

Southern Breezin'

Southern Oregon wind riders know the Columbia Gorge isn't the only place to ride

By **Steve Warga**
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Southern Oregon windsurfing and kite-boarding fans needn't travel all the way to the Columbia Gorge to find first-rate playgrounds.

Granted, the city of Hood River on the Columbia deserves its reputation as one of the Seven Windsurfing Wonders of the World, not to be missed by hard-core boarders — and it isn't. Enthusiasts come from all over the world to test their mettle against the sometimes gale-strength winds of the gorge.

But more than a few knowledgeable boarders also come from all over the world to sample Oregon coastal winds and waves well south and a bit west of the Columbia River hotspots. For about half the cost in fuel, you and your wind-loving pals can roll to Floras Lake, south of Langlois, where you'll find it all: smooth inland lake waters; booming ocean breakers just across the strip of sand dunes; equipment rentals and classes for beginners on up; oh ... and plenty of stiff, bracing breezes pretty much all day long, year-round.

For Southern California windsurfer Will Brady, the lure of Floras Lake proved overwhelming after he first surfed there in 1982. He'd been working in a windsurfing shop in San Pedro for about three years at the time. By 1989, Brady was hooked enough to start his own school and rental business adjacent to Boice-Cope County Park.

Then in 1991, Brady and his wife, Liz, built a handsome bed and breakfast inn with plenty of deck space and windows facing the north tip of Floras Lake and the ocean beyond. They've been busy ever since.

Looking every inch the classic California surfer dude with his straw-blond hair and wind-tuned tan, Will prefers a sail on his surfboards. More recently, he's turned to kite-boarding for a whole new brand of challenge and fun.

"Windsurfing generally starts out easier," he says, "but kites are easier to get better on. With windsurfing, as you get into stronger winds and smaller boards, it gets progressively harder. With kiting, it gets easier."

On a recent cloudy morning, with the wind blowing steady and strong, Will's son Reed, a newly-minted high-school graduate, demonstrated the sheer joy of hooking a parasail-like kite to his harness, sliding his feet into a board quite similar to a snowboard, then grabbing the kite's control bar and skimming across the lake in no time flat. Whenever the whim seized him, which was often, Reed

would twist a bit, tug a bit and lift out of the water — way out of the water. Flipping his board, pivoting, climbing and diving, the young daredevil looked for all the world like a skateboarder tricking in an invisible park 20 feet above the water.

It took only a modest bit of urging for Reed to grab his board and hop-jump his kite over the low line of dunes for a crack at some big, booming breakers beyond. Almost as quickly as he traversed the lake, Reed wasn't just in the breakers, he was past the surf line and looking like he wouldn't bother stopping until he reached Hawaii. But he turned back and started stunting along the wave tops.

The elder Brady, who considers kite surfing to be even more fun than boarding, says the Whiskey Run area just north of Bandon Dunes Golf Course is another place where wind and waves conspire to create ideal boarding conditions in Southern Oregon.

"It's the other big, popular spot around here," Will Brady says. "There's a lot of kilters up there because of the waves. The beach is flat and sandy, you can drive right up to the water and rig your kite. Sometimes we'll go all the way to the Bandon Lighthouse and back. That's about five miles."

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IF YOU GO

To reach Floras Lake, take Highway 42 into Bandon. Turn left (south) on Highway 101 and drive about 14.5 miles to Langlois. Drive about one mile past Main Street to Floras Lake Loop. Turn right (west) and drive .6 miles to Floras Lake Road. Turn right on Floras Lake Road for 1.4 miles, then take a sharp left to stay on Floras Lake Road. Take immediate right on Boice-Cope Lane and follow another .3 miles to road's end. Park there and walk to west shore of lake, or turn left on Park Road loop to reach Boice-Cope County Park. All roads and destinations are well marked.

Lessons and equipment rentals are available at Floras Lake Windsurfing, right next to the park. Individual instruction in either kite-boarding or windsurfing begins at \$60 for two or three hours. Learn more by visiting www.floraslake.com.

(Please note, Floras Lake Windsurfing will not rent kite equipment without instruction, regardless of experience levels.)

A little closer to home, you can find introductory information, instructions and alternate boarding locations from Southern Oregon Kite Addicts out of Shady Cove. Visit their Web site at www.southernoregonkiteaddicts.com to learn more.