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## Times-News

# With more users on public lands, illegal dumping threatens access

WENDELL — For many, public lands in Idaho are a treasure. But the behavior of a small portion of users can put access at risk for everyone.

Endowment lands, managed by the Idaho Department of Lands, are located near every community in Idaho. They've been set aside to be managed by constitutional requirement to generate revenues benefiting public schools.

These are also public lands that frequently see recreational activity, and not everyone is a respectful public lands user.

This week, staff from Idaho Department of Lands spent a day filling three trailers and three pickups with illegally dumped refuse on endowment lands north of Wendell.

According to IDL spokesperson Scott Phillips, the issue has become more problematic statewide.

“Unfortunately it’s becoming more common as Idaho’s population continues to grow, and more and more folks are looking to recreate in the great outdoors,” Phillips said. “For many years we have seen illegal dumping on endowment land, and destructive activities such as tearing down gates, shooting trees, taking vehicles where they shouldn’t be. But as population grows it does become more acute.”

And, Phillips said, if the recreational activities take place at a detriment to the primary purpose — maximizing revenue — the recreation opportunities will be closed off.

“Recreation is really a secondary activity that is allowed by the land board, provided it does not impact or get in the way of generating revenue for those beneficiary groups,” Phillips said.

This has happened in areas around the state, and the Department of Lands this year closed off motorized recreational access to East Fork of Rock Creek outside of American Falls.

In that situation, Phillips said the department asked for help from the community to keep the area clean, and for a while it worked.

“We put out a plea for help, some local citizens came together and helped us clean up the mess, and things got really good for a while,” Phillips said. “And then as this last season started, some of the bad actors and their bad habits came back to haunt that parcel of land, and we had to close it to public vehicular access.”

While the vast majority of public lands users are respectful of the areas, the actions of a few make the biggest mark.

“I think what we have are a few bad actors who may not realize that they are creating damage,” Phillips said. “They don’t think about what they are doing and it impacts everyone who are good actors, who do respect the land.”

By diverting staff time and resources towards cleaning up areas, the department is spending resources that otherwise would be getting passed through to the schools, he said. And after a certain point, it makes more sense to close the area down.

“When things get too bad, unfortunately sometimes our only recourse is to shut the lands down to public recreation,” Phillips said. “And that’s really the last course of action we ever want to see happen.”

The department has seen user groups volunteer time themselves to clean up areas.

Other ways people can contribute is to pack out everything they pack in, and not leave anything behind when they leave.

“Think of endowment land, and all public land in Idaho as an extension of your backyard,” Phillips said. “Would you leave human waste in your own backyard? Would you leave a pile of garbage laying in your own back yard? Probably not. Treat public land like it’s yours because it is.”

The department also encourages people who see misuse, destruction, or illegal dumping on public lands to contact the local sheriff’s department.