



Submitted photo

A mess of crappie

MIDDLE FORK OF THE JOHN DAY RIVER

Warm Springs Tribes add to John Day River land holdings

SUSANVILLE, Oregon — The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon have added 3.6 miles of frontage along the Middle Fork of the John Day River in Grant County to their land holdings.

The Nature Conservancy transferred the property, which covers 1,200 acres, to the Warm Springs Tribes in April. The property was donated.

The Nature Conservancy bought the property, known as the Dunstan Homestead Preserve, in 1990 from the Dunstan family, who had owned the land since 1899.

The property, which is about 17 miles downriver from Bates, includes habitat for one of Oregon's healthiest populations of wild spring Chinook salmon, according to a press release from the Bonneville Power Administration, which is partnering with The Nature Conservancy and the Warm Springs Tribes to manage the property to benefit fish and other wildlife.

The Dunstan property contains riparian and upland habitats of ponderosa pine, mixed conifer forests, savannah and open meadows.

Since buying the property The Nature Conservancy has worked with adjacent landowners, as well as the Tribes, to restore habitat and conduct research into preserving fish and other species.

"The Nature Conservancy is grateful and honored to have collaborated with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and BPA for over 20 years for river conservation along the Middle Fork John Day," said Jim Desmond, Oregon director for The Nature Conservancy. "This collaborative partnership is a great example of how working together can accomplish great things and is a success for the fish, wildlife and people that call this area home."

With the addition of the Dunstan Preserve to the Tribes' existing properties, also purchased in partnership with BPA, nearly 3,000 acres of important fish and wildlife habitat are permanently protected along the Middle Fork John Day.

"We are excited about what has been accomplished with the Tribes, The Nature Conservancy and other partners to further protect and restore important habitat in this ecologically diverse region," said Scott Armentrout, BPA's executive vice president for environment, fish and wildlife. "This is another example of how strategically invested ratepayer funds can help Bonneville fulfill its mitigation responsibilities and leave a lasting impact on the region."

The Warm Springs Tribes have spent almost a decade working to restore another reach of the Middle Fork, upstream from the Dunstan property. The Oxbow Conservation Area was mined by a dredge decades ago.

The Tribes are also restoring their Forrest property, about 10 miles upstream from the Dunstan parcel.

Robert "Bobby" Brunoe, general manager of the Tribes' Branch of Natural Resources, says the Middle Fork John Day River is an important place.

"Our Oxbow and Forrest properties already represent half of the river's Chinook salmon spawning habitat. The Dunstan adds another 10%," Brunoe said. "The Nature Conservancy and Tribes have been steady partners for years, and their generosity with the Dunstan transaction has been great for the Tribes and salmon."

READY TO REEL

■ When crappie are on the bite the action comes fast and furious for anglers

I might as well cut and paste this paragraph and use it all spring. Spring time in the Northwest is magical isn't it? We have ground squirrel hunting going on, turkey hunting, bear hunting, mushroom hunting and crappie fishing. You can wear yourself out, can't you? So I'm running myself ragged right now.

But I had a Texas hog hunt last week. I got home after midnight Thursday and had a talk on Good Friday at the Veterans Home and then three seminars at Sportsman's Warehouse on Saturday. My family loves eating crappie so I had to get out and see if they were hitting yet.

I finally got a free day the Monday after Easter and called my buddy Christopher Robertson to see if he was free. He's a fishaholic so of course he signed up. I had to take Katy to an Aggie Muster that night so we left early so we could get in a few hours of fishing.

I figured we were a week



BASE CAMP
TOM CLAYCOMB

or two early to catch them spawning but you don't want to be late so I always start early. We slipped the Jon boat out of the back of the truck, loaded up and I ran up to park the truck. Chris caught something like four or five fish during that time period right by the boat dock.

My secret spot should be great so we jetted over — OK, we jetted as fast as my Minn Kota would jet. We were using 1/8-ounce jigs tipped off with tube jigs. This year I started using Pautzke Crappie Fire Balls. They come in the colors of pink, orange, blue and gold and garlic- or shad-flavored. The Fire Balls are durable, well-scented and prompt fish to bite. I will be using them this spring on my crappie fishing trips.

