

‘It’s a fun part of our wheat farming heritage’

DERBY from Page 1

on by the amused announcers offering commentary over the loudspeaker.

In the crowd of several thousand, it’s hard to tell who’s more excited, the kids or their parents. Crowds “oo-hed” whenever a big hit was made, visibly shaking the drivers in their seats.

These combines have about 180 horsepower engines, longtime manager Mike Doyle said. Newer combines can have engines with up to 450 horsepower.

In addition to the derby, the weekend offers car and pickup truck races, plus a grain truck race, with the big rigs speeding around in a circle trying to pass each other.

When Joe Schluneger’s grain truck tipped over, he flashed a thumbs-up signal to the announcers and waited patiently for emergency crews to pull him out.

It was his second year in the race, and he’d never had a truck turn over before, the Almota, Wash., area resident said.

“Not here, anyway,” he told the Capital Press. “Maybe in the field when I was younger.”

Schluneger was unfazed.

“Farmers, we’re always competing,” he said. “It’s just something to do, where the farmers all get together. Just like the older cowboys used to get together and have a rodeo. Same thing.”

Will he race again next year?

“You bet I will,” Schluneger said.

Tips for anyone who’s thinking about it?

“Always wear your seat belt,” he said with a hearty laugh. “I recommend it for anybody.”

In 30 years, there have been only minor injuries, Doyle said. In the early days, a driver broke an arm, he said.

“We’ve been very lucky,” he said. “And we have four referees out in the arena at all times. We watch them pretty close.”

Welcome to Lind

Lind is a tiny town in Washington state 77 miles southwest of Spokane.

“The town goes from 500 people to 4,500 people in a day,” said pit crew member Derrick Laird.

Born and raised in Lind, Laird remembers watching the events when he was 5 years old.

“It’s just a great time,” he said. “It’s a redneck show, out there smashing full machines. You don’t see that every day.”

Sponsored by the Lind Lions Club, the event typically plows \$25,000 back into the Lind community, Knodel said. That’s about half the club’s budget, Doyle said. Projects include donations to the Lind Senior Center, fence at the city park, hosting an an-



Photos by Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Pit crew member Nolan Miller of Lind, Wash., works on The Enticer, driven by Josh Hernandez.



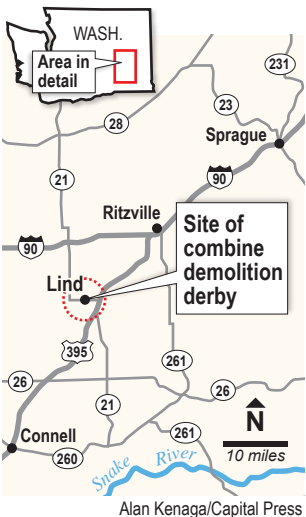
Julianne Sevigney, 5, and Madison Sevigney, 8, watch the annual Lind combine demolition derby.



Well-wishers congratulate Jim Oswald of Spokane, the winner of the combine demolition derby in Lind, Wash.



Almota, Wash., resident Joe Schluneger, center, is pulled from his grain truck after overturning it during the grain truck race. Schluneger was unharmed and said he plans to race again next year.



nual Easter egg hunt and supporting school organizations.

The remainder goes to maintaining the derby grounds.

“To bring that many people into town for the weekend is amazing,” Miller said. “It’s just a special event for the town.”

“It’s the only thing we have left in Lind,” Knodel said. “Without the combine demolition derby, we don’t bring people to Lind.”

Knodel and Miller first helped their dads modify their combines to compete in the derby in 2000, and have often driven since 2003.

At first, the derby was just a good way to hang out and spend time in the shop, Knodel said.

Now, as Lions Club members, they compete to keep the number of participating combines up and keep the show going. They balance driving with their duties running the cook shack with their families over the three-day weekend.

“Saturday we run the cook shack until derby time, then we go wreck the combine, then after we wreck the combine we come back and cook burgers until the band’s done playing at 11,” Knodel said.

‘Schoesler Skybox’

State Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, is an original derby driver. He competed in 17 or 18 derbies, winning

or splitting first place several times.

“Some of the most fun I ever had,” he said of the experience.

Schoesler used to park a truck next to the fence at the event. He would sit on bales of straw in the back to watch the event, dubbing it the “Schoesler Skybox.”

When Schoesler’s son went on the rodeo circuit, he lost a valuable part of his pit crew. The legislature and farming kept him from competing, although he says friends keep urging him to return.

Schoesler has invited friends, staff and lobbyists to attend the derby. No one has ever come away disappointed, he said.

