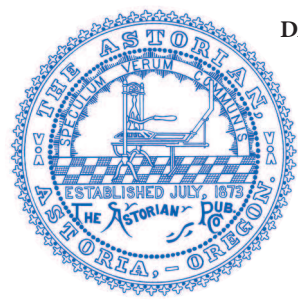


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

A welcome return for white sturgeon

After a three-year moratorium on keeping white sturgeon caught between the mouth of the Columbia River and Bonneville Dam, a modest retention season started this week. Though initial catches have been slow as might be expected considering the river's clouded spring waters, local anglers are happy to see some progress toward a return to normal for this important fishery.

Columbia white sturgeon venture out into the nearby ocean and even into Willapa Bay, but are formally considered a freshwater fish — the largest in North America. They can live more than a century and have become legendary among fishermen for their strength and size, with old sturgeon sometimes weighing hundreds of pounds. The much younger and smaller ones that anglers are permitted to keep — only 44 to 50 inches from snout to the fork in the tail — are locally renowned as one of the most delicious fish.

Like many other species, white sturgeon are struggling with habitat loss and deteriorating environmental conditions. During the drought year of 2015, for example, 80 breeding-age sturgeon died in the vicinity of Bonneville — possibly victims of too-warm water or perhaps harmful changes in water oxygen levels. Steller sea lions also have multiplied and found their way into sturgeon holes, exerting considerable hunting pressure. Fleeing predators disrupts the sturgeons' breeding patterns.

There also is little doubt that human fishing pressures played a role in sturgeon declines that led to the 2014 moratorium. When salmon numbers plunged in the 1990s, private and charter fishing heavily switched to sturgeon with an enthusiasm it was easy to foresee would lead to trouble.

We now are in the rebound period. Fortunately, state conservation measures appear to be succeeding, with an estimated 165,600 legal-size sturgeon in the river below Bonneville, up from 147,000 last year and 72,700 in 2012. Fishery managers have set an extremely conservative 3,000-sturgeon catch limit in the ongoing season — disappointing but much better than no season at all. The middling-sized sturgeon fishermen are allowed to keep generate a lot of economic activity for Columbia estuary ports, merchants and charter operations.

A study funded by the Bonneville Power Administration starting in 2000 has found female sturgeon do not sexually mature until they're at least 18 to 32 years old and only spawn about once every three years. Although not ideal fishing conditions, biologists have learned spawning success is best during high-flow years when the river creates turbulence over rough substrate or rocky-river bottoms — so this winter's intense rain and deep mountain snows may have a silver lining in future years in terms of producing young sturgeon.

Sturgeon are in trouble worldwide and caution is obviously warranted when it comes to harvest and stress. In this gloomy picture, the Columbia actually is something of a bright spot, with a 2015 estimate of up to 1 million white sturgeon of all ages from Bonneville to the river's mouth. It is especially important to protect breeding fish age 18-plus — they are vital to the species' future. "It's a resource that's not replaceable," a scientist observed in 2015. "Those big spawners, we know how valuable they really are."

Continuing proactive management of sea lion populations is clearly justified. Although the idea is repellent to avid animal-right activists, their numbers are out of proportion to available prey in the Columbia River as it exists today. Responsible wildlife management means adjusting sea lion numbers to match their niche in what is now an inherently human-centric environment.

Sturgeon are well suited to hatchery propagation. The states should begin such a program. Fishery managers are being careful about sturgeon. This is understandable, even if disappointing. But they must begin being more bold in enacting long-term plans for viability of these ancient and treasured fish.



Luke Whittaker/EO Media Group

Crew from Sea Breeze Charters in Ilwaco, Washington, unload sturgeon after a successful opener Monday.



GUEST COLUMN

Salmon restoration funding supports our rural economies



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

Commercial fisherman Richie Williams of Astoria tosses spring salmon from his gillnet boat in May 2010 on the docks at the Astoria Yacht Club.

By GLENN LAMB

Special to The Daily Astorian

The Pacific Northwest is salmon country.

On the Lower Columbia River and Pacific Coast, salmon and steelhead are key to our way of life, anchoring coastal economies, ecosystems and culture. Today, as for generations, commercial and sport fishermen feed their families and support communities through salmon harvest.

Salmon restoration efforts support the fishing industry, but also benefit other species, make our water cleaner and reduce the risk of costly floods. In short, when we protect salmon, we bolster our communities and our environment.

The Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund is managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency works with states and tribes to invest in salmon and steelhead recovery work in Alaska, Washington state, Oregon, California and Idaho, contributing \$1.2 billion since 2000 and leveraging \$1.4 billion in matching funds. The \$215 million invested in Oregon alone leverages \$330 million of state Lottery funds, bringing the total to protect and enhance salmon to \$545 million.

This is truly an investment, and one that provides returns.

Recreational fishing alone generates about \$500 million annually in Oregon, creating 16,500 jobs, and commercial salmon fishing creates over \$16 million annually and more than 900 jobs.

In addition to fishing, invest-



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

Glenn Lamb, executive director of the Columbia Land Trust, speaks at the Columbia Forum in 2015.

ing in the "restoration economy" also makes good business sense. According to the University of Oregon, every \$1 million spent on habitat restoration creates 15 to 24 local jobs, and more than 90 cents of every dollar stays in Oregon communities.

The salmon recovery grant program supports locally driven actions, not regulatory directives. With the help of watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts and land trusts, landowners and local communities plant trees, replace impassable culverts and restore streambanks. Cuts to this program would be a devastating setback for a citizen-led effort to restore healthy salmon runs

in Oregon.

Without continued investment like the recovery fund, salmon recovery in the Northwest will stall, hurting the economies and communities supported by salmon fishing in the long term. We hope you'll join us in asking Congress to continue to support the recovery of our salmon.

Glenn Lamb is the executive director of Columbia Land Trust based in Vancouver, Washington, with offices in Hood River and Astoria. A nonprofit organization, Columbia Land Trust conserves and cares for the vital lands, waters and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two

letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a

respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

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