

## PROJECT

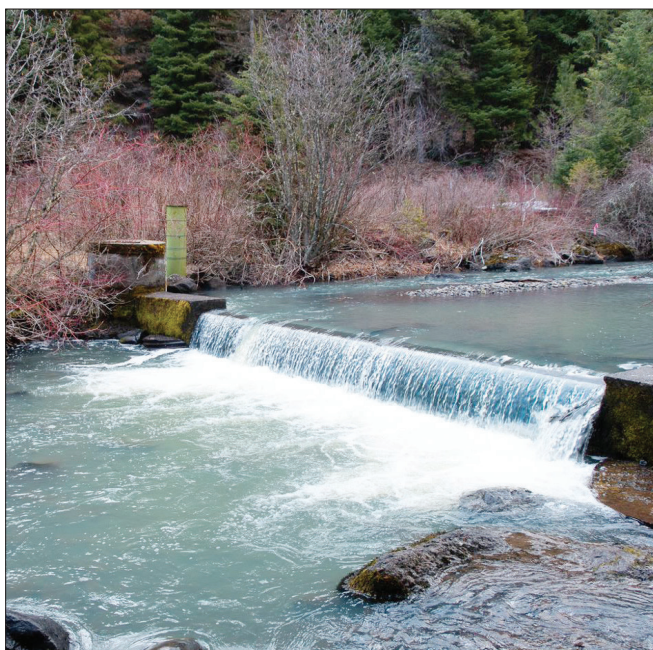
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The project also will add 22 large wood structures to the creek in order to create habitat for fish that would protect them from predators, help with sediments sorting and offer shade from the sun. The introduction of these wood structures, according to Old, will help restore the creek to its original state.

“Streams have evolved with heavy woodloads in them, and historically humans have taken them out, but these fish have evolved to use the shade and cover,” Old said. “A creek like Indian Creek is especially important for spawning and rearing of ocean-going fish and resident trout species. And as we’re starting to feel the effects of a changing climate, there is still cold water in places like Indian Creek.”

Returning the wood structures to the creek would do a lot toward making the creek a more habitable environment for the fish. While removing debris from a creek improves the efficiency of water flow it damages the waterway’s natural state, with far-reaching consequences.

“If you take out all the wood, you turn a creek into a ditch. All the fine sediments and small gravels which salmon and trout use



Levi Old/Trout Unlimited

Water flows over a diversion dam on Indian Creek near Elgin. Trout Unlimited, in partnership with Hancock Natural Resource Group, is planning to remove two outdated diversion dams on the creek, along with removing a culvert in an effort to restore spawning and rearing grounds for juvenile fish, including Lower Snake River steelhead, chinook salmon, bull trout and other fish.

to spawn are going to be swept out of them. You’re left with big boulders and cobbles,” Old said. “A functioning stream has a bunch of wood in it, and it catches sediments, builds pools and changes the geomorphology of the stream.”

The restoration work will also include planting of native riparian species along the creek to further bolster the resiliency of the habitat.

According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, there are more than 470 small dams in Northeastern Oregon sim-

ilar to the ones being removed by Trout Unlimited and Hancock Natural Resource Group. Barriers like those prevent fish from utilizing small creeks for spawning and rearing purposes, and limit the available space for the fish to spawn. By opening up these waterways, the ability of fish to properly reproduce — especially important for those that are endangered — is greatly increased.

“Anytime we can open up more habitat for spawning and rearing resident and ocean-going fish is a big win,” Old said.

## MASKS

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to require masks indoors in public spaces, but only Multnomah County, which includes Portland, did so.

Multnomah County’s infection rate was reported at 5.3% in the latest OHA weekly report. That is nearly half the state average of 9.5%, which is twice the maximum 5% that epidemiologists says will keep spread of the virus under control.

Despite calls from the governor and OHA about the critical hospital situation in their areas, counties with high infection rates, low vaccination numbers and swamped health care centers were not budging.

