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Large crowds could eclipse the eclipse itself

By *Cathy Dausman*

Planning a trip to view the Aug. 21 eclipse from up north? If you like crowds, this will be your lucky day. The 2017 solar eclipse reaches its first U.S. landfall mid-morning near Newport, Oregon, before traversing southeast across 13 other states and The Washington Post estimates seven million visitors will crowd the path of totality where 12 million people normally live.

Not only is the event astronomical, but the crowds may well be too. Lamorinda Weekly will recap several Lamorinda resident eclipse experiences in our Sept. 6 issue, but for now Lamorinda travelers should know that Oregon, a state with four million residents, will likely host conservatively one million visitors.

Most will arrive between Aug. 17 and 20 and depart by Aug. 22. Authorities statewide, from local police and fire officials to Oregon State Police and Oregon Department of Transportation management anticipate possible fuel shortages, increased fire danger, communication overload and are planning how to address those concerns.

Fire Chief Larry Goff of suburban Portland's Lake Oswego says authorities expect between 50,000 and 100,000 visitors at the Oregon coast and tens of thousands more in Central Oregon. He's been told the drive between Madras, Oregon, (population approximately 6,700, and inside the path of totality) and Bend, Oregon, (population approximately 91,000 and just outside totality), normally a 45-minute trip might take seven or eight hours Aug. 21, and he worries how a small town and all-volunteer fire department can look after 100,000 guests.

Arriving by air? Portland International Airport Aviation Media Relations Manager Kama Simonds says incoming flights will be 90 to 100 percent full, "especially those originating from the West Coast." Nearly 400,000 passengers are expected to pass through PDX between Aug. 17 and 22, she says, and the biggest challenge may be rental car return. "It is projected more than 17,000 rental cars will be returned Monday evening and Tuesday - a busy week's worth of business in a few days," Simonds says. "We're reminding folks who have flights to allow plenty of time to get to the airport," she cautions. Goff says he and other authorities are struggling to filter solid information from rumor, especially when the event is still 12 days out. "It's a fabulous planning event (for emergency personnel and management) Goff says, but emphasizes, "there's going to be impact!"

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