

Oregon

Salmon come home for the holidays

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

A record number of fall chinook salmon returned up the Columbia River past McNary Dam in 2015, continuing on to spawning grounds at Hanford Reach, the Snake River and Yakima Basin.

More than 456,000 of the fish were counted at McNary Dam, breaking the facility's previous record of 454,991 set in 2013. An estimated 200,000 fall chinook made it back to Hanford Reach, the most since hydroelectric dams were first built on the Columbia nearly 80 years ago.

Both federal and tribal leaders hailed the impressive run as a positive sign of their efforts to improve both fish habitat and passage at the dams. The Bonneville Power Administration is especially pleased with recent projects at McNary Dam, re-routing its juvenile fish bypass channel to provide better protection from predators. Crews also installed weirs at two of the dam's spillway gates, which lets certain species of fish pass through closer to the surface.

Overall, 2.3 million adult salmon passed through Bonneville Dam near Portland, making it the second-strongest year on record for the entire Columbia Basin.

"When you look at how well salmon did overall this year, it's clear the approach of restoring critical fish habitat and improving dam passage is working," said Lorri Bodi, vice president of environment, fish and wildlife at BPA.

There were 3,485 chinook counted at Three Mile Falls Dam on the Umatilla River near Hermiston. That's slightly more than the 3,259 in

2014, and less than the 4,117 fish in 2013.

Coho counts fell back to Earth after a monster year in 2014 — 3,076 in 2015, compared to more than 14,000 a year ago at Three Mile Falls Dam. Steelhead were much lower, with just 558 fish versus 1,480 in 2014.

Kat Brigham, who has served on the Board of Trustees for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation as well as the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, said such anomalies used to be purely attributed to ocean survival — something that's no doubt important, but was a convenient way of dismissing environmental damage and flaws in the dams' passage systems.

"Ocean survival is an important piece, but nobody can really determine what good ocean survival is," Brigham said. "We still have to look at what needs to be done to protect our fish as both adults and juveniles."

Brigham said she is excited about this year's fall returns, which is the result of hard work between the four CRITFC tribes, Northwest states and federal government.

But there are still challenges to reestablishing sustainable populations, she said. The basin still has 13 fish runs listed on the Endangered Species Act, and a changing climate won't make things any easier.

The CTUIR and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife began trucking spring salmon up past Three Mile Falls Dam in May this year, much earlier than normal as low flows and warm water put additional stress on the fish.



EO Media Group file photo

This aerial photo shows the McNary Dam on the Columbia River.

Oregon Wheat Commission, Port of Portland produce video

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

The Oregon Wheat Commission has partnered with the Port of Portland to put together an eight-minute video on the state's wheat industry.

The video highlights several aspects of the production and sale of wheat, including university research that helps growers maximize land potential, stewardship practiced by Oregon farmers, and how growers get wheat from the field to international markets.

"The project really came from the port," said Blake Rowe, chief executive officer of the Oregon Wheat Commission, who narrated the video. "They asked us during the winter if we would be interested in partnering with them on a video about the wheat industry, and we were more than happy to do so."

The port and the commission, who worked with the Portland media company Calcano Media to produce the video, determined the messages they wanted to convey, contacted farmers who were willing to assist in the production and started shooting the video in the spring.

"We wanted to feature the whole production process," Rowe said. "Not just: farmers put seed in the ground and wheat grows. We wanted to feature the role of research, the importance of transportation and the commitment of the farmers to stewardship and sustainability."

"The messages imbedded in the video are important things that the public needs to hear," he said.

"I don't think a lot of people realize how complex wheat production is, how important wheat farms are to rural communities and Oregon's economy. And also how wheat production touches so many sectors: whether it is the port or transportation or Oregon State University or jobs. People just don't think about it that way," Rowe said.

The wheat commission intends to utilize the video several ways, Rowe said, including with legislators, in community meetings and even in schools.

"It is a good message," Rowe said, "but it is not full of scientific terms and jargon that would be confusing to a general audience. We think it will be easy to use with the general public. We're pretty open to use it wherever and whenever we can, because we think the story is interesting and the message important."

The commission already has shown the video at the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention and at the meeting of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

"We shared it so other states can see what we were able to do," Rowe said. "I think folks were very pleased. Many said: 'Wow, we need to do something like that.'"

Rowe also has received several compliments on his narration.

"It seems to have worked out," he said of his first venture into narration. "I guess my price (free) was right."

Don't look for Rowe's voice to start popping up on television and radio ads, however.

Ranchers help feed area students

By CARL SAMPSON
Capital Press

JOHN DAY, Ore. — What began in Malheur County, Ore., as an effort to provide local schools with fresh, local beef is filling the plates of students at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School in John Day, Ore., and 13 other school districts in Oregon and Idaho.

Ranchers Feeding Kids was initially a joint effort between the Malheur County Cattlemen's Association and the Oregon State University Extension Service.

The concept was simple: Ranchers donate healthy cull



Carl Sampson/Capital Press

Cattle graze west of John Day, Ore., taking advantage of the sunshine and green grass. Ranchers have donated cows to 14 Oregon and Idaho school districts, providing fresh locally raised beef through Ranchers Feeding Kids.

cattle to the school districts, which either pay for butchering the animals or receive grants from ranchers or elsewhere to pay for it.

At Grant Union the donations usually end up in the form of hamburger, said Natalie Weaver, the head cook, who is in charge of preparing 120 breakfasts and 175 lunch-

es a day.

"The hamburger tends to be much leaner" than the ground beef the district usually buys, she said. "The students see a difference."

Curt Shelley, superintendent of Grant County School District No. 3, and Shanna Northway, OSU Extension agriculture and 4-H faculty,

coordinate the effort in Grant County.

The donated beef provides a cost savings for the schools and an opportunity for ranchers to promote their industry, Shelley said.

Three animals have been donated to area schools so far this school year, Northway said.

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