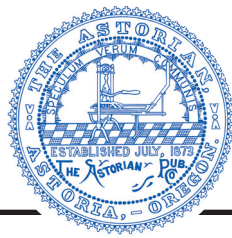


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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## OUR VIEW

# Making a muddle of saving salmon

Local experts connected in various ways with salmon fishing and conservation must be ready to blow a gasket over the Washington Legislature's latest clumsy efforts to "help."

In legislators' defense, saving salmon is a supremely messy business, with more murky crosscurrents and furious undertows than a dangerous outer coast beach. Pulled this way and that by those who genuinely know what they're talking about and many others who don't know a chum from a Chinook, policymakers find themselves in a hard-to-win situation.

Intentional confusion is added by outsiders whose only interest is in grabbing salmon for themselves or using the issue merely as a means to generate financial donations from well-wishing urbanites.

And as if all that wasn't enough, salmon management is also bound up with the need to help Washington's endangered resident orcas, and with the obligation to coordinate some policies with Oregon and Canada.

Although this may sound about as fun as getting lost in an undersea kelp forest, the legislative and regulatory issues of immediate local concern aren't that complicated.

For one, a plan is rattling around to ramp up the use of pound nets to commercially harvest hatchery-bred salmon. Banned about 90 years ago, this technique — otherwise known as fish traps — in theory catches migrating salmon without harm. The catch can then be sorted, with nonhatchery fish released to continue upstream.

Although this has obvious appeal, it comes with a variety of technical and pragmatic obstacles. The Wild Fish Conservancy has been experimenting with a pound net to catch tule fall Chinook and fin-clipped coho in the Cathlamet area. A proposal now on the



Cassandra Profita/Oregon Public Broadcasting

An experimental fish trap on the lower Columbia River has repurposed an old fishing method in search of a more sustainable way to catch salmon. It is, however, a long way from proving the viability of the concept.

table would advance this trial fishery to the next stage. This would be premature.

Astoria-based nonprofit Salmon For All — embedded in gill and tangle net technology — can't be considered objective, but certainly possesses deep and direct experience in commercial salmon fishing. The nonprofit makes convincing arguments:

"Our research shows that the capital investment needed to set up a pound net operation ranges from \$156,000 to \$258,000. Annual gross income produced by the current experimental gear from 2018-2020 averaged \$24,146.92, according to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife," Jim Wells, the president of Salmon For All, said in a February letter. "We do not think that current numbers and lack of profitability or even potential profitability, qualifies the trap as a 'commercial' fishery or 'emerging commercial fishery' as yet."

Advancing to a next regulatory stage with modern pound nets risks

splitting a fishery with thin profit margins into yet smaller slices, while undercutting private investment in the proven technology of tangle nets. These nets provide for live capture of salmon, achieving the goal of letting nonhatchery fish get on with their business.

The Washington Senate has made a muddle of a separate proposal to buy down the number of commercial fishing licenses on Washington's southern estuaries and the Columbia River. Such licenses are considered private property and in some cases have been owned by the same family for generations. Some aren't actively used, but represent additional potential harvest pressure on salmon.

An advisory committee convened by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recommended buying and eliminating 100 Columbia River/Willapa Bay and Columbia River/Grays Harbor licenses at a cost of \$10,000 each.

Senate Democrats, who are otherwise splashing money around

with enthusiasm, fiddled with this plan in such a way as to drastically reduce compensation, while at the same time forcing unpaid surrender of some licenses. This is neither fair nor wise, and risks scuttling an otherwise smart effort to winnow the fishing fleet down to a profitable and sustainable size. This initiative would enhance the coastal economy while improving income prospects for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

It remains an imponderable political mystery why a majority of 19th Legislative District voters chose to unseat state Sen. Dean Takko and state Rep. Brian Blake, experienced leaders who would have guided these issues to a correct resolution. However, we hope legislators and the Department of Fish and Wildlife will listen to the people most affected by these matters. The license buyback should be fully funded and the concept of bringing back pound nets should be held in abeyance, pending much additional study and consideration.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Kudos

Kudos to Clatsop County and volunteers in the administration and organization for the COVID-19 vaccines. So much work, and so much better than what Oregon and Gov. Kate Brown accomplished.

I was disappointed that the state of Oregon was not nearly as prepared as the Clatsop County people. The Clatsop County group was outstanding.

MERILEE LAURENS  
Seaside

### Reality

The reality is that here in Clatsop County we live in earthquake and tsunami country.

Feel the ground shake? Time to get to high ground — and fast. We likely will only have 15 to 20 minutes to get there. With trees and power lines down, and bridges out, we can't count on being able to drive to high ground; we'll likely have to get there on foot.

