California condors may be headed to Hells Canyon

By RICH LANDERS
The (Spokane) Spokesman Review

Idaho's Nez Perce Tribe as been awarded a $200,000 federal grant to pursue reintroducing the California condor in Hells Canyon.

Based on California's example, the use of lead ammunition for hunting is a potential issue in a swath of Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

The Nez Perce grant is a share of nearly $5 million in Tribal Wildlife Grants awarded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fund 29 Native American fish and wildlife projects. The federal agency's announcement was made last week.

Of those funds, $964,163 will be awarded to tribes in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

"The 'Condors in Hells Canyon: an assessment of habitat and threats to successful reintroduction' project will conduct comprehensive field-based assessments of California condor nesting, roosting and foraging habitat within the greater Hells Canyon ecosystem," said FWS Director Dan Ashe in announcing the grants.

"The study will also provide valuable data on potential threats to condor reintroduction to the region and is the first step in a multi-level process to reintroduce condors to the region."

If you hunt in Idaho, this should alarm you," says Robert Deen, a Boise outdoor writer who has some perspective because of his cabin and connections in California.

Lead ammunition was originally banned in a portion of the condor's range in Southern California. The problem was that condors — scavengers by nature — were being poisoned by eating lead in the gut piles and carcasses of animals shot by hunters.

The concept was seized upon by anti-gun legislators, who expanded the lead ban statewide. Since condors aren't found statewide, the rationale was changed to a "health issue," claiming that children were at risk of lead poisoning from eating game.... This led many California sportsmen to conclude that it was simply a ruse to further the state's anti-gun agenda.

Photo courtesy San Diego Zoo

California condor

However, many shooters are finding positive results in shooting copper bullets in terms of accuracy and performance. If cost and availability issues can be answered, the concern could be reduced.

Since 2003, the tribal wildlife grants have provided more than $72 million to Native American tribes for more than 420 conservation projects administered by federally recognized tribes.

The grants are provided exclusively to federally recognized tribal governments and are made possible under the Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2002 through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant program. Proposals for the 2017 grant cycle will be due in the fall of 2016. For additional information about Native American conservation projects and the Tribal Wildlife Grants application process, visit .

Other grants in the Pacific Northwest this year include:

- The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde will get $124,240 to restore Oregon oak habitat at Rattlesnake Butte Wildlife Area.
- The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians will receive $96,635 for the Tenmile Lakes Basin Lamprey Conservation Project.
- The Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe will get $187,125 to study and document the re-colonization process for lamprey in the Elwha River.
- The Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe was awarded $187,400 for a population dynamics study on Mountain goats in the North Cascades.
- The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe will get $199,500 to manage black bear populations for sustainability and hunter opportunity in the White River watershed.

Whales pass the Oregon Coast

By LYRA FONTAINE
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — Locals and spring break visitors had the opportunity to spot gray whales swimming north, part of the 6,000-mile round-trip migration the mammals make each year.

Ecola State Park was one of the 24 designated sites for the Spring Whale Watch Week hosted by Oregon State Parks and Recreation.

About 300 volunteers were stationed along the coast last week, helping state park visitors identify and learn about the expected 20,000 gray whales heading to summer feeding grounds in the Arctic's Bering and Chukchi seas.

Volunteers spotted 1,552 gray whales statewide, the state reported.

Ecola State Park whale-watching volunteers had already spotted 14 whales on the morning of March 22.

"It's a good day to see them," said volunteer Carl Hosticka, from Tualatin, using binoculars to look for whale spouts. "The sun illuminates the spouts so they will be easier to see."

Gray whales will keep swimming past the coast until October or November, Oregon State Parks and Recreation ranger Luke Parsons said. Resident gray whales that stay in the central Oregon Coast area also show up later in spring.

"These whales are the first-wave migration, the males and the immature females," Parsons said. "The majority of the mothers and the calves start showing up in late April and May."

When it gets dark in the Arctic around October, gray whales head back south. Hosticka also volunteered for the Winter Whale Watch Week in December, when gray whales can be seen traveling from the Arctic to lagoons in Baja California, Mexico, where they mate and give birth.

Volunteers, trained with the Whale Watching Spoken Here program, taught visitors about whale migration and feeding habits.

Gray whales, which prefer to eat organisms near the bottom of the ocean such as small crustaceans, do not eat much while migrating.

"There isn't much for them to eat along here," Hosticka said. "They bulk up and swim day and night because they can sleep with half their brain."

How long does it take for gray whales to migrate to the Arctic? It depends on the whale.

"Some of them are in a hurry and it will take them three or four months, and for some it takes even longer," Parsons said. "The mothers will travel quite a bit slower with their little babies. It's nonstop for several months just to get there. They're dedicated animals."

