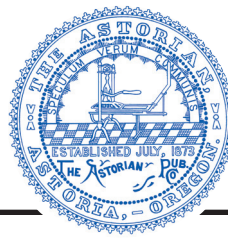


OPINION



the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

SHANNON ARLINT
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

A daunting task to keep water cold

Recent moves to address water temperatures and other forms of pollution souring Pacific Northwest rivers are both worthy and worrisome.

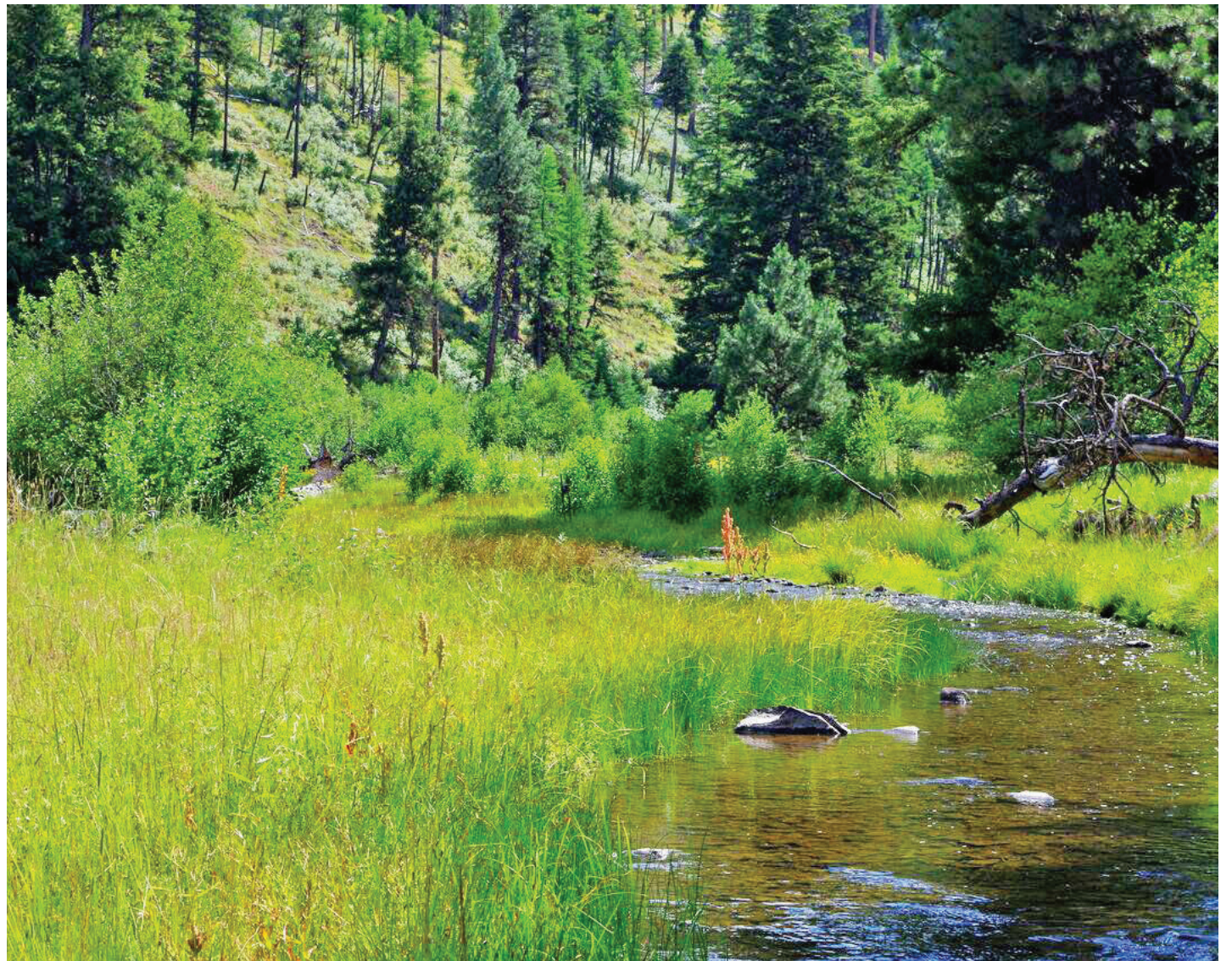
Worthy because salmon and interrelated species need all the help they can get. Worrisome because lawsuits and top-down legislation are clumsy ways to address highly complex problems.

Convuluted knots of heat and chemical contamination in the Columbia River system are familiar to everyone who has followed salmon-restoration controversies over the past 30 or 40 years. Much progress has been made in curbing traditional forms of pollution from major sources like manufacturing, agriculture and municipal sewage, while at the same time we have learned more about how closely attuned aquatic species are to even minuscule traces of some chemicals.

Heat is less often recognized by nonexperts as a form of pollution. But anything that warms seawater or rivers beyond fairly narrow limits can make life difficult or impossible for species accustomed to cold water. When it comes to salmon, heat not only harms their own biological processes, but also degrades the food web on which they rely.

