

BLOOMIN' BLUES



Photo by Bruce Barnes

Common willow herb

Few notice flower in crowded undergrowth

Name: Common willow herb
Scientific name: *Epilobium ciliatum*

This small plant is found in wet places throughout most of North America. Even though it is rather common, few people have probably seen it as it is usually crowded in among other plants in dense undergrowth, and has little to catch someone's eye, even when blooming.

The plant is generally less than 6 inches tall. Its leaves are usually 2-4 inches long, lance-shaped, with finely serrate edges. The flowers are pink or white, and about a quarter to a half inch wide.

There are four petals, each with a deep notch at the tip, giving the flower the appearance of having four pairs of narrow petals. Each flower looks like it is attached at the tip of a long slender branch up to 4 inches long, arising from the main stem at the point where the leaves are also attached.

Technically, what look like branches are instead an

essential part of the flower. They are actually slender linear pods where the seeds are formed. As the flowers mature, the petals drop off, leaving the pods looking like bare stems that some woodland creature bit the tips off of.

The common name, "willow herb," comes from the leaves looking similar to the leaves of most willows. *Epilobium* is from the Greek "epi" meaning upon, and "lobos" for pod, referring to the flower placed upon the tip of the seed pod. *Ciliatum* is a reference to fine hairs, cilia, which form longitudinal lines along the main stems.

This plant species has been used by various Indian tribes to relieve leg pains and for a poultice for muscle cramps. One tribe used it to relieve diarrhea.

Where to find: Look for this plant in damp shady places in the woods, usually crowded in among other plants enjoying a cool spot with plenty of water.

— Bruce Barnes writes *Bloomin' Blues* weekly

BRIEFLY

Fall salmon seasons begin on Columbia

HERMISTON — Fisheries managers are expecting another monster run of fall chinook up the Columbia River in 2016, which should bode well for anglers above Bonneville Dam.

The fall salmon season began Monday, Aug. 1 and runs through Dec. 31 from Buoy 10 all the way to the Highway 395 Bridge in Pasco, Washington. Tucker Jones, Columbia River program manager for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, said forecasts call for 960,000 chinook to return to the river, which is shy of last year's record run of 1.3 million but well above the 10-year average of 705,000.

"We anticipate another really good year this year," Jones said. "For the last three years or so, fall salmon fishing in the Columbia has been remarkable, and not just in the estuary. Fishing has been lights out from Buoy 10 all the way to the state line above McNary Dam, and 2016 looks to continue that red hot trend."

Coho returns could be a bit more unpredictable, according to Jones. Last year, ODFW expected a run of 540,000, though only 171,000 actually made it back into the river.

"We're not typically off by that much," he said. This year's forecast calls for 323,000 coho, of which 80,000 would be anticipated to cross Bonneville Dam.

The biggest change for the 2016 fall season deals with bag limits for ESA-listed steelhead bound for the Snake River.

In 2015, Jones said anglers nearly over-harvested steelhead, which would have

resulted in the fishery closing early. With another below-average run in the forecast, ODFW is telling anglers they can only keep one steelhead after Sept. 1 from Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam, and after Nov. 1 from McNary Dam to the Highway 395 Bridge.

Other regulations vary by location on the Columbia River, and can be found on ODFW's website at www.dfw.state.or.us.

Free ammo trial at Eagle Cap Shooters Association

JOSEPH — Hunters and shooters from Eastern Oregon are invited to try out non-lead ammunition for free Aug. 20 at the Eagle Cap Shooters Association.

A variety of cartridges will be provided by the Oregon Zoo's Non-Lead Hunting Education Program to test the accuracy of non-lead versus lead ammo. A special demonstration will also compare terminal performance of common lead hunting bullets and non-lead bullets in water barrels and ballistic gelatin.

"This is a great opportunity to try the latest technology in hunting ammunition without having to buy any," said Leland Brown, the zoo's non-lead ammunition outreach coordinator and a lifelong outdoorsman. "Non-lead ammunition offers great weight retention, consistent expansion and exceptional accuracy, all without lead."

The event runs from noon to 5 p.m. Shooters are encouraged to bring their own firearms and current bullets.

For more information, visit www.eaglecapshooters.com.

PILOT ROCK

Birch Creek assessment nears finish

Plan will prioritize restoration needs

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

It's a story all too familiar in Eastern Oregon and the American West.

Birch Creek, a tributary of the Umatilla River south of Pendleton, is the home waters of nearly half the basin's wild steelhead and regarded by local tribes as a fish factory. However, the watershed flows predominantly through private land, including farms and ranches that rely on flows from the creek for their livelihood.

It takes careful planning to strike a balance between the needs of landowners and the environment. That's why a team of partners has come together to develop the Birch Creek Watershed Assessment and Action Plan, to identify areas where restoration is needed and prioritize projects moving forward.

After two years of work, agencies say the plan is nearly complete. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation contracted with GeoEngineers in Pendleton on the study, in collaboration with the Umatilla Basin Watershed Council, Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District, U.S. Forest Service and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Together, they've held a series of five outreach meetings with landowners in Pilot Rock to gather feedback. The most recent meeting was held in July, where project leaders presented their findings and stressed the need for cooperation from the public.

