



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
A small purse seine is deployed on the Lower Columbia River. The net is played out in a large circle, ready to be drawn or "pursed" in. Theoretically, any fish caught within the purse can be sorted through, with wild-spawning individuals released back into the water, while hatchery fish are retained.

Seine: Plan to replace gillnet gear

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Also, much has changed since 2013. Kitzhaber is no longer in office and former gillnet strategist Bruce Buckmaster was appointed to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission this spring. As questions remain about the viability of using seines on the river, opponents of the plan are feeling optimistic.

"I'm feeling more hopeful than I was," said Hobe Kyr of Salmon For All, an Astoria-based association that represents gillnetters. "Let's put it that way."

Questions

Kitzhaber's plan to replace gillnet gear with purse and beach seines and phase gillnets out by 2017 went into effect in 2013, restricting gillnet fishing to side channels like Youngs Bay. Voters had shot down the plan in 2012 only to see Kitzhaber and Oregon and Washington's Fish and Wildlife commissions proceed with it in 2013.

For the last two years, state fishery managers in Oregon and Washington have operated commercial purse and beach seine fisheries on the river — gear outlawed by Washington in 1935 and by Oregon in 1950.

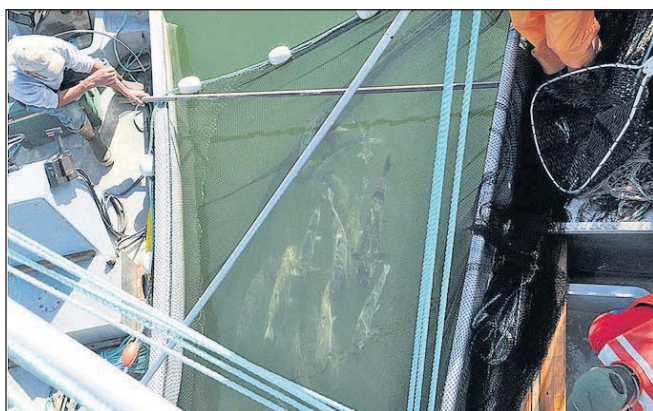
But according to interviews conducted with members of the Oregon and Washington departments of Fish and Wildlife over the past two years, questions have plagued Kitzhaber's plan from the start.

Mortality studies released last year seemed to indicate the seines had too high of an impact on salmon, meaning high percentages of seine-caught wild fish were more likely to die after being released back into the river. Fishermen — both sport and commercial, on the river and on the ocean — are limited to a certain percentage of wild salmon on they are allowed to catch, handle or keep.

Since 2013, the states have been studying the seine fisheries, trying to determine how they should function on the river and what a commercial seine fishery for Columbia River salmon even looks like. Each year, they have refined their data, fishery managers say.

"As it's gone along, I think people are a little more comfortable with the numbers going in," Ellis said, looking back over the years since Kitzhaber's plan went into effect.

He and others say the states



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Fish are able to swim freely while crew members sort through them.

have done an admirable job in collecting data and monitoring seine operations. When Ellis went out on a boat this summer, two state fishery observers were also aboard.

Landings

Last year, state fishery managers opened the purse and beach seine fisheries from August through September.

By the end of the season, beach and purse seiners had landed a total of 2,439 marked Chinook and 4,046 unmarked Chinook, 1,031 marked coho and 2,222 unmarked coho as well as 703 steelhead, according to a 2014 fall seine fishery observation summary published on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's website.

This fall, purse seiners landed a total of 2,312 Chinook and 526 coho during the fall season, according to numbers available from Oregon. Beach seiners landed significantly less from August through the end of September, ending with 681 Chinook and 61 coho.

The future

For Kyr and the Lower Columbia River gillnetters, very real questions remain about the economic impact of losing the main stem. The select areas — places like Youngs Bay specifically designated for commercial fishing — can't support the same number of fishermen that the mainstem can, they argue. And, they say, not all gillnetters are able to or want to switch gear.

Kyr firmly believes gillnets are much better at catching the right fish, limiting impacts on wild runs.

And, as Ellis points out, there is still much work to be done if seines are to replace gillnets.

Last year, commercial seiners on the Lower Columbia

River fished using "research impacts," meaning the wild fish they caught during the course of normal fishing didn't get deducted from the regular commercial impacts.

This was the first commercial seine fishery to operate on the Lower Columbia River in decades, and the seiners were able to catch and sell their salmon just like any other fishermen.

