

# Vernita Bridge Access Area changes



*“WDFW is committed to maintaining public access while addressing environmental concerns. We aim to manage the area sustainably, and are seeking a long-term alternative camping solution by 2026,”*

- WDFW South Central Region 3 Director Mike Livingston

For more information on changes at the Vernita Bridge site, scan the QR code or go to [wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/water-access-sites/30005](https://wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/water-access-sites/30005)



## **The importance of the Vernita Bridge site**

The Hanford (Reach) fall Chinook fishery is a popular recreational fishery, with many anglers accessing the Columbia River at the Vernita Bridge Access Area on State Route 243. The Vernita site is owned by the Department of Energy (DOE) and managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

While camping is not an officially permitted activity at the site, dozens of people, including fishing guides, camp at the site during the fishing season; many for weeks at a time. The level of use has become unsustainable and requires changes to address damage to onsite resources.

WDFW has made strategic management practices to promote responsible recreational use, while preserving the ecological integrity of this valuable natural resource.

## **Changes at the Vernita Water Access Area**

WDFW is committed to providing public access in this area for anglers. To do so, changes to site use are being made in the interest of environmental preservation and public benefit, conservation, and safety goals.

Alternative camping sites are being investigated for future fishing seasons. In the meantime, limited camping will continue at the Vernita site for the 2024 and 2025 fall salmon seasons, with all overnight use being phased out in 2026. Although camping will be allowed, it will be managed differently under the interim plan:

- There will be designated areas for overnight use and day use. A combination of large rock, eco-blocks, and signage will identify those areas.
- Vehicles and trailers will be able to use the area but will be confined to designated areas to avoid habitat and other damage. Depending on peak use, some users may need to find alternate camping locations.
- Camping will be limited to 14 days per user.
- When salmon seasons are not underway, camping will be prohibited and vehicle access limited to a smaller day use area.

The Vernita Bridge Access Area will be patrolled by WDFW Enforcement officers for compliance with posted requirements.

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## **Alternative camping options**

For those who decide not to camp at Vernita under the changed rules, there are some alternative camping sites in the area:

- Desert Aire RV park, Mattawa, 11 miles from Vernita
- Jackson Creek Fish Camp, Mattawa, Grant PUD, 7 miles from Vernita
- Priest Rapids Recreation Area, Desert Aire, Grant PUD, 11 miles from Vernita

Please visit the Grant Public Utility District website at [GrantPUD.org/visit-us](http://GrantPUD.org/visit-us) for more information on rules and regulations for camping at sites they manage in the area.

## **The future of Vernita**

WDFW is committed to seeking an alternative camping site and discontinuing camping at Vernita by 2026. Once an alternative site is identified, WDFW will need to work through permitting, design, and implementation, which can take a year or more.

WDFW is proposing for the Vernita Water Access Area to transition to a day-use only site with a developed boat launch, designated parking area, and restroom. WDFW has initiated a site planning process prior to environmental reviews and permitting that would be required for implementation.

Additional opportunities for public input will be available in the future as part of the planning and permitting process.