

Lamprey

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The next winter, they migrate to the ocean, becoming adults. There, they are parasitic to larger fish, attaching their sucker mouths to salmon, flatfish, rockfish and pollock.

They live in the ocean for three to five years, then head back to spawn. But, unlike salmon, they wait a year to spawn, without eating, until the following spring.

“It’s incredible, because they’re living off their fat reserves that whole time,” Wakeland said. “Which is why they made a really good food source, because they’re high in oils.”

Also unlike salmon, lamprey don’t necessarily return to the stream system where they were born.

Instead, it’s thought adult lamprey are attracted to the pheromones of juveniles still in the system.

So tribal biologists capture lamprey at Willamette Falls and release them above Fall Creek Dam, off the Willamette River near Springfield.

Forty of the 240 fish relocated each year are radio tagged, so scientists can track their movements.

“We’re getting more and more juveniles and larval lamprey above the dam,” Wakeland said. “The thought is those pheromones will attract adult lamprey.”

The plan seems to be working.

The project began in 2014, after a small test run in 2013.

“Last year we had some juvenile lamprey moving out to the ocean,” Wakeland said.

“And then this year, we’ve had some adults moving upstream. We’re seeing some migration.”

A successful restoration at Willamette Falls could extend the harvest season, which currently runs from June 1 through July 31, during certain hours only, and by special permit from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The four dozen or so lamprey Dirksen’s team caught, meanwhile, are headed for the tribe’s freezers, most likely to be eaten at the annual celebration of Tribal Restoration this fall.



Matt Zimbrick looks for a route over the boulders and rushing water of Willamette Falls. Zimbrick and a team of three were at the falls to harvest lamprey, a nearly 450 million year old fish that is culturally significant to tribes from southern California to Alaska. PHOTOS BY MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

A summer youth crew has been trained to clean and prepare the eels, and tribal youth also participate in the harvest, helping pass the tradition to new generations.

“A lot of the older elders really understand the tradition of the eels and the significance of Willamette Falls to the tribes from time immemorial,” Tribal Elder Giffen said.

“But they can’t go out and crawl around on the rocks,” he said. “That’s the significance of our young kids going out and harvesting these.”

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Matt Zimbrick, right, throws a rope to Brandon Weems, left, as they tie off their boat and begin to harvest lamprey from Willamette Falls.

Memories

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from teaching Physics at Santa Barbara City College.”

It didn’t stick.

In the blink of an eye he repeatedly, sometimes several times in the same minute, asks “where are we?”

As he sifts through the bag of tiny fragments looking for something familiar, dad sits in his wheelchair, rubs his forehead, says “it’s so complicated,” and then cries.

A lot.

Mornings are better.

By the afternoon and evening, my sister, Michelle, explained, he’s enveloped in a fog of confusion.

And you feel indescribably guilty when you dredge up the past, the son who’s torturing his father trying to get back something that is gone forever. On reflection, it feels so incredibly selfish.

Realizing that, you eventually come to a truce, an acceptance of the way things are, and not what you remember them to be, or what you want them to be.

Kay and Meghan, my daughter, Kay’s stepdaughter, helped a lot in making me realize the permanence of the new reality and deal with it.

Neither has the burden of a trove of childhood memories of dad as he used

to be.

They think of him as an interesting old man with a good sense of humor; a kind person who is always appreciative for everything that he has, the guy who always says “thanks so much for coming” and means it.

Meghan even came up with a way to deal with dad’s confusion.

“We’re in a movie!” she said. “And you’re the star.”

After all, anything can happen in a movie. Right?

A glimmer of suspicion came over dad.

“Where’s the cameras?”

“They’re hidden because they want everybody to act natural,” I offered by

way of explanation. It worked because a minute later, he forgot he was a movie star.

It’s a quirk of my dad’s mind that the largest memory slivers are those that are the oldest.

Such as Missouri, and Arizona.

Recent experiences such as what he had for lunch 15 minutes ago might as well have been in another lifetime.

“I don’t remember,” he’ll say. “But it was good.”

Yes, dad, it really was.

And that’s the guy I know and love.

Henry Miller is a retired outdoor columnist and outdoor writer. You can reach him via email at HenryMillerSJ@gmail.com

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