

Total solar eclipse casts spotlight on rural Oregon town

June 23 2017, by Gillian Flaccus



Joe Krenowicz, executive director of the Madras-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, gestures toward Mt. Jefferson as the sun rises over Madras, Oregon on June 13, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

Just before sunrise, there's typically nothing atop Round Butte but the

whistle of the wind and a panoramic view of Oregon's second-highest peak glowing pink in the faint light.

But on Aug. 21, local officials expect this lookout point just outside the small town of Madras to be crammed with people from around the world, all hoping for the first glimpse of the moon's shadow as it crosses Mount Jefferson's snow fields. Then, a solar eclipse will throw the entire region into complete darkness for two minutes.

The first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse to cross the continental United States in 99 years will first be visible in Oregon, and Madras is predicted to be among the country's best viewing spots because of its clear, high-desert skies, flat landscape and stunning mountain views.

Up to 1 million eclipse chasers will descend on Oregon for the celestial event, and officials are bracing for as many as 100,000 of them in and around Madras.

In this vast expanse of ranches and farms, rural, two-lane roads could mean traffic jams of cosmic proportions. Every hotel in Madras is booked, some residents are renting their homes for \$3,000 a night, and campers are expected to flood the national forests and grasslands during peak wildfire season.



On Feb. 26, 1979, eclipse enthusiasts gathered at Observatory Hill in Goldendale, Wash., to watch a solar eclipse. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years Aug. 21, 20127, and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (Wes Guderian/The Oregonian via AP)

The state's emergency coordination center will gear up, and first responders will prepare to respond to any trouble as they would for an earthquake or other natural disaster. Cell towers could be overwhelmed, traffic will be gridlocked, and police and fire stretched to the max

managing the crowds.

"Bring extra water, bring food. You need to be prepared to be able to survive on your own for 24 to 48 to 72 hours, just like you would in any sort of emergency," said Dave Thompson, spokesman for the Oregon Department of Transportation. "This is pretty much a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and it's really worth seeing. But you've got to be prepared or you won't enjoy it."

When the moon passes between the sun and the Earth, the path of totality—meaning total darkness—from the moon's shadow will begin on Oregon's coast, then cross the north-central part of the state from west to east.

But as the hype builds, authorities are increasingly worried that people who planned to watch from the notoriously foggy coast could move east at the last minute if the forecast sours. And Oregonians who live outside the path of totality could decide to drive to one of the prime viewing spots at the spur of the moment, creating havoc on the roads, said Cory Grogan, spokesman for the Oregon Office of Emergency Management.



On Feb. 26, 1979, eclipse enthusiasts, photographers and television crews gather to watch the solar eclipse in Goldendale, Wash. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years Aug. 21, 20127, and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (Randy Wood/The Oregonian via AP)

In addition, many tourists will be camping in hot, tinder-dry conditions, or even sleeping in their cars. First responders have been planning for months for a worst-case scenario: evacuating tens of thousands of people while trying to get fire engines through gridlocked roads. Cellular towers also may be crippled by the volume of people texting, calling and posting photos, making it difficult for fire crews to communicate.

Federal and local officials will stage engines and other resources at key locations, and firefighters from other agencies and private companies will send extra crews. But it's impossible to plan for everything, and tourists frustrated with traffic may use forest access roads as shortcuts, further raising fire risk, said Kent Koeller, a recreation planner with U.S. Forest Service outside Madras.

"Just driving off-road - having that contact with a hot muffler or a catalytic converter - could start an ignition," he said. "And in these fine fuels, it could spread very quickly."

Lysa Vattimo was hired two years ago to coordinate the town's planning efforts with more than 50 local, state and federal agencies. She spends her days trying to think of every possible consequence of having tens of thousands of people in a town of just 6,500—and her nights worrying she missed something.



On Feb. 26, 1979, the path of a solar eclipse passes over Goldendale, Wash., as William Yantis, director of Golendale Observatory, peers into a Celestron telescope. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years Aug. 21, 20127, and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands.(Jim Vincent/The Oregonian via AP)

The town and surrounding campsites have rented nearly 700 portable toilets, including some from as far as Idaho, to meet demand. Sanitation trucks will run almost around the clock, transporting trash to 50-yard-long (46-meter-long) dumpsters before it rots in triple-digit temperatures.

Gas stations are filling their underground tanks in advance, and businesses are being told to use cash only, to avoid bringing down the wireless network. Banks are stocking their ATMs, local hospitals have canceled vacations, and pregnant women close to their due dates are being told to leave to avoid getting stuck.