This year, the seiners were considered part of the regular commercial salmon fleet and their impacts — no longer billed as "research impacts" — counted in the same way. In the future, fishing season planning could get complicated and expensive with seines in the mix, too, Ellis said, especially if seines do in fact have a high impact on salmon.

There are also questions about what such fisheries would look like for Oregon fishermen versus Washington fishermen.

Both state Fish and Wildlife departments oversee the seine fisheries, and all of the participating fishermen this year needed to have a current Columbia River commercial salmon license and be able to show that they had landed salmon from the mainstem of the river or in select area fisheries off the mainstem within the last two years.

But while Oregon residents also needed to purchase a \$32 nontransferable experimental gear permit issued by ODFW if they were selected to participate in either of the seine fisheries, in Washington, the cost of participation was higher.

Washington fishermen who were selected to participate in the seine fishery were required to have an emerging fishery license and an experimental fishery permit, both issued by WDFW. While the experimental fishery permit does not cost anything, the emerging fishery license involves a \$290 fee.

Culling: Groups say lawsuit not about 'birds versus fish'

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Salmon impacts

NOAA Fisheries estimated that during 1998-2012, double-crested cormorants consumed 6.7 percent of juvenile steelhead, 2.8 percent of Chinook yearlings and 1.3 percent of juvenile sockeye migrating to the ocean.

Looking at it another way, NOAA also calculated the birds ate an annual average of 12 million juvenile salmonids, many of them listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The East Sand Island's cormorant colony, estimated at 15,000 nesting pairs, represents about 98 percent of the double-crested cormorant population in the Lower Columbia River. In 1989 the cormorant breeding population was about 100 pairs.

As tons of dredged rock and soil from the Columbia River streambed piled up over the years, avian predators, such as cormorants and Caspian terns, set up colonies on the fill.

The corps has a four-year plan to reduce the cormorant population in the estuary by 56 percent. The plan is spelled out in the final environmental impact statement, dated Feb. 6.

Lawsuit pursues end to bird cull

In response, the Audubon Society of Portland and four other groups filed for a preliminary injunction against the corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in April. The environmental groups argued their suit was not about "birds versus fish." Rather, they said, federal agencies were targeting cormorants rather than operating dams to minimize juvenile salmon mortalities.

NOAA Fisheries calculated annual cormorant consumption rates of juvenile steelhead, yearling Chinook and juvenile sockeye at 6.7 percent, 2.8 percent and 1.3 percent, respectively, based on data from 1998-2012.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon ruled against the Audubon and its allies May 8, citing their failure to prove that le-



Sondra Ruckwardt/Contributed Photo
Fish-eating cormorants are pictured here on East Sand Island near Chinook, Wash.

thally removing the number of cormorants stated in the corps' plan would likely cause "irreversible harm" to the overall population. The decision allowed the federal agencies to start their 2015 culling operation in late May.

Final oral arguments in the case are scheduled for March 7 before Simon.

Meanwhile, on Goose Island upstream of the Columbia River's confluence with the Snake River, fewer than 20 nesting pairs of Caspian terns have been counted this year.

"Last year, before the dissuasion program, there were about 400 nesting pairs," said Michael Lesky, natural resource specialist for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Ephrata field office.

These Caspian terns wear ankle bracelets, actually bands that indicate where the bird was tagged.

Tern populations have been big consumers of juvenile salmonids. Studies conducted during 2008-2013 estimated terns were annually taking 16 percent of upper Columbia River steelhead smolts and 2.5 percent of spring Chinook. Reclamation and the corps will release estimates next month of the number of juvenile salmon and steelhead taken by Caspian terns in 2015.

Relocation efforts

As part of the dissuasion plan, federal agencies have created alternative Caspian tern nesting habitat at Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge in San Francisco Bay. The alternative habitat was available for the 2015 spring nesting season.

Lesky, who visited the refuge in May, said he saw the birds nesting, rearing their young and using the habitat there.

The purpose of the new California habitat is to attract Caspian terns away from the Columbia River to a location where there are fewer or no ESA-listed species for prey. The San Francisco Bay refuge is on the bird's annual flyway.

It won't be known if Caspian terns at the Don Edwards refuge are terns from Goose Island until agency personnel have information from satellite tags on the terns, which will come later this year, Lesky said. The terns nesting there could also be from East Sand Island on the Lower Columbia, where efforts to reduce their numbers have met with limited success.