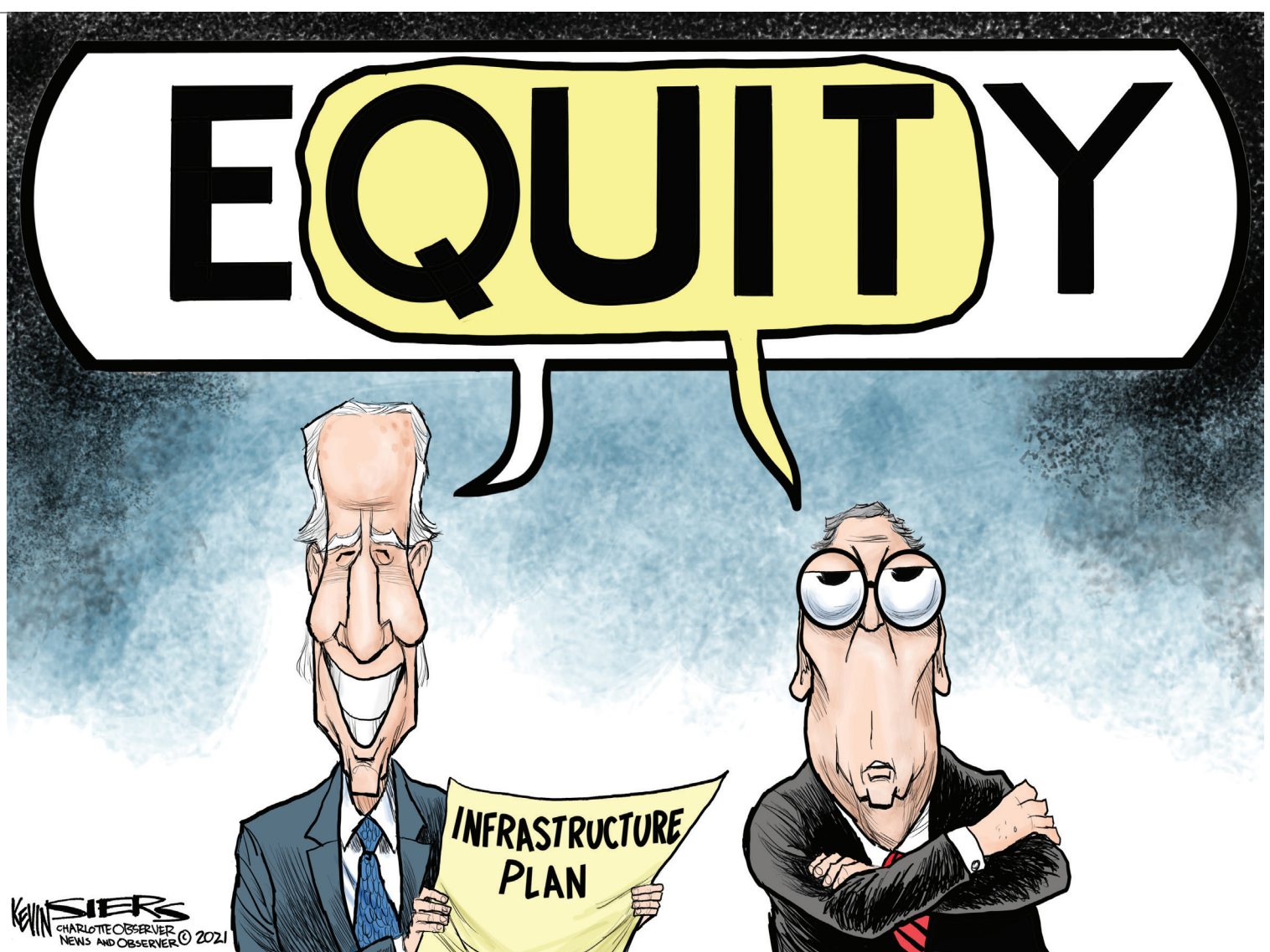
I live in a tsunami inundation zone in Gearhart. It has been breezily suggested by Stewart Schultz that the only option for survival is to get to the 100-foot elevation of the foothills at a distance to the east of us.

There is no way most of us in Gearhart can walk to the foothills in time. And in trying, we do not want to get stuck in the low-lying area in between with a tsunami on the way. We just don't have time.

It is unhelpful and misguided to ignore the realities facing most of our coastal residents. For our survival, the best high ground is the high ground we can actually get to in time.

Want to learn more? Check out the resources on the county's website at bit.ly/3fYbq5Y. Practice your evacuation plan and prepare. Your life may depend on it.

BEBE MICHEL  
Gearhart



### Prove it

The recent tempest in a teapot at the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District is interesting. To hear these folks talk, the old Broadway Middle School property, which SEPRD recently purchased from Seaside School District No. 10, is a toxic dump site of asbestos and black mold.

Reading their vitriolic letters to the editor, I'm left wondering, where was their hue and cry over this issue when our children were in those buildings? Why were

they silent about this threat all these years? Why is it now suddenly a big concern to them? Is the problem really that bad, or is this all just hyperbole?

It also raises the question of why didn't the Seaside school board gift the middle school to SEPRD, another taxing district serving the public, like they did the Gearhart Elementary School property?

Supposedly a big part of their reasoning for selling the Gearhart property to a private concern for less than a fifth of its true base value was worries about asbestos and mold. That whole affair fails to pass the

smell test.

District taxpayers were robbed and the school board was wholly complicit in the theft. Especially when you consider the subsequent Broadway Middle School sale.

If either of these sites are as dangerous as they are being made out, someone needs to prove it. My children went to both these schools. I want answers. And, quite honestly, the members of both boards should have their feet put to the fire to justify their actions.

BILL GRAFFIUS  
Gearhart