Matsutake Mushroom Harvests Begin

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Permits to harvest matsutake mushrooms for commercial purposes went on sale September 11 for the Deschutes, Fremont-Winema, Umpqua and Willamette National Forests.

The permit is valid on all four national forest until the season ends November 11. It is required for anyone picking the mushrooms for commercial purposes.

The types of individual matsutake commercial permits include:

A minimum five-day permit for $35.
Added days to the minimum five-day permit at $7/day.
A 30-day half season permit for $100.
A full season permit for $200. Permits are sold Monday through Friday from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Deschutes National Forestâ€™s Crescent Ranger Station and from 7:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Fremont-Winema National Forestâ€™s Chemult Ranger Station.

Each permit will include a harvest map that must be kept whenever mushrooms are harvested, transported or sold. Harvesters must view a slide show on forest safety, appropriate harvesting methods and camping in national forests before permits are issued at the two ranger stations.

Not all federal land is open to picking. These areas include campgrounds, wilderness areas, research natural areas, Crater Lake National Park, Newberry National Volcanic Monument and the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest.

Forest Service officials have designated a campground exclusively for commercial harvesters that opened September 11 near Crescent Lake Junction, just off Highway 58. The campground is called Little Odell Camp, and is the only place commercial harvesters can camp on the Crescent and Chemult Ranger Districts.

Camping fees can be paid anytime for one day up to the whole season, which lasts 62 days. The fee includes a refundable $25 cleaning deposit for each campsite.

The Chemult Ranger Station will also issue free personal-use matsutake mushroom permits from October 2 to November 11. It is the only ranger district that issues the permit, which has a limit of 15 mushrooms a day for up to 10 days in designated areas only.

Forest Service regulations require personal use mushrooms be cut length-wise to distinguish between mushrooms harvested for personal versus commercial use.

Federal and state law enforcement officers issued several citations last week for conducting illegal harvests on the Deschutes National Forest and confiscated hundreds of pounds of matsutake mushrooms.

Violators of federal mushroom regulations can be punished by a $500 fine, imprisonment for up to six months, or both.

Most Deschutes National Forest weather stations indicate extreme fire danger. Fire managers urge everyone venturing into forests to check current fire public use restrictions in Central Oregon by telephoning 1-800-523-4737.

Current fire public use restrictions and matsutake harvest information can be obtained by contacting the following offices:

Chemult Ranger Station, (Fremont-Winema National Forest), (541)-365-7001.
Crescent Ranger Station, (Deschutes National Forest), (541) 433-3200.
Willamette National Forest (541) 782-2283.
Umpqua National Forest (541) 672-6601.

Matsutake mushrooms appear to be sprouting early this year in Oregon and California national forests.

Forest Service officials believe this yearâ€™s matsutake harvest will also yield quantities not seen since the early 1990s, according to Pete Peterson, a Deschutes National Forest special forest products coordinator. But, prices will be affected by many factors influenced by a global market, he said.

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