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OUR VIEW

Save oyster growing on Willapa Bay

Nearly 13 years ago, when imidacloprid was first being considered to combat the burrowing shrimp population explosion in Willapa Bay, it appeared possible it might be licensed by 2012. It was by 2012 that Northwest oyster growers had agreed to quit using a much harsher pesticide.

Earlier this month, after enormous expenditures of time, money and emotion, the oyster industry formally surrendered and gave up the imidacloprid battle. It wasn’t a total loss.

Washington state personnel and oyster growers will form a working group to again study alternative methods of controlling the shrimp. The Willapa Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association is seeking \$650,000 in the coming legislative session to help pay for an integrated pest management plan. Such plans are common in the agriculture industry, typically minimizing chemical use in favor of more complicated strategies.

It certainly is worth seeking state aid. It deserves to be promptly approved, considering the state’s culpability in going along with imidacloprid until it became politically inconvenient, and then pulling the rug out from under Willapa’s shellfish farmers.

It bears remembering that the local industry has worked on the worsening shrimp problem for decades and participated in a variety of earlier research. A January 2007 burrowing shrimp workshop reviewed efforts to find a parasite that might kill them; encouraging crab or sturgeon to eat more of them; and using large mechanical equipment to crush or smother them.

Nothing has worked well enough to be useful, apparently including a more recent experiment by the Washington Department of Natural Resources to physically destroy shrimp beds.



Oyster farmer Kathleen Nesbitt gave Washington Gov. Jay Inslee a crash course on oyster biology during a tour of Willapa Bay in 2017.

Nor can we eat our way out of the problem. The shrimp aren’t palatable to humans. Although they can be used as bait, the many millions of tons of them in Willapa Bay far exceed any conceivable commercial demand.

It’s difficult to imagine some other pesticide gaining acceptance and playing a part in a future industry plan. In 2007, imidacloprid was considered so benign that the environmental group Toxics Coalition recommended it for flea control and considered its toxicity to be slight.

And yet hardening public attitudes about chemicals in the environment — and research finding imidacloprid might play a role in harming bees — undercut state support for using it in Willapa.

Even in 2007, an expert with the Washington State Commission on Pesticide Registration predicted imidacloprid wouldn’t be rejected because of genuine scientific or regulatory concerns, but because of politics.

The big question is whether commercial oyster farming — at some-

thing like its current scale — will be possible without spraying. Like most farmers, shellfish growers are effective conservationists yet attached to some practices that don’t neatly fit within the contemporary framework of avoiding man-made chemicals in the environment.

This conflict between lofty aspirations and pragmatic necessity might be resolved, but doing so is likely to require agencies to cooperate with citizens with an intensity that is almost impossible to imagine.

As usually cultivated here by large growers, oysters are scattered on privately owned tidelands for the majority of their life cycle. The surface they live on doesn’t have to be firm as a tabletop, but it must support their weight well enough that filter-feeding oysters can easily access the bay’s nutritious water.

Burrowing shrimp are a serious problem for this type of oyster growing. While mining the sediment for food, they churn tidelands into a soft, almost quicksand-like texture, into which oysters sink and smother.

There are a number of alternative

ways to grow oysters that don’t rely so much on a firm bottom. Some Willapa oysters already are grown “off bottom,” suspended in bags or cages from long lines.

Some oystermen fear that large-scale use of such cultivation methods will alienate homeowners worried about viewsheds cluttered with plastic lines, floats and tubing. All this plastic can pose environmental risks, too. Oysters grown this way are more expensive and are often destined for the upscale half-shell restaurant market.

Most Willapa oysters are shucked in Pacific County for use in recipes at home and in restaurants. Turning to different growing methods can require changes in everything from pricing to transportation and marketing.

But any such thorough shift in industry practices won’t be easy. As with the state-mandated cutbacks in gillnet salmon fishing on the Columbia River’s main stem, oyster growers have expensive equipment and decades of expertise tied up in raising oysters the way their fathers and grandfathers did.

As we have commented before, it looks very likely that some sort of fundamental shift must happen. If the state and the public want oysters — and their culinary and conservation benefits — it’s time to step up and help. This has to be framed in ways that allow every size of operation to identify future solutions that work.

Without its scrappy, hard-working and diverse army of oyster growers, Willapa would be very poorly positioned to survive the onslaught of development swirling in the immediate future of western Washington.

Without them, the bay may be saved from pesticides, but lost to everything else. They need smart partners with viable answers, not people taking potshots.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mitchell is strong

I attended Rep. Tiffany Mitchell’s recent town hall in Astoria, and was impressed by her social and emotional intelligence, her strong advocacy for education, health and social services for our community, and am confident in her ability to address the issues we face as a region and nation with clarity, focus, rigorous research and respectful communication.

I am inspired by her motives — to serve the people, not Wall Street corporations. This recall effort is a form of bullying, ungrounded and pointless. Please join me in allowing our valuable civil servant to continue to do her job on our behalf.

SUSAN BANYAS  
Astoria

False narrative

In the Lianne Thompson and Tony DeBone guest column “We Oregonians” (The Astorian, Oct. 26), they decry “angry insistence” and “warfare” by partisan groups. The most recent example of this was when the log truck drivers circled the state Capitol for two hours, honking their air horns, because they didn’t like the way a committee had voted on HB 2020.

