

Sea lion shuttle not a solution at Willamette Falls

State wants the power to kill

By CASSANDRA PROFITA

Oregon Public Broadcasting

Threatened winter steelhead will start making their way up the Willamette River to their spawning grounds in November, and half a dozen sea lions are already waiting to eat them at Willamette Falls.

Managers with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife have asked for permission to kill these sea lions to save the fish. They don't have an answer yet, but thanks to a sea lion shuttle earlier this year, they're ready to go should they get the approval.

Last year, sea lions at Willamette Falls ate a quarter of a winter steelhead run that was already down to about 500 fish. At that rate, biologists say, the run is at risk of extinction.

Oregon has permission to kill sea lions to protect fish at Bonneville Dam, where 29 sea lions were lethally removed last year. But they don't have that option at Willamette Falls, about 10 miles south of Portland where the river divides Oregon City from West Linn.

Without authority to kill the sea lions at Willamette Falls, fishery managers got creative.

The state trapped and relocated about a dozen sea lions in two cages on a dock below Willamette Falls between February and April.

In many of those cases, Bryan Wright, who leads the



Cassandra Profita/Oregon Public Broadcasting

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has installed two sea lion traps below Willamette Falls that could one day be used to lethally remove the animals to protect threatened fish.

department's marine mammal program, would hide out of sight at dusk until he saw a sea lion jump into the trap. Then, he'd press a button and a heavy cage door would slam shut.

Once the sea lions were trapped, Wright and other wildlife managers shooed them from the dock to a barge to a pickup truck — and then drove them 200 miles away to Newport.

"So, now we're transferring the animal from the barge to the truck," Wright explained from behind the wheel of a pickup truck as a team of workers banged on the walls of the barge with poles. "Usually you have to use a little bit of noise, tapping

the stick, prodding them a little bit."

The sea lions weren't exactly eager to hop into a cage on the back of a truck, and Wright wasn't exactly thrilled to be behind the wheel.

"It's not something anybody does every day," he said. "You have this 400- to 600-pound sea lion in the back, and nobody really knows, you know, driving by what we have back there. The first time I did it I was a bit white knuckled for the whole trip."

Sea lions swim right back

Even as he was releasing these sea lions, Wright knew it was just a matter of time before

they swam right back.

One sea lion made the 230-mile trip in just four days. Another one swam back and got trapped a second time, so he got two trips to the coast.

Shaun Clements, a state fisheries manager, said clearly driving the sea lions to the coast was not a solution to the problem. But it is one of their only options for protecting the fish while they wait for approval to kill the sea lions.

"In the meantime, we felt we had to do something because the run is so poor and the sea lion population is getting bigger," he said.

For every day the relocated sea lions weren't at Willamette Falls, the agency esti-

mates it saved two to three fish from getting eaten. Multiply that by 10 for each of the sea lions they moved, Clements said, and the number of fish that weren't eaten by sea lions starts to add up.

"We did save some steelhead from predation," Clements said. "Sixty days of two fish each a day, that's 120 fish. That's something"

Plus, he said, now they have the traps and the barge system ready to go to lethally remove sea lions should they get permission from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Trucking sea lions and salmon

But killing sea lions won't solve all the problems these fish are facing.

The salmon and steelhead that do make it over the falls — without getting eaten by sea lions — still have 12 dams standing in the way of their spawning grounds.

None of those dams have fish ladders — a stair-step-like series of pools that allows fish to make their way up and around a river's towering dam.

"So right now what you see in essence is a huge roadblock for these fish in both directions," said Jennifer Fairbrother with the Native Fish Society, an environmental group that sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over dam management in the Willamette River basin. "The big nut to crack is how do we help these fish get around the dams both as they go downstream

as juveniles and as they come back to spawn?"

Right now, dam managers have to help adult fish get around the dams by collecting them in a holding tank that drains into a truck. The truck drives the fish around the dam and dumps them out upstream.

Sea lions aren't the only wildlife getting trucked around Oregon. More than half the salmon in the Willamette River basin — tens of thousands of fish — get driven around dams every year. It's the only way they'll make it.