To redistribute Caspian terns, a method called social attraction is used to entice them away. This involves the Corps of Engineers building up islands at appropriate locations, and biologists then holding a big, loud party there. Instead of setting out chairs and tables and turning on music, they plant the new terrain with Caspian tern decoys and blast audio recordings of screeching terns.

Social attraction seems to work to lure a limited number of the terns to new areas, but it is hard to predict whether this widely dispersed and migratory species will continue to return to a new island or breed there, and whether relocation helps reduce Caspian tern consumption of juvenile salmon and steelhead on the Columbia.

COMING IN FEBRUARY!

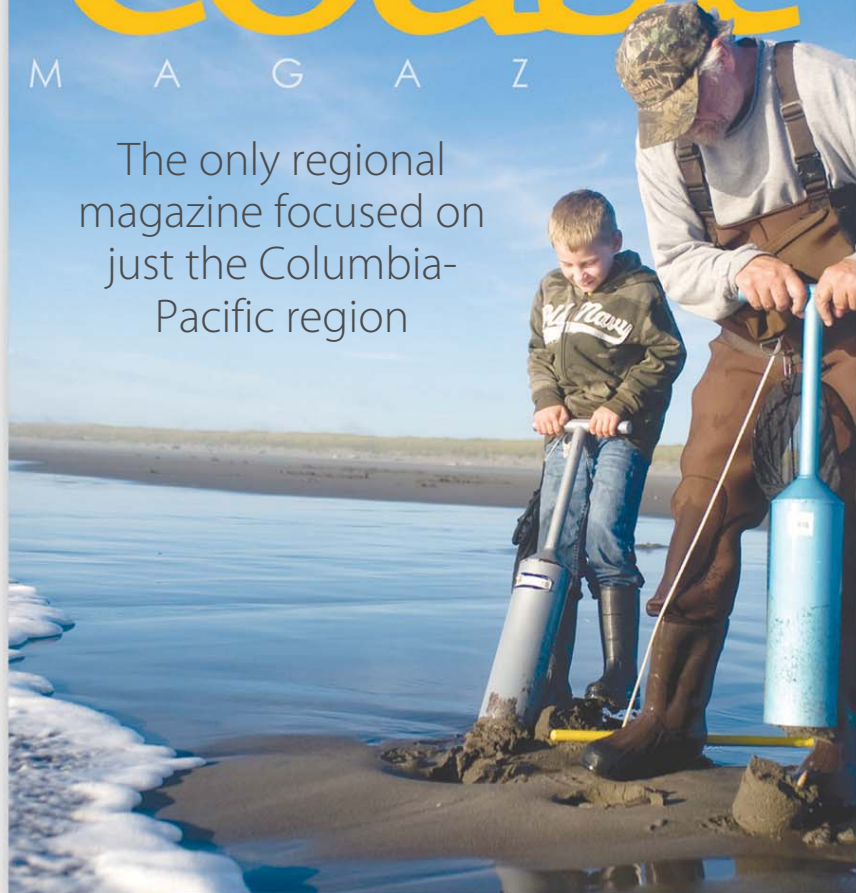
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Veterans: 'Their selfless quality should be an example for all of us'

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Eight-grader Isabella Morrill explained why she thinks Veteran's Day is important.

"Veterans give their freedom to give us ours. Their selfless quality should be an example for all of us in America," Morrill said.

"Why do we celebrate Veteran's Day? To give our gratitude, our honor. We must realize that Veteran's Day is not a pointless holiday. Veteran's Day is not a day that Americans should shuck aside."

Members from Veterans of Foreign Wars Fort Stevens Post 10580 attended, giving out buddy poppies, the official memorial flower of the VFW.

Leroy Dunn, quartermaster of the Fort Stevens chapter, read "When a Soldier Dies," a poem written by Jim Willis, a former director of the Ore-



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
Leroy Dunn, quartermaster of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Fort Stevens Post 10580, took the stage to read the poem "When a Soldier Dies" by Jim Willis, a former director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, during a Veteran's Day celebration Wednesday at Gateway Community Church.

gon Department of Veterans' Affairs, in 2004.

"So enjoy your freedom, your family and fun, but stop to remember where it all came

from," the last stanza of Willis' poem reads. "Freedom is triumph over evil and lies, and it's paid for each time a soldier dies."