Early in December, Columbia Riverkeeper sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, alleging violations of federal Clean Water Act provisions relating to heat and toxins associated with four large dams and reservoirs east of Portland on the Columbia. Without delving into the details of the lawsuit's claims and the Army Corps' initial responses, it's obvious that a federal agency should be held to the highest standards when it comes to managing a great river.

But it's also obvious that the Army Corps faces a difficult — and perhaps nearly insurmountable — challenge in limiting heat buildup in the vast pools of slow-moving water impounded behind dams. This was a daunting task before our planet started warming up. Keeping this water cold enough for salmon is likely to become harder with each passing year. This is much



Sandy DeBano

Maintaining natural vegetation, shade and other riparian features along rivers and creeks is an essential way of helping restore salmon populations.

complicated by the fact that the river is legally required to serve a variety of other functions — everything from power generation and irrigation to being a transportation canal between ports from its mouth to Idaho.

This isn't to say that ways can't be found to keep migration corridors cold enough for salmon, but any such answers are likely to require expertise and legal power beyond the capacity of a federal judge and arguing lawyers.

Water temperatures are also at the heart of new legislation proposed by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee that would require a wider swath of protective trees and other vegetation along thousands of miles of creeks and rivers. This leafy cover, coupled with large woody debris in water channels, fulfills essential functions in habitat — shade, protection from predators, water filtration, prey produc-

tion, flood and silt control, and on and on.

Protecting these riparian zones is another salmon-restoration goal that has been around for decades, and which has been previously fought over. Although it's safe to surmise most rural landowners in the Pacific Northwest are pro-salmon, stream setbacks have the effect of severely limiting how that land can be used. Weyerhaeuser and similarly situated forestry giants can manage to work around such limits. Family foresters, of whom there are many, can suffer crippling blows to assets built up by decades of careful stewardship of relatively small acreages.

Yes, as a society we must try harder all the time to find ways to mitigate for climate change and habitat loss. We who live in and love today's Pacific Northwest are the beneficiaries of decades of development that provided

employment and affordable electricity to our ancestors. We owe a corresponding obligation to pass well-functioning lands and waters along to our children.

At the same time, although lawsuits can be useful, they are a wasteful and blunt tool — too often better at fundraising and attention-getting than at identifying workable solutions. And legislation designed by an urban governor has the same flaws, unless it is perfected in the crucible of political give-and-take.

Bottom line: The Army Corps must continue finding better ways to protect and enhance the Columbia, something that may require congressional action to adjust its mission. And smaller riparian areas probably do need better setbacks in light of a changing environment, but the costs of such enhancements shouldn't be put on the backs of family forest owners.

GUEST COLUMN

Is this the system we really want?

I've got Humira on my mind.

The AbbVie drug intended to treat rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease and other afflictions is one of those touted endlessly on television and streaming services. "Humira helps people achieve remission that can last," an actress intones excitedly in one of the many spots. "You can experience few or no symptoms."

This month, The Lund Report, the health care information nonprofit, reported that Oregonians spent more on Humira than any other drug for the third year in a row.

The 10 insurance carriers that report to Oregon's Prescription Drug Price Transparency Program said that \$93.5 million was paid for 19,225 Oregon prescriptions over the last year, according to the report.

Clearly, AbbVie made a business decision to plunge heavily into consumer advertising — a practice that is conducted in only four countries in the world. And only two countries, the United States and New Zealand, allow

pharmaceuticals to advertise claims about product benefits directly to the consumer.

The Oregon prescription numbers explain why pharmaceutical makers are so keen to place their products in the minds of consumers. It explains why they spend so much money lobbying your representatives in Washington, D.C., to be allowed to do so.

How much do they spend?

A study published by JAMA Internal Medicine in 2020 found that pharmaceutical companies and health product companies spent \$4.7 billion, an average of \$233 million a year over a 20-year period, to lobby the federal government; \$414 million to contribute to presidential and congressional candidates, national party committees and others; and \$877 million to state candidates and committees.

AbbVie, which is headquartered in corporate-friendly Delaware, is publicly held, which means it must detail its financial condition in detailed reports to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. In the most recently reported quarter, ending Sept. 30, 2021, the company said Humira, one of multiple drugs



An ad for Humira, a drug used to treat arthritis, Crohn's disease and other afflictions.

AbbVie is selling, generated revenues of \$4.6 billion in the United States, and a paltry \$812 million in the rest of the world.

Clearly, advertising pays.

By the way, the cash price for a prescription for two Humira kits of 40 mg doses is about \$6,200, according to Drugs.com and GoodRx.com.

If you're fearful of getting sick because of how much it will cost, and you wonder how it is that countries in Europe and elsewhere can treat patients for so much less than they charge in the United States, pharmaceutical sales and

advertising offers one important clue.

Even if you accept that it's appropriate for a pharmaceutical company to pitch its products to consumers, rather than to health care providers — which it isn't — you have to wonder how many of those 19,225 Oregon prescriptions achieved the results patients hoped for.

Is this the system we want? Ask your elected representative if this drug delivery system is right for you.

Mike Francis is a longtime Oregon journalist who has extensively covered military and veterans issues. He resides on Astoria's South Slope.



MIKE FRANCIS