



The Capital Pioneers warm up during halftime in a game against the Portland Fighting Shockwaves on May 15 in Portland. The Pioneers won the game with a score of 6-0. PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL DOLLINS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Pioneers

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● “Football? What do you know about football,” the store clerk asked. ● While they assumed Rivera, a mother of three, was shopping for her son, she knows a thing or two about the sport. Rivera is one of 20 players on Salem’s newly formed semi-pro women’s tackle football team: the Capital Pioneers.

The Pioneers compete in the Women’s Football Alliance, a national tackle football league for women.

The team already was hurdling setbacks long before they stepped onto the field for their first game. In 2020, the Pioneers were preparing for their premiere season but it was canceled due to COVID-19.

“We started off with, ‘Can we do this? Can we make this happen,’” Rivera said. “As long as we get to play that’s all that matters right now.”

The Capital Pioneers have a range of varying experiences but anyone is welcome to play. The team originated when 10 players who formerly played for a tackle football team based in Eugene wanted to start a player-owned team based in Salem.

The Pioneers are a nonprofit and receive funding through sponsors, fundraisers and team fees. A board made up

of six players and one family member help make decisions for the team.

Each woman on the Pioneers pays \$400 to play for the season, which covers the cost of their uniforms, referees and other expenses. The players also additionally pay for their own equipment, like cleats and gloves, and any other travel expenses when on the road for games.

From girls who are still in high school to women who have teenagers of their own, each player has their own reason for wanting to play the game of football.

A football family

Renee Gonzales, 31, has been surrounded by football her entire life and joined the Capital Pioneers four months ago. Gonzales remembers cheering on both of her brothers who played youth football in Canby and watching her dad coach on the sidelines. The name of her four-year-old daughter, Oaklyn, was inspired by the Oakland Raiders.

“It’s just always kind of been the center of my family,” Gonzales said.

Gonzales has carried on the family tradition, and one of her brothers has joined her. She is a starting offensive lineman for the Pioneers, and her brother is the line coach.

This time around, though, it’s her time to shine.

One of Gonzales’ favorite things about playing football is seeing her daughter fall in love with it, too.

“To see the happiness and joy that it

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Appeal Tribune

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Marion County commissioners Colm Willis and Danielle Bethell speak to community members about a proposal to remove the Scotts Mills dam on Thursday. ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Dam

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The dam and the accompanying fish passage have been poorly maintained and further damaged by disasters like earthquakes, floods and storms. The dam has slowly crumbled, depositing concrete and rebar in the pool below the falls where people swim.

It’s been eyed for removal for decades by organizations including the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as it is viewed as an obstruction for passage of native species of fish.

The debate over the fate of the dam has dragged on for decades.

Scotts Mills’ city council has discussed the issue multiple times over the years and has gone back and forth on it.

But city manager Robin Fournier said the current position of the council is that the dam should be removed, saying there is no money for it to be repaired and it has become a danger.

“For us, it’s more about the safety factor,” Fournier said.

Proposal to remove the dam

The Pudding River Watershed Council proposed removing the dam first in 2020 and was able to obtain about \$100,000 in funds and in-kind work from the state’s departments of fish and wildlife and the watershed enhancement board.

But over the past years, community gatherings like Thursdays were largely prohibited – and Scotts Mills was impacted by wildfires and the ice storm – so it was impossible to bring the interested parties together.

The project, as proposed, would remove about 400 cubic yards of material, including the dam and much of the sediment that has gathered behind it for the past century. The work would occur during a two-week period after Labor Day when the water level is at its lowest.

“Everything out in the channel would be removed,” Marion County Public Works Director Brian Nicholas said.

Locals questioned the scope of the project and how it would change the popular swimming area into a slightly interrupted stream.

“It’s been there over 100 years, why should we take it out?” Scotts Mills resident Andrew Isaksen said.

Some neighbors questioned whether the removal would result in native fish species returning to the body of water, what noise and disruption would occur while it is being removed and how it would impact the property of those who live downstream.

“I would say nobody wants to see the dam removed, we want to see the dam fixed,” said Scotts Mills resident



Ireland and Coraline Peters sit near the Scotts Mills dam on Thursday, May 27, 2021 in Scotts Mills, Oregon. ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Dick Bielenberg. “There is no money, there is no funding to fix the dam.

“What’s going to happen is it’s going to continue to crumble. If we don’t tear down the dam in the next few years, we’re going to have a swimming hole full of concrete and rebar.”

Funding for removal, not repair

Kate Smith, who lives nearby on the Clackamas County side of Butte Creek, brings her children to the park often. She said she’s seen the fish passage run dry and fill with trash, making it unusable for its intended purpose.

The dam has become such an impediment that many of the native fish species no longer exist there.

“Let’s just take it out,” Smith said.

Locals pointed out that native fish species that formerly migrated up the creek are no longer present.

“Years ago, we used to have Chinook salmon up here, a lot of them,” said Mike Wolff, who has lived in Scotts Mills since 1978.

Anna Rankin, the executive director of the Pudding River Watershed Council, said if Marion County approves the project later this year, it would be too late to complete the removal this year. The soonest it could be done is 2022, but the watershed council will have to apply to the state for money again.

“We can get funding to do site enhancement, but not fix the dam,” Rankin said.

Willis said he doesn’t want the county, and especially the residents of Scotts Mills, to feel pressured to tear down the dam because of the \$100,000 that has been earmarked for the removal project.

He said the county will host another work session about the fate of the dam, where interested parties like those who attended the town hall could come to a resolution about the future of the dam.

“It sounds like not everybody had the same information and so I’m kind of hopeful that as people get together and talk, they’ll come together and find something out,” Willis said. “Maybe not, but that’s my hope.”

Bill Poehler covers Marion County for the Statesman Journal. Contact him at bpoehler@statesmanjournal.com or [Twitter.com/bpoehler](https://twitter.com/bpoehler).

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