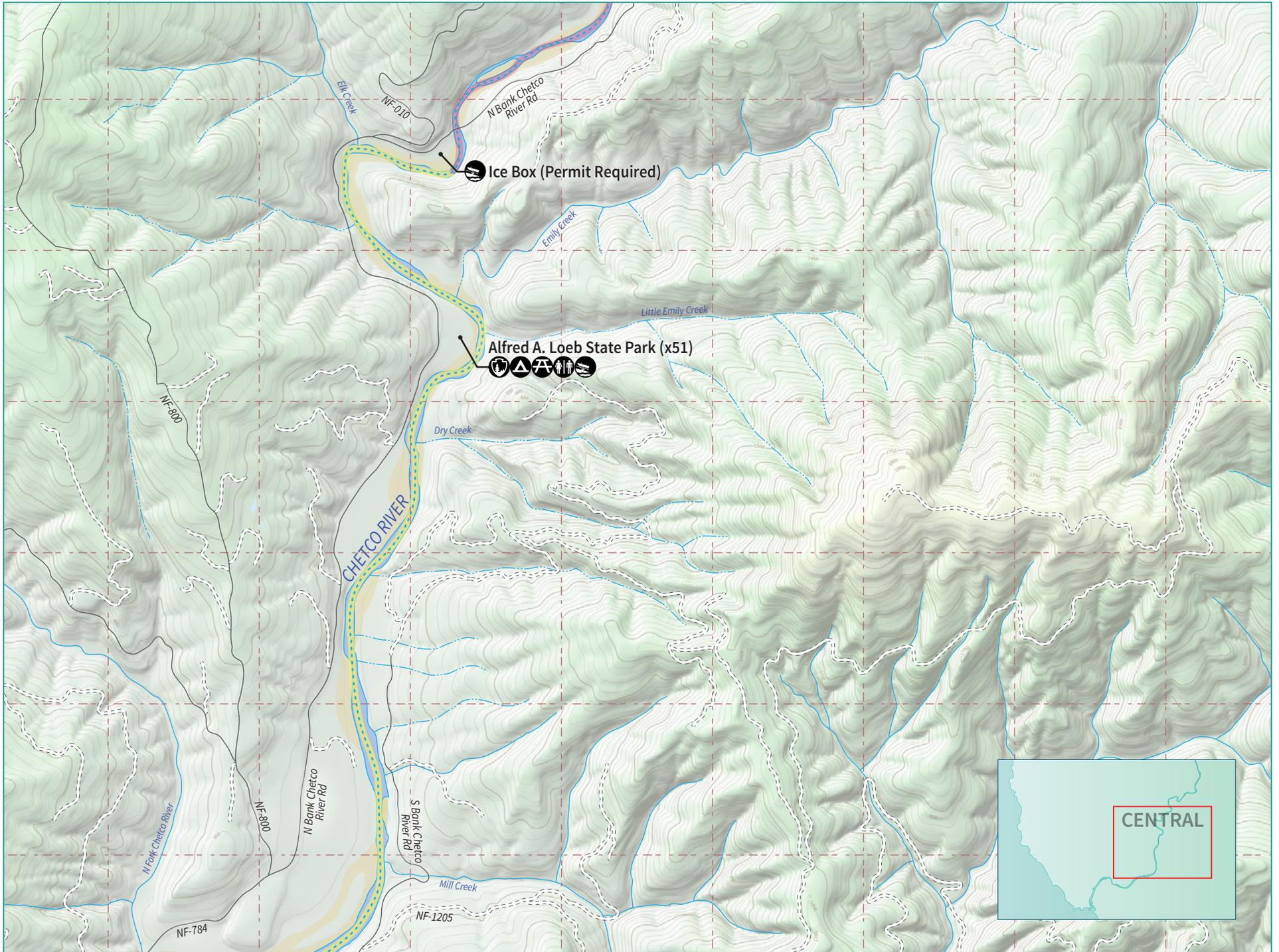
**Fires:** Wildfires can dramatically impact the region. Respect local fire restrictions, make fires only where it's permitted, keep them small and put them out completely.

