

Non-native crayfish invading Crater Lake

By DAMIAN MANN
Mail Tribune

MEDFORD — Underwater barriers in Crater Lake are being floated as one idea to slow the invasion of millions of non-native crayfish that are threatening a salamander known as the Mazama newt.

“It’s still early in the invasion,” said Dr. Sudeep Chandra, a biology professor at the University of Nevada in Reno. “We’re talking about millions instead of hundreds of millions.”

Crayfish were introduced to the lake by humans in 1915 to provide food for non-native fish. An explosion in the number of non-native species threatens not only the newt, but ultimately the awe-inspiring clarity of Crater Lake itself.

The metal barriers, which would be about 18 inches tall, would be installed along the lake bed at strategic spots, running perpendicular to the 21-mile-long shoreline, sort of like spokes in a wheel.

About two-thirds of the shoreline around the lake is now crowded with crayfish, so the barriers would be

positioned to separate crayfish from the remaining newt habitats.

Chandra was chairman of a scientific panel that is working with Crater Lake National Park officials to find ways to slow down the crayfish invasion. He said Lake Tahoe in California has an even worse infestation of crayfish. One of the strategies was to work with local companies to harvest the crayfish for sale as food, Chandra said.

By next summer, Chandra said the urgency of the problem at Crater Lake requires action be taken quickly. In the winter, the crayfish descend into deep waters but return to near the shoreline in the summer, Chandra said.

His panel suggested finding a way to sequester newt breeding areas just outside the lake. Installing the metal barriers, which likely would be made of aluminum, is another option but would require extensive environmental analysis.

Another conservation suggestion is to do a DNA analysis of the newts to preserve the information in case they don’t survive. “That shows how dire this is,” said Chandra.

Unfortunately, getting rid of the crayfish completely is almost impossible with current techniques, Chandra said. Traps have lured in only limited numbers of crayfish.

The crayfish breathe through gills, and scuttle along the bottom of the lake.

Newts, which are about 8 inches long, were the top predators in the lake for thousands of years, gorging themselves on insects and snails. Now crayfish compete for the same food sources, and also intimidate and sometimes devour the newts.

“You can hardly turn a rock over without finding a juvenile or adult crayfish,” said Mark Buktenica, the park’s aquatic biologist.

“We’re looking at barriers to slow down the invasion.”

Visitors wouldn’t see the barrier above the water line, Buktenica said. Scuba divers likely would install them but are limited to a depth of 30 meters, or about 100 feet. Crayfish have been found at 250 meters, or about 800 feet, however.

Wizard Island is the location where crayfish were first introduced,

and the barriers would be placed on either side of it.

“It’s probably the most viable option for slowing down the expansion of crayfish,” Buktenica said.

Crater Lake’s reputation for its crystal clear waters is also threatened, and it started a century ago by those working hard to keep the lake as a tourist destination.

“It’s ironic,” Buktenica said. “People who dedicated themselves to the preservation of Crater Lake were under the impression at the time that the introduction of these fish would make it a more desirable place for people to come.”

As the number of crayfish and fish increases, the delicate biology of the lake could be overwhelmed. Already scientists have seen an alarming jump in crayfish since 1980.

Buktenica said he hasn’t seen any signs of murky waters yet, but last year he noticed an increase in algae along the shoreline. As time passes and the biology of the lake changes, it could arrive at a tipping point that would be a disappointment to visitors, Buktenica said.



SKI REPORT

Spout Springs
Tollgate, Ore.
CLOSED

Anthony Lakes
North Powder, Ore.
New snow: 10"
Base depth: 35"
Conditions: Excellent.
Lots of new, powdery snow and good coverage.

Ski Bluewood
Dayton, Wash.
OPENED FRIDAY
New snow: 3"
Base depth: 30"
Conditions: Early season conditions, but a week of strong precip allowed the ski hill to open.

Ski Fergi
Joseph, Ore.
New snow: Some
Conditions: Good snow in region.

Mt. Hood Meadows
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: 12"
Base depth: 55"
Conditions: Dumping snow mid to late week, powder skiing plentiful. Most lifts open.

***Most area ski hills begin their holiday schedules on Monday. Visit their websites for information about lift times and dates of operation.**



Dave Ellifrit/The Center for Whale Research via AP

In this Dec. 16 photo provided by the Center for Whale Research, a new baby orca whale is seen swimming alongside an adult whale in the Haro Strait between San Juan Islands, Wash., and Vancouver Island. The new baby is the eighth born since last December to the small, endangered population of killer whales that spend time in the inland waters of Washington state, according to the Center for Whale Research, which keeps a census of the orcas for the federal government.

Another baby: 8th endangered orca spotted in Puget Sound

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Whale researchers are celebrating the birth of another baby orca in Puget Sound, the first time in decades the population has experienced such a boom.

The new baby is the eighth born since last December to the small, endangered population of killer whales that spend time in the inland waters of Washington state, according to the Center for Whale Research, which keeps a census of the orcas for the federal government.

“It’s wonderful,” said Ken Balcomb, senior scientist with the center at Friday Harbor. “We’re hoping this is the future.”

Decades ago, there were more than 140 of the unique animals known as southern resident killer whales. That number declined to a low of 71 in the 1970s when dozens of the mammals were captured to be displayed at marine parks and aquariums across the country.

Despite a decade of research, protection and recovery efforts, the animals continue to struggle primarily due to a lack of food, pollution and disturbances by marine vessels. The population is now at 84. There were 77 animals last December.

