

Editorials are written by or approved by members of the Capital Press Editorial Board.

All other commentary pieces are the opinions of the authors but not necessarily this newspaper.

Opinion

Editorial Board

Editor & Publisher
Joe Beach
opinions@capitalpress.com

Managing Editor
Carl Sampson
Online: www.capitalpress.com/opinion

OUR VIEW

Feds must also protect Klamath farmers, ranchers

Farmers and ranchers in the Klamath Basin are in a tough spot.

Agriculture is a \$557 million industry in the Klamath Basin, but it requires steady, reliable access to water. Despite a huge federal irrigation project, farmers and ranchers in the basin don't have that.

The Klamath Basin received just 43 percent of its usual snow last winter. Stream flows are expected to range between 24 and 58 percent of normal through September. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a drought emergency for Klamath County on March 13.

But as of this writing, irrigators still don't have a water allocation from the Bureau of Reclamation, the agency that controls the project.

The Klamath Project is a massive feat of engineering consisting of six dams, 185

miles of canals and 490 miles of lateral ditches. It spans roughly 200,000 acres of farmland, including 18 irrigation districts.

But the available water is tied up to protect endangered suckers in Upper Klamath Lake, where snowmelt is stored, and salmon in the Klamath River.

Oregon follows the "first in time, first in right" water doctrine — the oldest water right gets first dibs, what's left flows to holders of less senior rights down the line. The Klamath Tribes were granted the most superior rights by treaty in 1864.

The tribes keep water in the lake to protect shortnose and



Lost River suckers, which are both culturally significant and federally endangered.

The tribes also filed a lawsuit May 24 against the bureau, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries

northern California secured an injunction in 2017 that requires the Bureau of Reclamation to keep 50,000 acre-feet of stored water to flush away *C. shasta* spores until 80 percent of juvenile

Service, seeking an injunction forcing the agencies to provide more water in Upper Klamath Lake for the suckers.

They also support the restoration of endangered salmon in the river.

Juvenile salmon heading down river are at risk from *C. shasta*, a deadly parasite.

Along with a coalition of environmental groups and fishing interests, the Hoopa Valley and Yurok tribes of

salmon reach the ocean — perhaps by June 15.

The federal government is obliged to protect the fish. But it's because of the federal government that there is farming in the basin.

It built the project and encouraged farmers to settle with the promise the water would be there. After World War I it gave plots to veterans, many whose descendants are still farming today.

As a matter of law, efforts must be made to save the fish. As a matter of right, the culture of the tribes must be preserved.

The basin's 2,000 irrigators and their families have their culture, too. It does not reach back to time immemorial, but it is the life blood of the basin's economy.

It seems to us that the government owes something to the irrigators. If the fish are saved but the farmers and ranchers are not, the loss will be incalculable.

OUR VIEW



Sea lions expose conflicts in environmental laws

It must have been quite a sight. As U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader tells the story in his latest newsletter, he and representatives of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife were at Willamette Falls, where sea lions were decimating the salmon and steelhead, which are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

"We witnessed a sea lion taking a bite out of a salmon before members of the Grand Ronde tribe who were fishing at the falls could reel it back in," the congressman wrote. "The depredation was stunning to see."

The sea lions are amazing predators, totally outmatching the fisheries and wildlife managers, who had already tried to evict them from the falls. They had scooped up 10 of the offending critters and transported them to new stomping grounds along the Oregon Coast, where they wouldn't be eating protected fish.

Within a few days, though, the sea lions were back at Willamette Falls. The pinnipeds had swum up the coast to the Columbia River and upstream to the Willamette River all the way to the falls. It was a trek of a couple hundred miles.

The problem is that sea lions are also protected under federal law. The Marine Mammal Protection Act forbids anyone, including wildlife managers, from "taking" a sea lion, whale, dolphin, sea otter or polar bear without a permit.

The law, which Congress passed

and President Richard Nixon signed in 1972, was aimed at preventing incidental take and harassment of the marine mammals.

In the Willamette Falls case, the salmon are protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Congress — and Nixon, before he was run out of office — approved that law to protect local populations of fish, plants and animals. Note that it doesn't protect species so much as local populations.

At Willamette Falls, wildlife managers

"We witnessed a sea lion taking a bite out of a salmon before members of the Grand Ronde tribe who were fishing at the falls could reel it back in. The depredation was stunning to see."

have a legal standoff: Protected sea lions are eating protected fish.

All of which would be mildly interesting to farmers in the Willamette Valley, except for one thing. Though populations of hatchery-reared fish are healthy, fisheries managers have been working overtime to rebuild the populations of native run fish in the river system. They outdid themselves recently with a plan to spend \$200 million to \$300 million to build a concrete tower in Detroit Lake to regulate the water temperature for the fish.

While that tower is under construction, irrigation water to 8 percent of the valley's farmland would be either cut off or reduced

for at least two years.

Here the managers want to take drastic, and expensive, measures on behalf of protected the native run fish and protected sea lions are killing them.

What to do.

ODFW last year applied to the National Marine Fisheries Service to kill the sea lions before they wipe out the salmon and steelhead. That agency, operating at the speed of government, is expected to make a decision by the end of this year.

In the meantime, Schrader, a Democrat, and Republican Reps. Jaime Herrera Beutler and Dan Newhouse of Washington state and Rep. Don Young of Alaska have introduced legislation to update the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Called the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act, the bill would extend to states and tribes the authority to kill sea lions that prey on endangered salmon and steelhead. Sea lions have also been making a banquet of protected fish in the Columbia River.

It's a good first step toward getting a handle on this problem. And it might also be a step toward revisiting the Nixon-era environmental laws that conflict with one another and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars a year to protect local populations of fish, plants and wildlife.

If everything is protected, then nothing is protected.

Guest
comment
Sine Kerr



Grassroots involvement is a game-changer

By SINE KERR
For the Capital Press

It only took one unpleasant experience speaking with individuals at a casual dinner party to realize I needed to make a change in the way I approached socially and emotionally charged topics related to agriculture.

Initially, the conversation was amicable, with thoughts and ideas freely exchanged. But, when I mentioned that conventional and organic milk have the same nutritional value, oh my, did that set one of the guests off on a tirade against conventional farmers. I felt I needed to match her level of hysteria — and I easily obliged!

Nothing positive was accomplished through that exchange and it left me feeling upset and angry with myself for not maintaining my composure. I missed a fantastic opportunity to at least give some thoughtful, calm insight about how every type of farmer cares for their animals and monitors the quality of milk they produce.

I decided to get help and get help fast! I needed to only look as far as my Farm Bureau.

I began to participate in training events that offered resources and genuine hands-on experience in how to relate to people's concerns regarding how their food is produced. I learned why I needed to keep my emotions in check, how to listen first, ask a few key questions, then calmly and factually share how we care for our cows and crops on our farm.

It took some practice, but over time it became easier to control my emotions. I could tell that people really were listening even when they didn't completely agree. I no longer dread an encounter or embarrass myself.

When passion for your livelihood meets leadership training and preparation, there is no limit to what opportunities are available.

With so few of us producing our nation's food and fiber, it is critical that when we have opportunities to engage with our non-farming friends, we do so in a manner that has the best chance of transforming their view of modern agriculture.

State Sen. Sine Kerr, R-Ariz., is an Arizona Farm Bureau leader and partner in Kerr Family Dairy. This column is adapted from an article published in Arizona Agriculture, Arizona Farm Bureau's monthly publication.