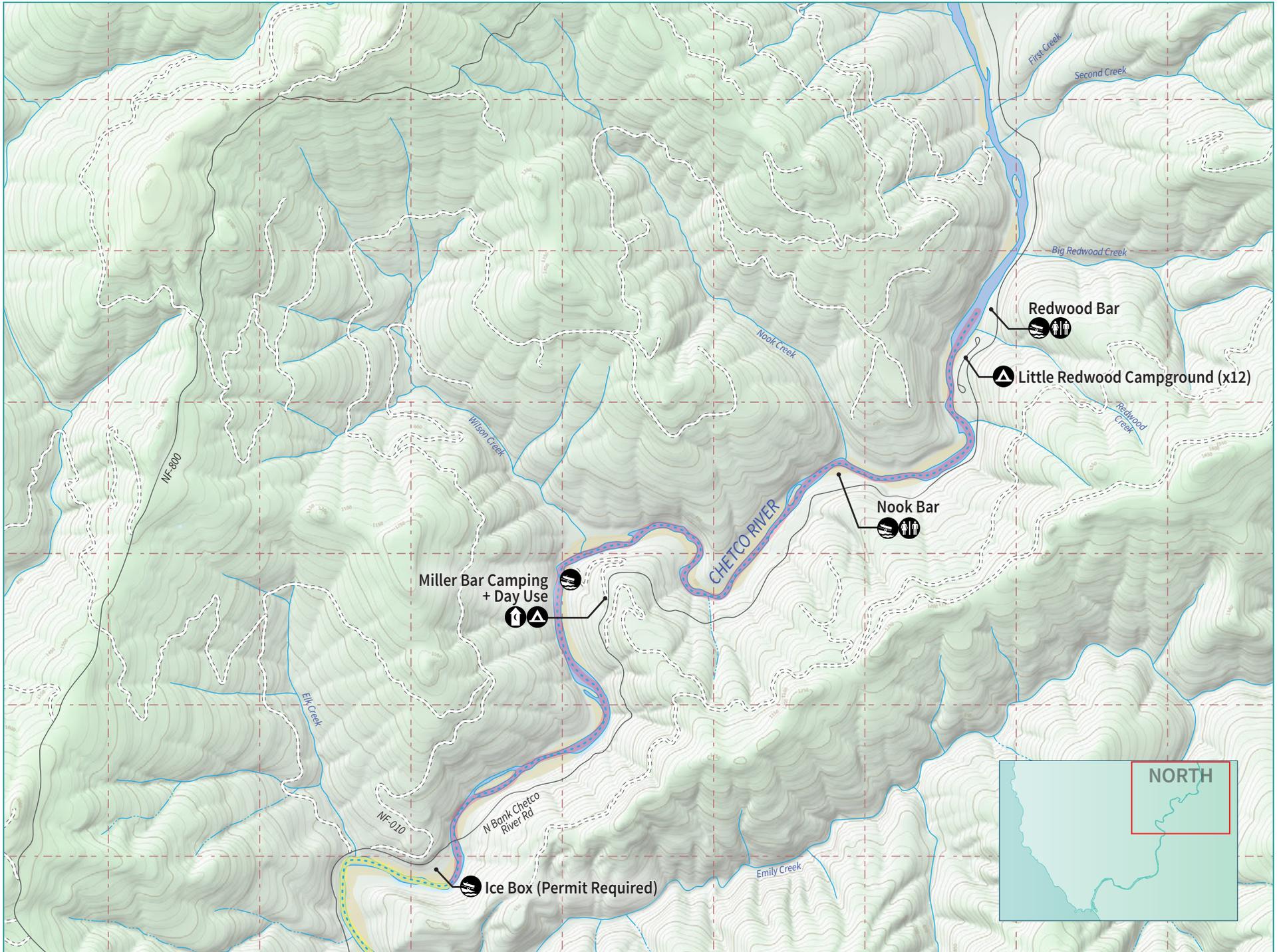
**Invasive Species:** Aquatic nuisance species are a serious threat to Oregon's waterways. Introduction and spread of harmful non-native species can upset the delicate balance of our fragile ecosystems. Aquatic nuisance species are often spread between waterways by hitching a ride on boats and gear. Please wash your boats when switching from one river to the next.



Chetco River Estuary, photo by Priscilla Macy.







