



## Life Jacket Lending Program

### History



In February 2000 a casual conversation between river guides Dana Burwell, Acting Fire Chief of McKenzie Fire & Rescue, and Steve Schaefer, President of the McKenzie River Guides Association, led to the start of a Life Jacket Lending Program for the McKenzie River Valley. This program is a cooperative effort between the McKenzie River Guides Association and McKenzie Fire & Rescue.

Their conversation was triggered after the tragic drowning of a 2 year old and his father while fishing without life jackets on the McKenzie River in September 1999. The son fell in, and in an attempt to save his son the father drowned as well, leaving his young daughter on the river bank. Steve and Dana came up with the idea of lending life jackets for the day to people needing them for their children. The primary goal of the Life Jacket Lending Program is to keep all young people safe around recreational water.

To begin the program, the Guides Association donated funds for 50 new life jackets ranging in sizes infant to teen size. It was quickly realized more jackets were needed to support the program. In response to this need, the Guides and the McKenzie Masters, a group of fly fishermen from around Oregon, held a fishing derby and auction of drift boat and rafting trips, and fishing merchandise donated by local merchants. The \$2,000.00 raised purchased an additional 150 life jackets.

The life jackets were distributed to retail businesses in the McKenzie Valley. Loaning the life jackets for the day was a huge success. McKenzie Fire & Rescue's Public Education Division manages the day to day operations of the program, which includes inventory control, yearly disbursement and collection, cleaning and preservation of the life jackets.

Today, life jackets have been loaned out nearly 8,500 times during the last 14 years of operations. Protect yourself and your family when visiting our river. Borrow a life jacket.