

OPINION

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YOUR VOICE

Support Scenic Area

To our Wasco County Commissioners:
As we drove the old highway last night, stopping at the Tom McCall preserve, it was twilight. I wanted to catch a few photos of the wildflowers in case we weren't able to drive that way again during prime bloom. We were astonished at the number of cars and people there at that time of day.

Do you have any idea?, you must!, at what a draw our incredible gorge is for people? Do you realize, you must!, the state helps subsidize our county costs toward the paperwork involved in assisting Gorge preservation? We come out ahead however you look at it because those two dozen cars that were with us at twilight spend money in Wasco County! And, they return!

Do you realize the reason our tourism has increased on the river is because the Gorge has been protected? Those passengers on the several cruise lines know what to expect, and without our county's participation, I don't doubt that will change. Hood River County is an alternative for them. I don't want to lose them to other better offers, why do you? It's amazing how often we greet passengers who are returning. They also come back again by car. And, I assure you, they all spend their dollars here, even the crew members.

It's our responsibility to preserve what we have here. It's also your responsibility to keep our county residents from having extra hoops to jump through when wishing to make home improvements. They deserve a break!

Wasco County must continue to be a key player in preserving our incredible Gorge. We must stay in the Gorge Commission!

Sandra Haechrel
The Dalles

Guardian Angel

On Sunday May 2, in the evening, my dog fled the Eagle Creek Overlook Group Campground. She has never done so before, but the booms scared her.

You told me she went down the

Gorge Cruiser



The sternwheeler *Columbia Gorge* docks at Cascade Locks Thursday evening, May 6, awaiting a new day of river cruises and excursions. Cruise lines are again operating in the Columbia River Gorge as the state begins to loosen COVID-19 safety restrictions. **Mark B. Gibson photo**

road. You then drove, saw her and drove miles to come back to tell me where you saw my dog.

You gave me a ride that led me to know my dog was heading on 84 westbound. You dropped me off so I could run after her. I dangerously chased her for miles.

You then were there when my dad drove down. Because of you, my dad knew where to go. He picked me up on the highway. We drove another two miles and we got my dog. She was completely safe.

We got her because of you. I cannot thank you so much. When I tell

the story, I refer to you as my dog's guardian angel. You are the reason my dog is safe. Thank you.

From the fellow huge dog lover!
Jan Marrinan
Portland

What about us?

Hey *Columbia Gorge News*, I have been reading your paper since *Hood River News* merged with *CGN*. I have very much enjoyed it. There is something missing however!

On the front of the newspaper it states *Columbia Gorge News*, Hood

River, The Dalles and White Salmon! Guess what? Cascade Locks is an incorporated city in the Columbia Gorge, just minutes from Hood River and The Dalles.

How come the "goings ons" here are never mentioned in the *Columbia Gorge News*?

Why, just this week there was an enormous cruise ship docked in the canal, Northwest Trail Alliance volunteers came and cleaned up the Easy Climb Trail (it is a beautiful mountain bike trail, by the way) and The Sternwheeler *Columbia Gorge* is back in Cascade Locks with daily

excursions. The Cascade Locks Museum has opened for the season! There is a new museum director and she has put together some fabulous exhibits rich in history about our area.

New businesses are springing up and the town is a "bee hive" of activity on the weekends.

Also missing from the newspaper was any information about the candidates running for Cascade Locks Port Commission. It seems the second largest city in Hood

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How salmon shape our rivers

Historic fishery decline impacts Columbia River system

■ By Zach Collier

TO MANY, THE CONNECTION between Idaho's Salmon River and its namesake extends little beyond the name.

What most people don't realize is that this iconic river was once the most productive tributary for steelhead and Chinook salmon. Historically placed under pressure by a combination of overfishing, climate change, and habitat degradation, these fish populations have been suffering.

The construction of the Snake River dams in the 1960s and 1970s have nearly solidified the fate of these fish by blocking migratory routes between spawning grounds and the Pacific Ocean and creating reservoirs that disrupt the ecology of the once free-flowing river. These reservoirs have slow-moving currents which make it difficult for smolts to orient themselves towards the ocean, and the deeper waters create an excellent habitat for hungry predators.

With dams in place, a smolt migrating downstream must navigate warmer waters, avoid predators and somehow pass through each dam project along the river just to reach the ocean.