# RESOURCES

## GUIDES & OUTFITTERS:

South Coast Tours: [www.southcoasttours.net](http://www.southcoasttours.net) / (541)373-0487  
Riverside Market: [www.chetcokayaks.com](http://www.chetcokayaks.com)  
Wilderness Canyon Adventures: [www.wildernesscanyonadventures.com](http://www.wildernesscanyonadventures.com)

## TRANSPORTATION:

Curry Public Transit: <https://currypublictransit.org/>  
South Coast Tours: <https://www.southcoasttours.net/>

## CHAMBERS:

Brookings Harbor Chamber of Commerce:  
<https://brookingsharborchamber.com/>

## WATERSHED INFORMATION:

South Coast Watershed Council:  
[http://www.currywatersheds.org/south\\_coast\\_watershed\\_council.aspx](http://www.currywatersheds.org/south_coast_watershed_council.aspx)  
(541) 247-2755

## ENCOUNTERING WILDLIFE:

Quietly view wildlife, giving a wide berth to the birds and animals you may encounter. A small pair of binoculars can stow easily on your boat and help you maintain a safe distance while viewing. Do not disturb stranded or wounded animals. Instead, contact the Wildlife Center of the North Coast at (503)338-0331.

Birding: [www.oregoncoastbirding.com](http://www.oregoncoastbirding.com)  
Wildlife Rehab: [www.coastwildlife.org](http://www.coastwildlife.org); (503)338-0331  
Duck Hunting Regulations: [www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/hunting/waterfowl/](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/hunting/waterfowl/)  
Fishing Regulations: [www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/)  
Shellfish Toxicity Alert: [www.oregon.gov/ODA/FSD/shellfish\\_status.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/FSD/shellfish_status.shtml)  
Oregon Wildlife Recreation Report: [www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/)

## PERMITS:

Rules and permitting are subject to change, currently all boats over 10' need an invasive species permit with the state of Oregon.  
<https://myodfw.com/articles/buying-aquatic-invasive-species-prevention-permit>

## WEATHER & SAFETY INFORMATION:

USGS Real Time Water Data: [www.waterdata.usgs.gov](http://www.waterdata.usgs.gov)  
Tide Predictions: [www.saltwatertides.com](http://www.saltwatertides.com)  
Surf Report: [www.oregonsurfcheck.com](http://www.oregonsurfcheck.com)  
Local Weather: <http://weather.yahoo.com/forecast/USOR0239.html>  
Wind Report: [www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/buoys.php](http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/buoys.php)  
Oregon Rivers: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/or/nwis/rt>  
Tide Predictions: [www.tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/tide\\_predictions.html](http://www.tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/tide_predictions.html)  
Tide tables provided at local markets.  
NOAA: [www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/](http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/); [www.wrh.noaa.gov/](http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/); [www.noaa.com](http://www.noaa.com)  
Buoys: [www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/buoys.php](http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/buoys.php)  
Surf Report: [www.oregonsurfcheck.com](http://www.oregonsurfcheck.com)  
Road Report: [www.tripcheck.com](http://www.tripcheck.com)  
State Marine Board: (503)378-8587  
U.S. Coast Guard Sector Sector North Bend: (541)756-9220  
Station Chetco River, Harbor: (541)469-3885  
Station Coos Bay, Charleston: (541)888-3267  
Oregon State Police Headquarters, Salem: (503)378-3720  
After Hours: Salem Dispatch: (503)375-3555  
SW Region HQ: (541)726-2536  
Curry County Sheriff Offices: (541)247-3242



Chetco River Estuary, photo by Priscilla Macy.

Thanks to our partners and sponsors, and a special mention to Tom Baake for his involvement in the creation of the South Coast Paddle Guides. Tom is a published author of many outdoor recreation guide books. Very few people have as much knowledge about our region’s recreational opportunities. His guide books can be found online and at many area outlets. We thank Tom for his passion in helping visitors and residents alike discover the many recreational opportunities Southwestern Oregon has to offer.

We recommend this book by Tom Baake and Ron Wardman:  
*Oregon South Coast Canoe, Kayak and Stand-up Paddle Guide.*

Coos Bay: Westways Press

Email: [westways@frontier.com](mailto:westways@frontier.com) | Website: [www.scod.com/guidebooks](http://www.scod.com/guidebooks)

This paddle guide printed on Polyart waterproof paper.



**TRAVEL  
OREGON**



Chetco River, photo by Octave Zangs. Cover photo by Priscilla Macy.