“I felt strongly that local elected officials needed to step up and take action and preserve hospital bed capacity and protect their vulnerable constituents,” Brown said. “Clearly, that is not happening, and I’m needing to take action at this point in time.”

OHA and OHSU officials have pointed to several counties where no action was taking place despite having infection rates double the state average.

Statistics show the highest rates are concentrated in two areas: Umatilla, Baker, Union,

Malheur and Wallowa counties in Eastern Oregon, and Jackson, Josephine, Douglas and Curry counties in Southwestern Oregon. Crook County in Central Oregon also has twice the state rate.

Nearly all are in areas that have been resistant to masking mandates and other restrictions throughout the pandemic.

Since the uplifting of statewide mandates, Union County has seen a rise in cases along with a lull in vaccination efforts, with only 45.2% of adults fully vaccinated, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The county is vaccinating an average of 24 people per day. At this rate, it would take 267 days for the county to reach an 80% vaccination rate.

### Events remain a go

Though Brown had ceded daily control to the counties, her emergency order dating back to March 2020, and renewed by her several times since, allowed the state to take back control at any point.

No ban on county fairs, the Pendleton Round-Up, the Oregon State Fair in Marion County, Oregon Ducks and Oregon State Beavers and other college football games, concerts or other

major events in Oregon was in the works “at this time,” Brown said.

The Pendleton Round-Up, the major event of the year in Eastern Oregon, held in mid-September, had been canceled in 2020 because of the pandemic. Amid months of declining infection rates, Brown earlier this summer said “Let ‘er Buck,” a popular saying of fans of the event, which draws more than 50,000 to the region.

With the delta variant hitting Umatilla County especially hard, the pandemic was once again raising questions about the safety of holding large-scale events.

In an Aug. 10 newsletter for local officials, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said that the rising infection levels and low county vaccination levels were not going without notice in Salem.

“Putting an event in jeopardy that means \$60 million to the local economy is dangerous particularly knowing that, for some of our businesses, it could be the final nail in their coffin,” Murdock wrote. “In the coming weeks, we need to dramatically increase our vaccination rates to demonstrate we are serious and that we care.”

— The Observer reporter Carlos Fuentes contributed to this report.

## RESTAURANTS

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of the restaurant than cut off the people who have supported us through the pandemic.”

### Employment shortage

While the demand for the RRF was extensive, not all business owners are completely in favor of continued government-funded relief. Merlyn Baker, owner of Merlyn’s Catering Co., believes the biggest issue now is the lack of reliable employees looking for work. With unemployment available, restaurants are among the many businesses struggling to bring in new employees during difficult financial circumstances.

“There isn’t one problem that we have economically right now in our nation that can’t be filled by people going back to work,” Baker said. “I’ve had to turn away more business this year than ever just simply because we don’t have enough employees.”

The catering service is managing to stay afloat, but Baker has had to limit his restaurant hours at The Landing Hotel and personally works more than 20 hours per day. He said he received more than 700 employment applications since the start of the pandemic, but only hired about 10 employees after rejecting incomplete applications and experiencing applicants not showing up for the interview or quitting quickly.

“What hasn’t been addressed is adaptation,” Baker said. “We just keep getting more money from the government.”

### Facing a potential second round

A major concern of restaurant owners is the recent spike in COVID-19 cases. Most restaurants are using funding like the RRF to dig themselves out of a hole that has been costing their business for upward of 16 months. With restaurants finally allowed to open again for indoor dining last spring, some owners now are preparing for the worst.

“We made the mistake of thinking this was over,” Rogers said. “When they opened everything back up, we put everything back to normal.”

If indoor capacity limits or even indoor

dining closures are enacted again, some businesses will face difficult decisions. With many businesses left out in the first round of funding and the possibility of a spike in the pandemic, the National Restaurant Association and others in the industry are pushing for a second wave of the Restaurant Revitalization Fund that would include an additional \$60 billion in relief funds.

“We need that fund replenished and we need to have a plan in place for if we start seeing lockdowns again,” Astley said. “If we start seeing the prohibitions on indoor dining again, I think even more restaurants won’t survive this round.”

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