“It’s a fun part of our wheat farming heritage,” Schoesler said. “Anybody can have a car demolition derby, but not everybody can do combines.”

Adrenaline rush

Sitting in the driver’s seat is a big rush, Tyran Doyle, son of Mike Doyle, said.

“You’re just kind of anxious to make your first hit,” Doyle said. “The first year, I was kind of nervous. But once you make a hit or two, it’s all downhill from there. You just try to focus on where you can make your next hit, and try not to be hit.”

Members of the pit crew experience a similar rush.

“A lot of it, we hope he does good and when he comes back to the pits, we don’t have a bunch of work to do,” Derrick Laird said. “We hope the combine held up and we’re not replacing everything known to man.”

Ordinarily, putting a new hydrostatic drive into a combine would be a full day’s project, Laird said.

But in the midst of the derby, with three or four people, it goes faster.

“Adrenaline’s going, we manhandle it in there within an hour and half, two hours sometimes,” he said.

“You’re watching what you made compete,” said his brother, Bryden Laird, a welder in the pit crew. “If they’re doing good, if they get a big hit, I get excited. I’m a fan watching what I love. It’s like someone watching their favorite team get a touchdown or a big hit.”

Competition is friendly, Derrick Laird said.

“Seeing what they’re doing, can we top it? Oh, that’s a great idea, we’ll match them,” he said. “The other drivers are constantly trying to find ideas. That’s fine, it’s all about letting the machines last longer.”

If someone needs a replacement tire, a competing team will lend it with the understanding that it’ll be replaced before the next year, Derrick said.

“Friends in the pits, enemies in the arena,” Bryden Laird said.

Wanted: Drivers

Jim Oswald was the big winner of the June 9 derby, collecting the \$1,200 top prize. It was his second solo win; he’s also tied for first several times. Two other drivers tied for second, each receiving \$900.

It was also Oswald’s last time competing, he said. He’s going to spend more time with his family.

“It’s good to go out on top,” he said.

Oswald attributed his win to experience and his pit crew.

“My first few years were not very good,” he said. “You’ve got to get through those, look at (other) combines, figure out what they’re doing, show up and have fun.”

The number of drivers has decreased, from a peak of 23 about six years ago. Mike Doyle attributes that to the expense of preparing a combine for the show.

If scrap steel prices are up, farmers may want a higher price for the combine than derby teams are willing to pay, Derrick Laird said. Scrap prices are roughly \$90 per ton, so a 5.5-ton combine could net a farmer \$400. In the past, scrap’s been as high as \$190 per ton.

By contrast, a new com-

bine can cost a farmer upwards of \$500,000, Mike Doyle said.

Knodel says another problem is the lack of a younger generation coming up through the ranks.

“There’s just not a lot of farm boys left any more that have the skillset or the resources,” he said.

Just to keep numbers up, the Lions Club has purchased combines from around the area for the past two years, transporting the machines to Lind and then selling them locally. The club has sold seven combines in recent years.

Show costs are higher each year, Knodel said, citing insurance, security and prizes.

This year was Josh Hernandez’s first turn at the wheel of a combine. He had helped on a pit crew for seven or eight years. A lifelong Lind resident, Hernandez figured it was time to run his own machine this year, after competing in the car and pickup races.

He called the experience “amazing.”

“You get a little butterflies at first, but when you actually get in there and get the first hit, it’s awesome,” he said. “Just do it. It’s a blast.”

If young people yearn to drive a combine, Knodel urges them to contact the Lions Club.

“Right now, we’re just in that survival mode of finding the next generation of people to enter and continue it,” he said.

As long as the organizers “keep doing everything right,” they’ll keep drawing a crowd, Miller said.

In the meantime, word about the event continues to spread.

“A lot of time, people ask me where I’m from and I say ‘Lind,’ and they’re like, ‘Where?’” Bryden Laird said. “And I’m like, ‘You ever hear of the combine derby?’ and they know exactly what I’m talking about.”