I also upgraded my fishing equipment and got some Field & Stream fishing rods.

And probably just in time since I was attending to some menial task and laid my ultra-light rod off the back of the boat. A big crappie grabbed it and the rod jumped out of the boat like a high diver never to be seen again.

We fished a while and were catching a few. They had not moved up yet to spawn so we fished out 30 to 50 yards from shore and that was the main area we were catching them at.

After a while we decided it would be better fishing back at the dock so we went back and fished there a while as well as a few of my other spots.

Most of the bites were gentle so when they hit, start reeling. The way we were catching them is to cast out a jig tipped off with a Pautzke Crappie Fire Ball and let it sink to the bottom and then gently reel it in. Many taps came right away but we caught a lot of fish up close to the boat. Whether they had followed it up or were

up that high feeding I can't tell you.

To be successful I'd recommend using the Crappie Fire Balls. They are super slippery but very effective. To make them easier to hook, I put a few on my seat. They dry up fast so you don't want to wait too long because they will really shrink. Just let them dry enough so they're easier to handle or, I think if you took a little flour and rolled them in it you could grasp them better. I'm going to try that next trip.

Pretty soon it came time to leave, especially since we had to clean our fish before I took Katy to dinner. We caught 92 in 5½ hours. They're still pre-spawn but will move in and start spawning any day now. They're just waiting on the water temperature to rise a few more degrees.

I told Chris to keep fishing while I loaded the boat and he caught something like a dozen in that short amount of time. I have to get back this weekend. It might be hot.

REPEAT

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Despite my visual tussle with our galaxy's obstinate star, I made a photo of the Snotel that closely mimicked last year's. And again the difference was stark — the scene dominated this year, as in 2017, by snow rather than the dirt of 2018. The greater snow depth this year, compared with 2017, was obvious thanks to the split rail fence that surrounds the Snotel. In 2017 the snow didn't even reach the bottom rail; this year it was near the top rail.

It was a fine day to walk through the woods. The spring norther that was ruining hairstyles and propelling grit into contact lenses down in the valley was, to our great satisfaction, impeded by the canyon of Rock Creek and by the dense timber. We could hear gusts roar now and again in the crowns of the tall-

est tamaracks and spruces, and see their branches bend, but the air was comparatively gentle at ground level.

Our snowy slog was enlivened by the tracks of a lone bear. The bruin had ambled on the south side of the road, never straying more than a few feet to either side, for about half a mile. Some of the individual tracks were almost perfectly preserved in the snow, the hind paws leaving the strangely human shape characteristic of ursine prints.

I know as much about dating animal tracks as I do about trigonometry — which is to say, nothing at all — but given the changeable nature of snow in spring I don't think the bear prints, which had distinct edges rather than the blurred ones that melting snow creates, were very old.

I talked with Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Baker

City office, and he told me that bears, having recently left their winter dens, would be looking for green grass to gorge on.

We didn't see much of that

in the snowbound landscape, which perhaps explains why the bear was heading downhill, toward less snowy, and presumably more nutritious, prospects.

Mother's Day Brunch

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Spring Cleaning 101

What you should know about the disposal of household hazardous waste.

What is household hazardous waste?
HHW is anything labeled toxic, flammable, corrosive, reactive or explosive. These materials can threaten family health and the safety of pets and wildlife.

What are some examples of hazardous waste?
Aerosols, Bleach, Drain Cleaners, Metal Polish, Mothballs, Oven Cleaners, Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Ammonia-based Cleaners, Mercury Thermometers, Wood Polishes, Waxes, Fertilizers, Insecticides, Herbicides, Rodenticides, Spa and Pool Chemicals, Roofing Compounds, Antifreeze, Batteries, Motor Oil, Paint Strippers and Thinners, Gasoline and more.

Where can I safely dispose of my hazardous waste?

La Grande Facility: Open to any resident of the three counties every other Tuesday, 8am-12 noon. By appointment, however, small labeled quantities accepted daily. (541) 963-5459.

Baker City Facility: Open the first Wednesday of each month, 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 523-2626.

Enterprise Facility: Open the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 426-3332.

Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year!

The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of hazardous waste.