The newest orca, estimated to be a few weeks old, was spotted earlier this month near San Juan Island by a member of the Pacific Whale Watch Association. Researchers couldn’t initially determine conclusively from photographs whether the

whale was new.

Photos taken Wednesday, however, helped confirm that the eyepatch and other markings on the baby were distinct. Each Puget Sound orca is identified by unique black and white markings or variations in their fin shapes.

The baby is the fifth born to the J-pod, one of three groups of Puget Sound orcas. It was spotted swimming with its mother, grandmother and other family members in Haro Strait.

Balcomb said the baby boom could be due to the fairly good salmon year on the Columbia River. “I think that sort of allowed these mothers to bring their babies to full term,” he said.

Researchers won’t know for some time if the baby is male or female.

Wolf provision left out of massive congressional budget

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A proposal that would have taken gray wolves in the western Great Lakes region and Wyoming off the endangered list did not make it into a massive year-end congressional tax and spending package, an omission that surprised its backers but was welcomed Wednesday by groups that support maintaining federal protections.

U.S. Reps. Collin Peterson, D-Minnesota, Reid Ribble, R-Wisconsin, and some other lawmakers had hoped to attach a rider to return management of wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Wyoming to the states, which could have opened the door to a resumption of wolf hunting in those places. The provision would have undone federal court decisions that restored the animals’ protected status in the four states despite repeated efforts by the federal government to remove them from the list.

Peterson said budget negotiators dropped the provision from the final bill, which was unveiled late Tuesday, because the White House had threatened a veto if the bill contained any changes to the Endangered Species Act.

“Obviously I’m disappointed,” Peterson said. “We thought it wasn’t going to be a problem because the Fish and Wildlife Service was supporting it.”

Peterson, the ranking Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee, said supporters will have to regroup and decide on their next step. He said a stand-alone bill probably could pass the House but he’s not sure about the Senate. It’s also possible an appeals court could overturn the lower court decisions, he added.

While livestock interests supported removing federal protections for wolves, wildlife groups lobbied against it.

“It certainly was a

pleasant surprise,” said Brett Hartl, endangered species policy director with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Backers of the rider were trying to use a tactic that succeeded in 2011 when Congress removed wolves in Idaho, Montana and sections of Utah, Washington and Oregon from the list.

“Cooler heads prevailed in Congress,” said Wayne Pacelle, CEO of the Humane Society of the United States. He said a letter written by Sens. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey, and Barbara Boxer, D-California, and signed by 23 other senators including Gary Peters, D-Michigan, helped make the difference.

BRIEFLY

Bend recreation group asks for access to Mt. Bachelor

BEND (AP) — A Bend nonprofit group is asking for more access to Mt. Bachelor’s Nordic ski trails as snow conditions at lower elevations have been disappointing.

The Bulletin reports that Bend Endurance Academy, which runs outdoor recreation programs for children and teens, is again in talks with officials at Mt. Bachelor ski area to allow students access to Mt. Bachelor Nordic Center.

Bend Endurance Academy approached Mt. Bachelor officials in 2009, but was denied access because students from Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation and high school Nordic ski teams already use the trails. The academy has been running its Nordic programs at Virginia Meissner Sno-park.

Mt. Bachelor President and General Manager Dave Rathbun says they are working to accommodate BEA while ensuring the trails aren’t overcrowded.

Missing sledders, including 2 kids, found on Mt. Hood

GOVERNMENT CAMP (AP) — Clackamas County authorities say a couple and two young children who went missing after leaving for a sledding trip to Mt. Hood have been found.

KGW-TV reports that the missing group had left for the mountain Saturday and failed to return as planned. Twenty-year-old Jose Correa, his 17-year-old girlfriend and two children, ages 2 and 5, were found stuck in the snow Sunday. They were reported to be fine and did not require medical attention.

Family members of Correa had contacted

authorities after the group didn’t make it home.

Snowmobilers located the four stuck in snow in an area near Timothy Lake and reunited them with family members.

Walla Walla County cattle feeder fined \$50,000

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — A cattle feeding operation in Walla Walla County has been fined \$50,000 for failing to manage air pollution.

The Washington Department of Ecology says the facility allowed small particles into the air, including dust and dried manure. Those particles can cause health problems for some people.

The agency said Wednesday that Simplot Feeders violated air quality rules which require management of dust and other pollution. Simplot Feeders can appeal the fine to the state’s Pollution Control Hearings Board within 30 days.

Rescued sea turtle slowly improving at aquarium

NEWPORT (AP) — The outlook is improving for an endangered sea turtle that washed ashore at Pacific City last week.

The Oregon Coast Aquarium says the Olive Ridley sea turtle warmed to 68 degrees as of Wednesday — up 11 degrees from when she arrived at its rehabilitation unit. The aquarium says the turtle’s temperature much reach 75 degrees before she is ready to leave triage.

The turtle was stranded during last week’s thunderstorm. It earned her the nickname “Lightning.”

Congratulations East Oregonian Christmas Tree Ornament Contest Winners!



Kendall Moore - Age 11





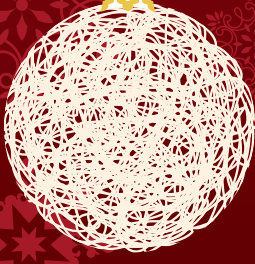
McKinley Moore - Age 6





Aislin Jo McFarlane - Age 3





EAST OREGONIAN