The length of an average female gray whale, 45 feet, was displayed in the grass using measuring tape. Females are usually larger than males, and their milk is rich, made up of more than 50 percent fat, Hosticka said.

Instead of teeth, gray whales have rows of bristly plates called baleens, which allow them to filter the food and water they scoop off the ocean floor with their mouths.

On the journey north from Baja California, the babies continue to nurse and begin learning how to eat.

"The mothers are teaching them tricks of the trade," Parsons said.

Lyra Fontaine/EO Media Group

Volunteer Carl Hosticka helps visitors scan for whales.

Lyra Fontaine/EO Media Group

Whale bones and teeth, or baleens, displayed by volunteer Carl Hosticka.

Lyra Fontaine/EO Media Group

Whale watchers at Ecola State Park have binoculars at ready.

Boy returns wallet he caught fishing

By GLENN PUIT
McAlester News-Capital

EUFALA, Okla. — Brandon Jameson was fishing with his family Saturday morning on Lake Eufaula — trying out his brand new bait caster — when he felt a tug at the end of his line.

"I thought I had a fish so I started to reel it in," the 12-year-old tells the *McAlester News-Capital.*

But as Brandon pulled in his catch from the waters near Crowder, he looked down and realized he didn't have a fish on the line after all. Instead, it was a billfold hanging from his hook.

"I caught a wallet!" Jameson yelled to his mom and dad, Rachel and Body Jameson.

The Jamesons immediately called law enforcement to report Brandon's catch.

Four weeks earlier, McAlester area resident Lance Rollins was fishing from his fishing boat on Lake Eufaula, near Crowder, when he realized his wallet was missing.

The billfold contained gift cards, credit cards and some cash.

"I was fishing about a month ago and I was careless," Rollins said. "I had my wallet in my pullover hoodie. I took it off when I was out there fishing and I didn't realize at that time I'd lost it. I didn't realize until I got back to the boat ramp that I didn't have my wallet and I just gave up on it."

Rollins quickly signed off on the fact that the wallet was lost forever. He went about replacing the credit cards and his drivers license in the coming weeks.

He said he was shocked when, on Saturday morning, he received a visitor while working at his job at the McAlester Regional Wellness Center. The visitor was a law enforcement officer who was there to return his muddy wallet with all the credit cards and soggy cash still inside.

The officer provided Rollins with the name of the boy who caught the wallet on the lake, along with the names of the boy's parents.

"I couldn't believe it," Rollins said.

Rollins called the Jamesons and asked them to stop by his place of work. When the Jamesons arrived at the wellness center Rollins gave them a big thank you along with the soggy cash from the wallet.

"An outstanding young man and outstanding parents," Rollins said. "A lot of people wouldn't do that. A lot of people would have never turned it in intact with all the money in it. Gift cards. It's pretty neat. They are going to get the money."

Body Jameson said there was never any question as to what they should do about the wallet. Rachel Jameson added "we were obviously going to try to do the right thing and teach him (our son) to do the right thing, too."

Brandon Jameson said he was glad to help.

"It feels good to do the right thing," Brandon Jameson said.

REI to move headquarters

SEATTLE (AP) — Officials with REI say they've chosen Bellevue as the site of their new headquarters.

The Seattle Times reports the outdoors co-op headquartered in Kent since 1988 has been looking for a new campus.

REI said Tuesday it has signed a nonbinding letter of intent to develop eight acres in Bellevue, between State Route 520 and Bel-Red Road.

It has about 1,200 employees at its headquarters and currently has other offices in Bellevue and in the Georgetown area of Seattle.

The co-op should know by summer if the deal can move forward.

If the deal is finalized, the relocation could take place in 2020.

SKI REPORT

Spout Springs
Tollgate, Ore.
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Anthony Lakes
North Powder, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 82"
Conditions: Sunday is the last day of the season. Nordic closed. Spring conditions.

Ski Bluewood
Dayton, Wash.
New snow: None
Base depth: 83"
Conditions: Spring

Ski Fergi
Joseph, Ore.
Conditions: Fergie Fest Apr. 2, ski races and ski golf, lawn chair race at 4 p.m.

Mt. Hood Meadows
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 120"
Conditions: Surface Conditions Groom and off piste are soft, spring snow.

SPOUT SPRINGS
SKI AREA
Friday: 5 pm to 9 pm
Saturday: 9 am to 9 pm
Sunday: 9 am to 4 pm
All Holidays: 9 am to 4 pm
Night skiing starts January 1st and is Friday 5 pm - 9 pm & Saturday 5 pm - 9 pm

Have an adventure story you'd like to tell?
Or photos you'd like to share of your steelhead or elk, or mountaintop view?
Email Tim Trainor at ttrrainor@eastoregonian.com, or call him at 541-966-0835.