Lawsuit seeks a preliminary injunction to keep higher water levels in Upper Klamath Lake

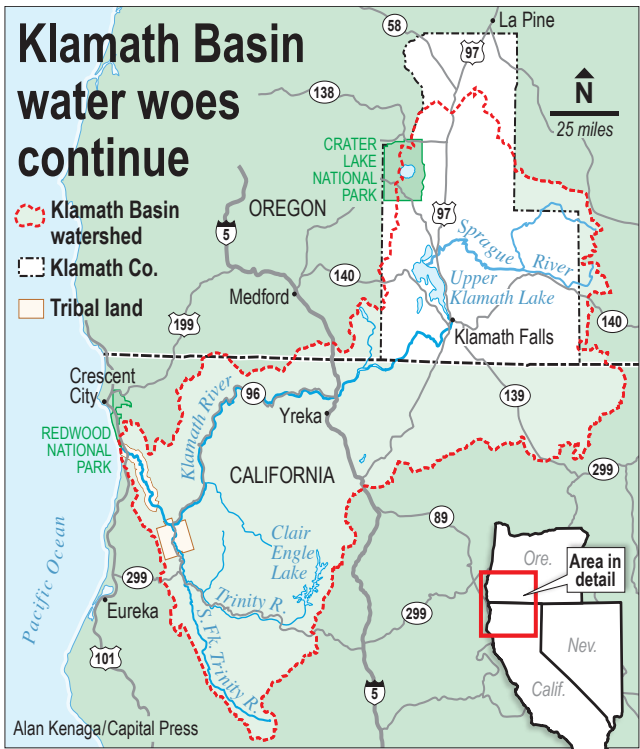
KLAMATH from Page 1

Don Gentry, Klamath tribal chairman, could not immediately be reached for comment. A hearing in the case will be held July 11 before Orrick.

According to the tribes’ lawsuit, the Bureau of Reclamation has allowed the water level in Upper Klamath Lake to dip below minimum conservation levels for the suckers on multiple occasions. It seeks both a preliminary injunction to keep higher water levels in the lake, and also calls upon the agencies to correct management deficiencies in the 2013 BiOp.

The Bureau of Reclamation is also responsible for diverting irrigation water into the Klamath Project, which serves roughly 2,000 irrigators and 200,000 acres of farmland.

Brad Kirby, KWUA president and operations committee chairman, previously said the group would intervene and oppose any action further limiting irrigation supplies. If a preliminary



injunction is granted, Kirby said it would likely force the Klamath Project to shut off completely for up to several years.

“They want to require Upper Klamath to be held at unprecedented and artificially high elevations

for suckers year-round,” Kirby said. “I wouldn’t expect there to be any water at all available for Klamath Project irrigation and wildlife refuges until there are new biological opinions, which is not expected until 2020.”

‘There’s no question this gives the tribes a stronger lever’

CULVERT from Page 1

the treaties obligated the state not to obstruct salmon streams. The 9th Circuit Court agreed that some culverts break that promise, though the ruling was vague on what else might violate the treaty.

In appealing to the Supreme Court, state Attorney General Bob Ferguson said the 9th Circuit’s order was too broad. Ferguson issued a statement Monday focused on culverts. The state estimates that replacing the culverts will cost roughly \$2 billion. The order applies only to some state-owned culverts, though Ferguson pointed out that the state isn’t the only government in Washington with culverts.

“For example, King County alone owns several thousand more culverts than are contained in the entire state highway system. The federal government owns even more than that in Washington state,” Ferguson said.

Idaho led 11 states that asked the high court to overturn the order. The Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana Farm Bureaus echoed

the states’ concern that the 9th Circuit had wrongly elevated treaty rights over other interests and laws.

Former Washington Attorney General Rob McKenna submitted a brief on behalf of Washington cities and counties that are concerned tribes will seek to apply the 9th Circuit ruling to local governments.

“We’re still in agreement with Attorney General Ferguson and former attorney general McKenna, and cities and counties that the 9th Circuit went too far,” Washington Farm Bureau associate director of government affairs Evan Sheffels said. “There’s no question this gives the tribes a stronger lever.”

The high court’s tie vote was made possible when Justice Anthony Kennedy recused himself because as a judge on the 9th Circuit Court in 1985 he participated in a case on tribal treaty rights and Washington fish hatcheries.

The Supreme Court did not announce how the justices lined up on the culvert case. During oral arguments in April, Washington Solic-

itor General Noah Purcell faced tough questioning from justices on whether there are limits to the state’s right to block fish habitat. The state estimates the culverts reduce fish runs by 1 to 5 percent. Purcell said 5 percent was not enough to violate treaties, but could not give justices a more precise answer.

“That should have been a very strong signal the 9th Circuit Court’s decision would be affirmed,” said Seattle lawyer Nathanael Watton, a former Justice Department lawyer who has litigated tribal cases.

“It certainly strengthens the tribes’ hand,” Watson said. “If they had a seat at the table before, perhaps they are at the head of the table now.”

Washington Lands Commissioner Hillary Franz, who opposed appealing the 9th Circuit order, said the ruling should prod tribes, governments and private landowners to collaborate.

“Everything I’ve heard in my communications with agriculture, local governments and the tribal community is that they all want to come together,” she said.