"What we've asked our residents to do is get prepared ahead of time. About a week out, fuel up on propane, gas, whatever fuels they need, get their prescriptions, go to the doctor, do what you need to do," she said. "And then stay home."

In Madras, hotels were booked years ago, and spots at 25 campgrounds in and around the town are going fast. Farmers are renting out their land for pop-up campgrounds, and thousands of parking spaces for day trippers are getting snapped up.



Christina Carpenter and her 11-year-old son, Evan, hold some of their chickens on the family's organic farm on June 13, 2017 as Carpenter's husband, Grant Putnam, looks on. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Carpenter is renting out camping spaces on the family's farm for nearly \$1,000 and up during the four days leading up to the eclipse and will provide live music, guest lectures, star-gazing and meals. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

The Black Bear Diner, one of the town's most popular restaurants, expects to serve 1,000 people a day during the week leading up to the eclipse. Owner Joe Davis has ordered five weeks of food for one week of business and will have an abbreviated menu of 10 items to speed

service.

"The Black Bear Diner has been here in Madras 18 years, and I'm sure this will be by far the busiest week - and probably double the busiest week - that we've seen," he said.

But amid all the hubbub and anxiety, most residents have kept sight of the wonder.

Darlene Hoffman is one of the few here who watched the last total solar eclipse to touch Madras 38 years ago. Hoffman, 80, recalls how the birds stopped singing and the horses prepared to sleep as the sky gradually darkened and a hush fell over the land.

"It was really something to see. It really was," she said. "That amazed me more than anything."



A poster advertising special safety glass for viewing the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse sits on the counter at a McDonald's restaurant in Madras, Oregon on June

12, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



A poster advertising the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse hangs in the window of a

McDonald's restaurant in Madras, Oregon on June 12, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

SOLAR FEST 2017		ECLIPSE 8-21-2017
CENTRAL OREGON		8-17 TO 8-22-2017
<u>BREAKFAST</u> EGG COMBOS		WITH ALL SERVED HASHBROWNS AND WHITE OR WHEAT TOAST
CHICKEN FRIED STEAK - 2 EGGS		\$14.50
BIG FOOT CHICKEN FRY - 3 EGGS		16.50
HAM BACON		
- OR-LINK SAUSAGE - 2 EGGS		\$13.00
HUNGRY BEAR (LARGER PORTION)		
HAM OR BACON OR SAUSAGE - 3 EGGS		\$15.50
NEW YORK STEAK - 6 OZ - 2 EGGS		\$12.00
NEW YORK STEAK - 10 OZ - 2 EGGS		\$17.00
<u>OMELETTES</u> - 3 EGGS		SERVED WITH HASHBROWNS AND WHITE OR WHEAT TOAST
MEAT LOVERS - HAM, BACON, SAUSAGE JACK CHEESE		\$14.50
CALIFORNIA - AVOCADO, MUSHROOM, JACK CHEESE		\$14.00
SHASTA SCRAMBLE - 2 EGGS - AVOCADO, SPINACH, TOMATO, ONION, BELL PEPPER, JACK CHEESE		\$13.00

A rough draft of a special shortened menu for the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse is seen resting on a table at the Black Bear Diner in Madras, Oregon on June 12, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the

state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. This diner expects to serve 1,000 people a day during the event. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



An advertisement for a festival built around the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse sits alongside a busy road leading into Madras, Oregon on June 13, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



Joe Krenowicz, executive director of the Madras-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, looks toward Mt. Jefferson as the sun rises over Madras, Oregon on June 13, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



A poster advertising the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse hangs in the window of a McDonald's restaurant in Madras, Oregon on June 12, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



An advertisement for camping spaces for the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse sits alongside a busy road in Madras, Oregon on June 13, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be in Oregon and Madras, in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. Officials are worried about the ability of the rural area to host so many visitors and are concerned about the danger of wildfire from so many people camping on public lands. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



A poster advertising the Aug. 21, 2017, total solar eclipse hangs in the window of a McDonald's restaurant in Madras, Oregon on June 12, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be Oregon and Madras, Ore., in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)



A sign advertising solar eclipse glasses for the Aug. 21, 2017, total solar eclipse hangs in the window of a McDonald's restaurant in Madras, Oregon on June 12, 2017. The first place to experience total darkness as the moon passes between the sun and the Earth will be Oregon and Madras, Ore., in the central part of the state, is expected to be a prime viewing location. Up to 1 million people are expected in Oregon for the first coast-to-coast total solar eclipse in 99 years and up to 100,000 could show up in Madras and surrounding Jefferson County. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Total solar eclipse casts spotlight on rural Oregon town (2017, June 23) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-06-total-solar-eclipse-spotlight-rural.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.