Roughly 5-8 percent of smolts die at each of the eight total projects along the Snake River. Cumulatively, this means that roughly 50 percent of Idaho's smolts

"This is an all-encompassing plan; a best case scenario for salmon and the people that rely on them."



Zach Collier

die before they reach the Pacific Ocean.

This number does not include the additional predicted mortality of fish perishing in reservoirs, during their upstream migration, or through delayed mortality effects caused by stress brought on after navigating the dams.

The number of spring-summer Chinook that returned to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River basin in 2020 was about 900 fish, a major decline when compared to the nearly 50,000 spawning Chinook in the 1950s. This number is estimated to be about 30 percent of the number that spawned in this basin in the 1880s. At the end of the day, time is ticking for these river ambassadors.

Though more and more difficult to come across these days, steelhead and Chinook represent everything that makes the rivers of the Pacific Northwest unique. As anadromous organisms, these fish spend part of their life in the ocean accumulating nutrients and building up energy-rich fat reserves. They will then migrate up to 1,000 miles to their freshwater spawning grounds where they reproduce, die, and contribute energy to the food chain via the decomposition of their tissue.

This ultimately provides for the overall ecosystem. From the towering ponderosa pines to the abundance of wildlife on the Salmon River, the ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest are built with the help of salmonids.

Just as the ecology of the west depends on these fish, so too does my livelihood and the livelihood of thousands of others. My business relies on the preservation of pristine wilderness ecosystems starting with rivers and the organisms they support.

My business, Northwest Rafting Company, is based out of Hood River. The town is bordered by the Columbia River — the pathway Pacific salmon must take to reach the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

As a long-time outfitter on the Middle Fork of the Salmon I have known of the plight of these fish. The federal government has spent 20 years and over \$17 billion tweaking the hydro system, yet they have still failed to restore salmon runs.

Between the 1950s and 1960s — before construction of the lower Snake River dams — an estimated 48,000 total adult Chinook returned to the Middle Fork of the Salmon river basin to spawn. In 2020, biologists counted 467 redds — depressions in a river bed created by female salmon to deposit eggs — meaning approximately 934 adults returned to the region, a mere fraction of historic populations. These fish have almost been eradicated.

Starting in 2010, changes have been made in how commercial and private rafting permits on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River are

issued during the salmon spawning window of Aug. 15 through Sept. 15.

This has resulted in a reduction of river use by recreational boaters during this time. We as outfitters are now monitored closely during spawning season to prevent boats from impeding on salmon spawning activities.

In certain years, some of the few redds left are found downstream in the only path available for rafting. If we are unable to avoid the few salmonids left, our fear is that a river closure may be put in place.

Caught in a limbo of supporting whatever protections salmon can receive while also relying on the river — the same one that these populations inhabit — for work, I and many others in my industry have been in a state of uncertainty for decades.

We have to stop clipping the toenails on a patient that needs heart bypass surgery.

The "band-aid fix" of halting the already limited rafting activities on the river may help buy some time — if any — for the remaining spawning fish, but it will not actively restore fish populations.

A better option

There is, however, another option; a plan on the table that cuts to the heart of the issue and ensures a liveable future for salmon, steelhead and thriving outdoor economies.

Congressman Mike Simpson's new \$34 billion Columbia Basin Initiative is the most complete restoration and replacement package ever proposed to solve this delicate

issue.

This plan will not only recover these fish, but also move the entire Pacific Northwest forward with major investments in energy modernizations, recreation, agriculture and transportation.

This plan safeguards a better future for all parties throughout Oregon and Idaho, from outfitters like myself to residential and commercial power users in the Lewiston/tri-state area.

This is an all-encompassing plan; a best case scenario for salmon and the people that rely on them.

I firmly believe that passing this plan into law is the only chance we have at seeing salmon and steelhead populations recover in the Columbia River Basin.

Leadership in Oregon and Idaho should work together to move this plan forward. I am calling on Oregon's congressional delegation, Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley as well as Representatives Peter Defazio and Cliff Bentz to support Congressman Simpson's bold and necessary plan.

Whether we want to admit it or not, we all walk on ground built by salmon and steelhead.

The Columbia Basin Initiative is the best chance we have ever had at prioritizing their recovery.

Zach Collier is of owner of Northwest Rafting Company, a Hood River business that operates a rafting company on the Columbia River affected by the Snake River Dams, an outfitter working on the Rogue, Owyhee, Chetco, Illinois and Salmon Rivers. He can be found online at www.nurrafting.com.

Regional news for the Gorge

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