

Tribes could harvest prized food at restored wetland

By CASSANDRA PROFITA
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Native American tribes could someday resume their tradition of harvesting a prized first food — the potato-like tuber, wapato — from the wetlands along the Columbia River in the Steigerwald National Wildlife Refuge.

The area was drained years ago and cut off from the river by levees, but a \$31 million restoration project has removed about 2 miles of those barriers to restore 965 acres of floodplain habitat.

It's the largest wetland restoration project on the lower Columbia River, designed to re-establish valuable salmon habitat while reducing flood risks to the area. The newly restored wetlands will benefit a variety of native species including lamprey, beaver and migratory birds. It's also creating the perfect habitat for wapato, a tuber that grows in wetlands and was once so abundant along the Columbia in southwest Washington and Northwest Oregon that Lewis and Clark named the area Wapato Valley.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners, including the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership, will plant 3,000 wapato bulbs and 30,000 seeds in the wetlands for future tribal harvest.

Sam Robinson, vice chairman of the Chinook Indian Nation, joined in a ceremonial planting of wapato at the restoration site on Monday and sang a song in honor of the positive change at the refuge.



Photos by Cassandra Profita/Oregon Public Broadcasting
ABOVE: Julie Fernandez, right, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky and Doug Kruger, with the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership, dig holes for wapato bulbs in the newly restored wetlands at the Steigerwald National Wildlife Refuge on Monday.
INSET: Wapato is a tuber that looks like a small potato and grows primarily in wetlands.

"Wapato was such a huge resource from this area here down to Longview and through Portland," he said. "It was a huge trade item. So, as they were harvesting this wapato, they were bringing it down to where my relatives

were and trading it for fish oil. ... Maintaining refuges like this is so valuable."

Robinson said it would normally be this time of year that tribal members would start harvesting wapato, after the plant had died

back and sent all of its nutrients into its root system. He said he is looking forward to seeing the restored wetland evolve so that tribal members can harvest wapato at the site in the future.

Wapato tastes like a potato but it has a bit more nutrition in it, according to Curtis Helm, restoration ecologist with the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership.

"It has a little more iron in it, cooks easily. It's easily stored and easily dried," he said. "But you have to know where the plant was growing in order to harvest it because the above-ground plant dies in the fall."

Helm said numerous factors have reduced the amount of wapato in the Northwest, including the loss of floodplains as the Columbia River was diked for farming, but also invasive species and competing crops like potatoes.

Juliette Fernandez, project leader with the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex, said she is grateful for her agency's partnerships with Northwest tribes.

"On many of our refuges we have native plants that were also first foods that continue to be harvested by our tribal partners," she said. "Working with them not only to understand biology of the plants but to create harvest opportunities has been really been meaningful. This week, as we have Thanksgiving and as we all sit down to enjoy our various forms of food and the things that are important to us in our lives, that's one relationship I'm thankful for this year."

Sture: Hearing was Sture's first chance to argue for his freedom since 2011

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investigating mischief near the home the officer shared with his wife and children. Sture shot him off a motorcycle, then plugged him twice in the head.

Sture's motivations remain vague. He had served time for stealing a vehicle in the years before the killing and has said he didn't want Shepherd to stumble upon his marijuana operation. The police, however, found no such plants.

Brown said the evidence suggests Shepherd's murder was a "thrill kill." Sture said drug use had influenced his actions.

Before he fled the area with Shepherd's motorcycle, Sture detained at gunpoint Shepherd's colleague, Brian Johnson, who found the body. He made Johnson get on the ground and rummaged through his wallet, but didn't injure him.

Days later, Sture was taken into custody in central Oregon, where he had been hitchhiking.

At last week's hearing, Sture apologized to the Shepherd family, something he had not done in his four decades in prison.

Members of Sture's family and volunteers with his religious studies group supported his release.

"We are all intensely committed to being an integral part of his stability and crucial support system," his sister, Cindy Wiggins, said at the hearing.

Sandra Bierschied, Shepherd's daughter, said the idea of Sture being released is "incomprehensible."

"Every single event in my life has been altered because of this reckless choice that Michael Sture made in 1980," Bierschied said. "Leading up to this very day, not once has my father's killer ever made any attempt to explain his actions or show any remorse to my mother or our family."

The psychologist who evaluated Sture beforehand wrote that the convict had a low risk of committing further violence, but that

substance abuse could increase the risk.

Sture has severe disorders when it comes to using alcohol, stimulants and marijuana, and a moderate disorder with using heroin, the psychologist wrote.

In addition, Sture exhibits traits of antisocial personality disorder. "Mr. Sture has demonstrated problems with impulsivity, irresponsibility, and failure to plan ahead," the psychologist wrote.

The parole board wrote in their decision that Sture "suffers from a present severe emotional disturbance that constitutes a danger to the health or safety of the community."

Although Sture said at his hearing — his first chance to argue for his freedom since 2011 — that he had been sober for nearly two years, board member John Bailey said that's not very long for someone seeking parole. Sture has dabbled in wellness programs, yet even within the 12-step Narcotics Anonymous program, he has stalled at step No. 4.

Bailey and board members Greta Lowry

and James Taylor worried whether Sture could stay sober once discharged, given his history of relapses in prison. "Living in the community would increase the likelihood of his exposure or ability to obtain illicit substances," the board wrote.

In light of Sture's newfound commitment to sobriety — made, the decision noted, "a mere few weeks prior to his most recent hearing" — the board believes Sture is indeed likely to start using again. "(S)uch conduct would present an unacceptable risk to the people of Oregon," the board wrote.

"While the board recognizes and applauds (Sture) for his present desire to remain clean and sober, the board needs to see significantly more clean time from him to find he has the capacity to remain clean and sober in the community."

Virginia Shepherd said, "I'm glad he won't be out in public now ... I just feel he could do this to some other family, and that wouldn't be good."



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