

FISH: 62 hatchery programs are funded under the Mitchell Act

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vancy argues hatchery-raised fish are actually harming endangered salmon, steelhead and bull trout and their habitat by competing for resources, while spawning with wild fish and genetically influencing future generations.

The conservancy wants the government to take a closer look at hatcheries before going ahead with payments under the Mitchell Act. Shortly after the suit was filed, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission — which represents the Umatilla, Yakama, Warm Springs and Nez Perce tribes — fired back, saying hatcheries are a valuable tool for fish recovery and calling the conservancy's challenge a "distraction."

Paul Lumley, executive director of CRITFC, said the tribes are working toward hatchery reform, and believes they've made positive strides over the year that have helped restored fisheries in rivers where salmon and steelhead were once depleted — such as the Umatilla River.

"Hatcheries themselves are not pushing these runs toward extinction. It was because they were pushed toward extinction that we have hatcheries," Lumley said. "This litigation puts all hatcheries into one program that demonizes them, when in fact many are beneficial."

There are 62 hatchery programs funded under the Mitchell Act, which Lumley said were promised to the tribes to mitigate impacts from building the Columbia River dams. Historically, the river had 17 million returning adult salmon. Those numbers are now somewhere around 2 million.

To quit producing hatchery fish would have reverberations throughout the basin, Lumley said.

"I think it would have a huge effect on fisheries both along the Coast and up and down the Columbia River for tribes and non-tribes alike," he said.

The Wild Fish Conservancy, however, argues the programs knowingly harm native fish and their habitat, from structural failures at the hatcheries themselves to the loss of genetic diversity from outbreeding to increased risk of disease, competition and predation.

Earlier this year, a study by Oregon State University on steelhead showed hatchery and wild fish are, in fact, different at the DNA level. Outbreeding caused rapid genetic changes in juveniles, even after just one generation. Researchers are still working to determine just what those differences are.

Yet, with few exceptions, the National Marine Fisheries Service hasn't issued updated biological opinions on the programs since 1999, according to the lawsuit.

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires agencies make sure hatchery operations aren't jeopardizing fish before they can authorizing funding.

"It's been 17 years; NMFS needs to step up, initiate consultation and put the needed solutions in place," said Kurt Beardslee, executive director of the Wild Fish Conservancy on March 31. "We are investing millions of state and federal dollars every year on salmon recovery, and at the same time spending millions of public dollars on hatchery programs that are compromising that investment."

Mike Matylewich, fisheries management director for CRITFC, said the lawsuit paints all hatcheries with the same brush when the tribes have made a careful point of genetic analysis and selecting the right broodstock to avoid diminishing fitness of the fish.

Some hatcheries have experimented with new designs intended to train juveniles before they are released into the wild. The Yakama Nation is seeing positive results so far from work at the Cle Elum hatchery in Washington, Matylewich said, as well as the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery in Idaho.

According to a previous report, the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery attempts to mimic stream beds to help juveniles develop better camouflage from predators. Sunken logs and river rock bottoms promote food and hiding areas beneath the water's surface, which prevents them from becoming "like shiny nickels" to kingfishers and mergansers.

By shutting off funding from the Mitchell Act, Matylewich said it would shut off practices that are proving to recover fish runs.

"The people who did destroy habitat then get off the hook, so to speak," he said.

Lumley said critics need look no further than Umatilla River spring chinook to see how hatcheries have played an important role in reestablishing salmon that were once totally decimated. Now, he said people fish side by side in downtown Pendleton.

Jeremy Wolf, CRITFC chairman and Umatilla tribal member, said the conservancy's lawsuit is "based on flawed logic that hatcheries caused the decline of wild salmon abundance."

"The tribes have demonstrated with their own successful programs how carefully managed hatcheries can rebuild abundant naturally spawning runs in our rivers and streams," Wolf said in an earlier statement. "Those truly interested in recovery are better served by putting their efforts into restoring the wild rivers that salmon need."

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COUNCIL: Marks voted for a permanent ban on marijuana sales

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South Hill and Riverside.

During a series of interviews between the East Oregonian editorial board and city council candidates, Marks and Tibbets were the only candidates that discussed marijuana.

Marks was one of four councilors to vote for a permanent ban on marijuana sales twice, before she and other pro-ban councilors relented and agreed to put the issue up to a ballot referendum in November.

Marks still has her doubts about allowing marijuana sales if voters reverse the ban, questioning the logistics of running a business that can't put money in the bank and marijuana's legality under federal law.

"We still have an issue around federal regulations. I would agree say to (voters), 'Would you really want me to break the law?' Please, honestly. Not that your vote isn't important, and not that your voice isn't important. It is. Righteously so. But your voice is saying to me:

"Break the law."

Tibbets took the opposite tact, saying that marijuana sales needed to be embraced by the city.

"I was hearing something about a change in the state law where a city would be able to assess something like 3 percent tax on it," he said. "Exploit that. Work with the people in your community and work out some good regulations that keep everybody safe and everybody happy."

Although new to politics, Tibbets first garnered attention when he was convicted of a hate crime in 2010.

Tibbets earned 45 days in jail and five years probation for head-butting a man and using an anti-Semitic slur during the downtown wiener dog races.

Tibbets said his crime is a matter of public record, and if a voter looked at his record since the incident, it would show that he has stayed free of criminal activity since then.

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BRONZES: Travel Pendleton will maintain the trail

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audio narrative featuring voice actors that will play the historical figures and talk about the historical context in first person.

Pat Beard, Travel Pendleton's event recruiter, said the trail would be a boon to the city's tourism industry.

"Once we have this tool and that statue tells you its story while you're standing there, they become living, breathing things as opposed to an inanimate piece of art," he said.