Later, when an armed militia group said they would defend the Republicans who flew the coop instead of voting on HB 2020, the timber barons who are behind #TimberUnity remained silent, rather than renounce this mafia-like tactic of threatening violence, because it supported the outcome on HB 2020 they wanted.

Though they claim to support a one-team approach to mitigating climate change, DeBone and Thompson demonstrate their partisanship on HB 2020 repeatedly, stating that its consideration was “fear and suspicion in action.” They take issue with HB 2020, which they claim would hurt the economy, but provide no scientific sources for their claim. Instead, they rely on a sports metaphor about a “Hail Mary” pass.

In spite of all of their verbiage about our “shared humanity,” the opinion piece is a thinly-veiled support article for the timber industry which, in a major study, directed by Beverly Law at Oregon State University, was found to be the greatest producer of greenhouse gases in Oregon.

The industry needs allies like DeBone and Thompson to continue spreading the false narrative about how cap and trade will hurt the economy, even though 71% percent of Oregonians supported the cap-and-trade bill, according to a poll done by FM3 Research, and don’t see it that way.

ROGER DORBAND  
Astoria

A better bridge

Pastor Bill Van Nostran repeats the phrase “When you’re a carpenter, everything looks like a hammer,” in reference to how law enforcement responds to the unhoused. A police dog reminds me that police are inclined to reach for hammers, in so doing, miss a better tool.

Many times I’ve turned toward a person in some agitated, violent or crisis state. For example, I saw a tall man screaming walk into the Bridgewater Bistro’s kitchen door, then come out shortly still screaming at the winds. I turned toward him, hoping to calm him; not from any ability of mine, but through the natural affection of my dog, “Newt.” Very shortly the man was calmly petting my Newt.

And one Sunday above the empty parking lot of the Urgent Care, a woman was screaming at the world. So I set my bike aside. Newt led the way down the steps. When the police arrived, the woman was quietly holding Newt, and spoke in a casual manner.

I don’t know how many times Newt calmed someone with me, or off on his own. He’s with my brother now, but I’ve his son, “Harpo,” who has a great bundle of love to ease troubled souls. A person like Newt or Harpo can serve to de-escalate so many situations.

Police dogs can be so much more than a hammer or an odor detector. They could be a companion to the police and the policed, a better bridge between us.

MICHAEL MILLER  
Astoria

Racism run rampant

President Donald Trump has chastised black athletes for kneeling during the national anthem, asserted that the “race problem” was Barack Obama’s doing, and claimed that “both sides” shared blame for the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, on Aug. 12, 2017.

His Aug. 5 “denouncement” of white supremacy sounded like a little boy forced to eat his spinach or rat on his friends. Will his racism, hatred and its attendant violence ever end? What will it take for Americans to come together to decry his bigotry? And can we ever embrace tolerance, empathy, compassion and goodwill?

Donald Trump, our bigot-in-chief and morally-senescent emotional impleton, who doesn’t have the capacity to tell right from wrong, will no doubt continue to deepen the racial divide. How sad, especially in light of his Oct. 23 grotesquely racist remark, labeling the impeachment inquiry as a “lynching.”

Pandering to public fears around race, Trump will continue to speak to the worst impulses of his MAGA-hat-wearing audiences, and embrace whatever nasty, violent visions that seem politically expedient at any given moment.

Reflecting on our history of race relations and class warfare, I’m not sure we’ll ever heal our wounds. Nonetheless, it’s far beyond time for us men and women of good conscience to denounce this president, to remember the eloquent urgings of Jackie Robinson and Bobby Kennedy, and to continue our battle against bigotry.

We have an urgent obligation to begin the cleanup.

ROBERT BRAKE  
Ocean Park, Washington

Venom

Recently, a man angrily told me, “Trump’s the most immoral president in the country’s history.” He was so filled with venom, it was impossible to discuss the subject.

Having lived through all past presidents since Herbert Hoover, and read their biographies, by far the most immoral of the lot were John Kennedy and Bill Clinton. Lyndon Johnson ran third.

Only Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, the Bushes and Barack Obama appeared to follow marriage vows. Even Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower had mistresses. So President Donald Trump’s affairs, if any, wouldn’t be unusual for a president.

The same angry man railed about President Trump’s Syria troop withdrawal. It’s debatable whether America should interfere militarily with another country when that country’s action isn’t directed at America. But agree, discussion with this fellow was impossible.

America invaded Iraq 19 years ago. After 9/11, and stories about “weapons of mass destruction,” President George Bush’s military action sounded reasonable. But Bush’s invasion led to more fighting elsewhere in the Middle East. Many thousands of lives were lost. Trillions were squandered.

And after the efforts of Obama, who followed Bush, the Middle East is still in turmoil. Those folks are still fighting among themselves, like they’ve been doing for centuries. So I agree with Trump: After 19 years of war, it’s high time to end America’s military involvement.

But, as the angry fellow reminded me, any mention of politics these days is asking for trouble. I yearn for those “good ole days,” when politics could be discussed with just a little heat, instead of raging fire.

DON HASKELL  
Astoria