

What it feels like to swim across the Willamette River in the summertime

OPEN FORUM

By Willie Levenson

Camaraderie. Summertime. Propulsion. Activism.

Jumping in the water, the river feeling amazing, what an incredible way to start the day, why wait until after lunch to plunge into a river?

That's how we start our day.

On a morning with stronger currents you're reminded our river has tidal influence from the Pacific Ocean, 100 miles away.

The current is never threatening but its pull sometimes surprises as your rhythmic spirit takes over and subconscious choices are made in carving your path across the river.

Our swim does not have chlorine, lap lanes, or flip turns.

Reaching the shores of downtown we slowly collect and rest a moment, then count off to be sure everyone made it across.

Looking around you notice the eclectic collection of heads and shoulders wading in the water.

We all have stories, are individuals, and yet are all united by our love for our river and our Green River Hugger swim caps.

As summer proceeds you realize you have become familiar with a

lot of these people. Is this what community feels like?

You stop mid-way back across and take it all in.

The bridges, downtown, the kineticness of the human swimming pod, the movement of the water. Swimming so closely to others, sometimes you imagine we are a band of migrating salmon.

Throughout the summer the sun changes position as the days shorten. Mid-August the sun shines right in your eyes at the horizon as you swim east.

If you play it just right, you can steer directly behind a Hawthorne Bridge piling to eclipse the bright, late summer sun.

You savor the swim as you climb out of the river, exhilarated, adrenalized and satiated from completing a half mile swim.

In the height of summer you are lost in the sublime, never thinking about the end. But too quickly our season ends, like our season started, darker mornings, and cooler temperatures.

Frequently it is hard to get out of bed and go in the summer—we are in the river at 7 a.m.! Lying in bed, more than once, I have thought maybe it's best to linger, rest, and miss a morning swim.

But you do make it, and plunge in, and realize, somehow, you forgot, how incredible it always feels to be buoyant and immersed in our Willamette River. You're overtaken by a rush and a smile, and kick into gear.

Willie Levenson is leader of the



Members of the River Hugger Swim Team take a summer plunge into the Willamette River. (Photo courtesy of Willie Levenson)

Human Access Project and a member of the River Hugger Swim Team. According to Levenson the estimated date to start swimming is June 19 or when the Willamette River reaches 65 degrees.

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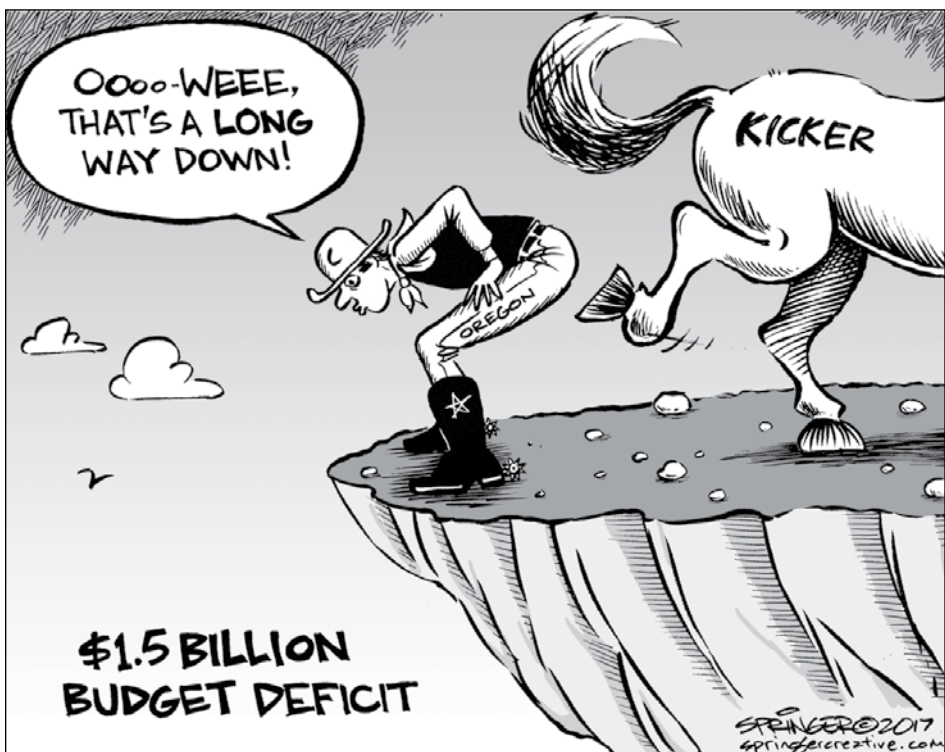
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Phone: (503) 244-6933; Fax: (866) 727-5336
general email: news@multnomahpost.com
web address: www.swportlandpost.com

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