Beard said the attraction will keep tourists in town longer and contribute to the city's lodging taxes.

He added that Travel Pendleton will maintain the trail and make updates pending arts committee approval.

Because half the money was derived from the urban renewal district, the council needed to approve that

allocation as the Pendleton Development Commission.

The commission approved the allocation 5-1, the lone opposing vote coming from Councilor Neil Brown, who preferred that the entire appropriation come from the arts fund. Councilors John Brenne, Al Plute and Tom Young were absent.

Later during the city council meeting, the council unanimously approved the appropriation from the arts fund.

The council also decided to postpone a decision on a 5-year lease with Blue Mountain Community to continue using the baseball field on the former Blue Mountain Recover Center property.

The city of Pendleton became the landlord for the baseball field when the state turned over control of the BMRC property earlier this year. Under the terms of the

lease, BMCC covers rent by maintaining the baseball fields and paying the insurance.

The point of contention for some councilors was that the city couldn't opt out of the agreement unless BMCC defaulted on the lease.

The state agreed to clear the shuttered mental health facility from the property so the city could use the land for industrial development.

If a company approached city officials about obtaining the property and clearing out the baseball field, councilors argued, the city would have no way to accommodate the potential employer.

Diane Drebin, BMCC vice president of student affairs, attended the meeting and said the prospect of forcing BMCC off the field on short notice would create uncertainty in the baseball program and hurt recruiting efforts.

"To have only 180 days to

find a new field, that doesn't do well for the program," she said. "It could bring a program to its knees."

Instead of the standard 180 days, Drebin said BMCC would need 2-3 years notice to give the program time to find a new field.

While many councilors were amenable to a longer notice period, Paul Chalmers said a prospective industrial company may not want to jump through too many hoops.

"If you got somebody looking for a place to site, they're looking for shovel-ready sites," he said. "That's the reality of it. Port of Morrow has 12,000 shovel-ready acres ready to go."

The council ultimately decided to table the issue while staff renegotiate the contract with BMCC.

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ECHO: Has amenities, but still lacks a grocery

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like Christmas light contests and tree giveaways.

It hasn't brought a grocery store or gas station to town, or allowed the few Main Street businesses to open more than two or three days a week. But it has gained Echo a reputation as a "hidden gem" of Eastern Oregon, complete with vineyards, tasting rooms, a golf course, camping, a museum, antique store, highly rated eateries and a truly historic downtown.

"People come here and they rave," Berry said.

Arguably the biggest partners with the city in developing Echo's downtown have been Lloyd and Lois Piercy. The pair, who own Echo West Vineyard and Sno Road Winery, have renovated several of Echo's historic buildings and are in the process of restoring more. Their projects — past and present — include the old one-room schoolhouse, the former grocery store, a downtown garage, the historic Koontz building and the former Echo Hotel. They also hold several events each year that draw tourists in, including the Red 2 Red bike race across their land and an annual car show that benefits the high school shop class.

"We love Echo, we love the historical aspects of Echo, and it just kind of snowballed from there," Lois said.

She said preserving the buildings' historical aspects while also adapting them to modern — uses like the winery — take a lot of time and money. But the Piercys enjoy hearing from past and present Echo residents who remember the buildings in their glory days.

"I love the memories and the nostalgia that just pour in," Lois said.

The Piercys also love the rich soil around Echo, which Lois said has produced "wonderful" grapes in the vineyard.

In addition to being good for



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The historic Koontz has been restored and transformed into the Sno Road Winery.

growing grapes, Echo has also proved fertile for trees and flowers. The city regularly wins awards from the America in Bloom and Tree City U.S.A. organizations, some of which are almost unheard of for a town so small.

"We've played on that and tried to build up community pride," Berry said.

One of the many events focused on building up that community pride was Wednesday afternoon at the Echo Tree Fair. It seemed to be working, too. As elementary school students played leaf identification bingo, answered questions about trees and made rubbings of bark, they demonstrated a sound knowledge of trees and a pride in Echo's beauty.

"Trees are used to make lots of things," fourth-grader Abby Gaede said in answer to a question about why it's good for a city to have trees. "We've actually won Tree City U.S.A."

Echo School fifth grade teacher Rick Thew, who on Wednesday was in the city hall ballroom teaching students about the effects of forest fires, said those types of community events were one of the things he enjoyed about Echo.

"I like the small-school community aspect, where everyone is watching out for everyone," he said.

Thew doesn't actually live in Echo,

however, because when he began working for the school district he and his family couldn't find a house in Echo that fit their needs. Now they commute to the school every day from Stanfield.

Thew's living situation points to one of the ironies of Echo: It's a "bedroom community" with a scarcity of bedrooms.

Berry said some people don't like hearing Echo categorized as a bedroom community, but the fact that the majority of its residents are either retired or working in a different community means it's "just a fact of life."

However, Echo isn't really seeing new housing development other than a new house or two a year on Echo Heights, north of the city. That means people like Thew — attracted to Echo for its beauty, amenities and small-town vibe — can find themselves out of luck when looking for housing that fits their needs.

Fortunately, Berry pointed out, Stanfield is less than five miles away and Hermiston is about a nine-minute drive in good conditions.

It's a good thing, because even though Echo residents can get a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon from Echo Ridge Cellars or duck gnocchi from the Wheat & Barley Pub, there's nowhere in town to buy an egg or a chicken breast.

Peggy Haines, an Echo resident who shops at the Main Street Market in Stanfield, said as much as she loves Echo's quaint, small-town feel that's the one thing she would like to see change about it: a market or grocery store.

"It would be nice if you're cooking and need some flour or sugar to just run to the store," she said.

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