The dams were built for flood control, and dam managers says they're too tall for regular fish ladders and spillways.

"In a perfect world, we'd have a ladder where we didn't have to trap and handle fish," said Greg Taylor, fisheries biologist with the Army Corps. "Everybody wants that. But it's not a tool that's available to us at this point. It's not there."

While dam managers puzzle over better options, sea lions are eating more and more of the fish downstream.

Clements says the only option left is to kill the sea lions to save the fish — before it's too late.

"It's a pretty simple equation for the winter steelhead right now," he said. "Their numbers are so low. They're losing so many here at the falls, that if we don't do this they're going to go extinct."

The Department of Fish and Wildlife is expecting a decision on its application to lethally remove sea lions from Willamette Falls by the end of the year.

A walk through the trees



Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian

Attendees of Clatsop County's 28th Annual Community Leaders Forestry Tour stopped on state-owned land Wednesday to observe a cut-to-length thinning operation that employs modern Finnish-made machines designed to lessen the impact of heavy machinery on forests and maximize harvest. The theme of this year's tour, which draws dozens of attendees each year, was 'Working Forests — More Than Just Trees.' In addition to the thinning project, the tour also highlighted fish passage improvements at Hampton Lumber's Big Creek Tree Farm.

BRUCE JONES FOR MAYOR
BRUCEJONESFORMAYOR.COM

West Coast earthquake warning system becomes operational

Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Developers testing an earthquake early warning system for the West Coast say its automated alerts are ready to be used more broadly, but not for mass public notification.

U.S. Geological Survey official Doug Given told reporters Wednesday at California Institute of Technology that the ShakeAlert system has transitioned from a production prototype to

operational mode.

The system being built for California, Oregon and Washington state detects an earthquake is occurring and send out alerts that may give warnings of few seconds to perhaps a minute before shaking arrives at locations away from the epicenter.

Select industries, utili-

ties, schools and other entities have been using ShakeAlert for years, and officials say it can be used more

widely.

Officials say, however, that cellphone technology is too slow for mass alerts.

Roger4Astoria.com
 Roger Rocka
 City Council, Ward 1

Clatsop Post 12
Spaghetti Dinner
 With Salad and Garlic Bread
Friday, Oct. 19th
 4 pm until gone
\$8.00
 6PM "Karaoke Dave"
 ASTORIA AMERICAN LEGION
 Clatsop Post 12
 1132 Exchange Street
 325-5771

WANTED
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber
 Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA
 Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

THE HAUNTED COVE
FRIDAY & SATURDAY
OCTOBER
 12TH - 13TH
 19TH - 20TH
 26TH - 27TH
 6PM - 9PM
ENTRANCE FEE: \$3
PER PERSON OR 3
NON-PERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS
 KOA RESORT
 All proceeds go to CCA Regional Food Bank & KOA Care Camps
 1100 NW Ridge Rd. Hammond, OR
 503-861-2606
 AstoriaKOA.com

JOAN HERMAN FOR ASTORIA CITY COUNCIL WARD 3

TELL ME YOUR CONCERNS & IDEAS
October
 Tuesdays @ Blue Scorcher
 1493 Duane 2-3pm
 Thursdays (11th, 25th) @ Peter Pan Market
 712 Niagara 5-6pm
 Saturday 27th @ Street 14 Cafe
 1410 Commercial 2-3pm
November
 Saturday 3rd @ Street 14 Cafe
 1410 Commercial 2-3pm

Preserve Historic Astoria ♦ Support Local Business ♦ Advocate for Affordable Housing
VALUES VISION VITALITY
 ♦Joan for City Council, PO Box 946, Astoria 97103 ♦ joan4ward3@gmail.com ♦

Trav's PLACE
 Serving Breakfast and Lunch
 Winter Hours Open at 6 am
Now Open for Dinner!
 Friday and Saturday nights until 9 pm!
 303 1st Avenue South, Ilwaco, Washington
 360-777-3740 • travsplace.net