

OXBOW: Rehabilitation could boost critical habitat and fish returns farther up river

Continued from 1A

70 percent of the trees that were planted have survived, and some species — like black cottonwoods and hybrid poplars — have take especially well to the land.

The trees are watered with 15 miles of drip irrigation using the Bureau of Reclamation’s water right. Jon Staldine, executive director of the watershed council, said the design isn’t perfect, but the project has been a valuable experience and sets the stage for bigger picture work on Oxbow.

“We’re looking at the site not only on a piecemeal basis, but on a holistic scale,” Staldine said. “We want to put together a comprehensive plan on how restoration should happen out here.”

With the majority of land in the Umatilla Basin still privately owned, Staldine said opportunities for large-scale restoration like Oxbow don’t come along very often.

The Oxbow property was once divided into three different parcels before the Bureau of Reclamation purchased the land and water rights



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Black cottonwood trees are one of the varieties of trees planted that are doing well at the Oxbow site near Hermiston.

in 2000. The acquisition was done under the Umatilla Basin Project Act, which directs the agency to manage the site for fishery resources.

Since then, the bureau has had no money allocated to do anything with the property, said Umatilla Field Manager Boris Belchoff.

“We do what we can through part-

nerships,” Belchoff said. “Whatever funding they can get to do things like this, we support it,” Belchoff said.

The watershed council secured a grant for more than \$55,000 from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board in 2013 to do the first flood-plain project. That year’s Leadership Hermiston class then raised addi-

tional donations and recruited volunteers to put the trees in the ground.

Around the same time, the city of Hermiston finished a 1.5-mile paved trail from Riverfront Park to Elm Street, which Belchoff said was a benefit to both the people and the land.

“It provides a path of least resistance,” he said. “This is Hermiston’s local wilderness area for people who just like to hike through and look at wildlife.”

Ken Thompson, who lives in Hermiston and serves on the watershed council board of directors, said there is still plenty of work left to do. The scoping group came together to identify and prioritize new ways to enhance the property.

Talks are still in the early stages, Thompson said, but possible projects include removing invasive weeds and non-native Russian olive trees, improving riparian vegetation and reconnecting historic flood channels to the river, which would create new wetland habitat for fish and waterfowl.

“I’d like to see (Oxbow) remain as a keystone wildlife project in the

city of Hermiston,” Thompson said.

Bill Duke, district fish biologist for ODFW, sat in on the first scoping meeting in November. He said Oxbow provides spawning and rearing habitat for coho and fall chinook up the Umatilla River, as well as overwintering ground for steelhead.

“It’s a migration corridor for all our salmon and steelhead species. Adults and juveniles both move through there,” he said.

Rehabbing Oxbow could boost a critical piece of habitat in the lower basin, which might boost fish returns farther up river, Duke said. But results won’t come overnight.

Staldine said it is possible that Oxbow, if done right, could become a model for environmental rehabilitation in the lower basin.

“There are not that many opportunities in the lower Umatilla basin to approach large-scale riparian restoration,” he said. “I’d love it, if we can get this partnership to work out.”

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WORLD BRIEFLY

New draft climate deal emerges as Paris talks end

LE BOURGET, France (AP) — French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Thursday presented a new draft of a global climate accord that showed headway on some key issues and stalemate on others as the talks outside Paris headed into the final stretch.

The 27-page draft — two pages shorter than a previous version — included a long-term goal of keeping global warming “well below” 3.6 degrees F.

The draft also said governments would aim to peak the emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases “as soon as possible” and strive to reach “emissions neutrality” by the second half of the century.

That was weaker language than in previous drafts that included more specific emissions cuts and timeframes. Emissions neutrality wasn’t defined in the text. Previous versions have included similar terms that are generally understood to mean no more emissions than the Earth can absorb.

The issue appeared far from settled, however, with one negotiator from a developed country saying his delegation would “push back” on the long-term goal. He spoke on condition of anonymity because the talks were ongoing.

Fabius, who is leading the talks, told negotiators to review the draft and come back in two hours to continue the talks. The Paris conference was scheduled to end on Friday, but the annual U.N. talks rarely finish on time.

Diplomats from 196 governments are trying to forge a global pact in Paris to slow global warming by collectively slashing emissions, mostly from the

burning oil, coal and gas for energy.

The biggest challenge is to define the responsibilities of wealthy nations, which have polluted the most historically, and developing economies including China and India where emissions are growing the fastest.

U.S. commandos say no to women in special ops jobs

WASHINGTON (AP) — The men in the U.S. military’s most dangerous jobs care little about political correctness or gender equality. And they have a message for their political leadership.

When they are fighting in the shadows or bleeding on the battlefield, women have no place on their teams.

In blunt and, at times, profanity-laced answers to a voluntary survey conducted by the Rand Corp., more than 7,600 of America’s special operations forces spoke with nearly one voice. Allowing women to serve in Navy SEAL, Army Delta or other commando units could hurt their effectiveness and lower the standards, and it may drive men away from the dangerous posts.

An overwhelming majority of those who agreed to respond to the RAND survey said they believe women don’t have the physical strength or mental toughness to do the grueling jobs.

Some of the broader conclusions of the survey, taken from May through July 2014, were disclosed by The Associated Press earlier this year, but the detailed results and comments written by respondents had not been released.

Half the men who got the survey responded. People who feel most strongly about an issue are often more inclined to answer surveys.

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