"It's going to take your guys' help," said Mike Lambert, fisheries program supervisor for the tribes. "Hopefully, we can start working with you to address some of these things."

The assessment is primarily geared toward fish recovery and water quality, Lambert said. A technical team made up of experts from the different groups walked along the watershed surveying physical characteristics of streams, how they're functioning and how they impact steelhead habitat.

Along the way, they noted a number of limiting factors for fish in Birch Creek. In some reaches, the creek is loaded with sediment, cut off from its floodplain and dries up entirely. Fisheries managers estimate there



Staff photo by E. J. Harris

In Jan. 2015, old tree snags still sit where they were cabled in to the bank of Birch Creek in 1989 by the ODFW during a stream bank stabilization project.

"It's going to take us a long time to get back on a recovery trajectory."

— Rick Christian,
 Project manager for the CTUIR

are approximately 1,500 steelhead returning to the creek, with the capacity for 2,500-3,000 if the watershed were fully functioning.

The action plan lists five streams that currently support steelhead, including Lower Birch, East Birch, West Birch, Pearson Creek and Bear Creek. These "Tier 1" streams are at the top of the list to restore and protect for the benefit of fish.

But an overwhelming majority — up to 95 percent — of the basin is private land, which means project managers need buy-in from hundreds of landowners in the community. Lambert said the plan takes into account not only what's best for fish, but for the landowners, too.

"When you have water connected to the floodplain, you can see the benefits to farming and crops as well," he said.

The tribes are no strangers to this kind of detailed planning in the Umatilla Basin. A similar study was done in 2004 on Meacham Creek, and work to restore the floodplain has proven successful in recent years. The same technical team is also eyeing

an ambitious study of the main stem Umatilla River.

Rick Christian, project manager for the CTUIR, said projects along Birch Creek will likely be more site-specific owing to the amount of private land. He foresees efforts in the future to boost fish passage and stabilize stream banks by planting new riparian vegetation and installing fencing to keep out livestock.

The action plan is the tool they will use to identify those needs, Christian said. That, in turn, will help support applications for funding to get the work done.

"It helps us prioritize where we should be working, instead of being opportunistic," Christian said. "We'll still work with landowners whenever they come to us."

Planning on Birch Creek has cost approximately \$300,000, which the tribes paid for out of the 2008 Fish Accords with Bonneville Power Administration. Christian believes the Birch Creek assessment should be made public by sometime early next year. For now, they are continuing to gather local input.

While the creek won't ever return to pristine, prehistoric conditions, Christian said they can take steps to move it in that direction.

"It took us a long time to get here," he said. "It's going to take us a long time to get back on a recovery trajectory."

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Paddler's paradise at Port Orford Heads

JOEL GORTHY
The Register-Guard

EUGENE — Dave Lacey shouts over his shoulder, his voice carrying through salty air laced with a pungent shrimp-and-sour mystery aroma: "Have you ever smelled whale's breath before?"

As the scent hits them, four kayakers in boats behind Lacey's exchange looks and comments that reflect more delight than disgust. Rarely does one get to tail a whale so closely — to paddle through the precise place where, moments before, the mighty mammal surfaced, spouted and left lingering evidence of its most recent visit to the submarine seafood buffet.

Actually, Lacey experiences this kind of thing all the time as owner of South Coast Tours. His is the only company in this part of the state offering guided near-shore kayak excursions such as the wildlife-viewing trip happening this day off of the magnificently looming, teeming-with-life Port Orford Heads.

But as is true on this overcast September morning, most of his wetsuit-clad clients experience new-to-them revelations around every rocky corner and in every cave and cove as they ply Oregon's rugged southern coastline.

A brief whale tale

Today, a juvenile gray whale quickly and silently rolls at the surface, near a sheer rock cliff plunging into deep water no more than 30 yards away. Lacey orders his flotilla to hold position. The creature's next rise could happen anywhere in the vicinity. An oval of surface water suddenly swells and shimmers like a soon-to-boil pot just off the port side of one kayak. That's a sign of a powerful tail thrust below, Lacey says.

Paddles pause; pulses pound. Then, a spout!

"There! It's moving fast," Lacey yells, motioning toward a rocky point, maybe 100 yards seaward, where the silvery-gray leviathan seems to be speeding toward open ocean.

Everyone follows Lacey at full paddle for a few minutes through increasing seas and the aforementioned whale's breath. After crossing Hells Gate — a gap between the headlands and offshore Tichenor Rock — the group slips into the heads' last south-facing cove to watch for more signs of the whale.

Rounding the corner and heading north from here would mean full-on western exposure to the Pacific's potent waves and winds, a challenge best left to expert ocean paddlers. So, Lacey typically makes this the turnaround point of a 3.65-mile, 2.5-hour tour.

The whale's departure for unseen waters becomes certain after several minutes, so the kayakers dip their

paddles and swing their bows back toward the beach.

Sights, sites to behold

Certain members of this expedition actually started the day feeling slightly disappointed. Port Orford Heads was Lacey's backup destination if anything short of perfect conditions prevented paddling into the extraordinary but more-exposed "Arches Territory" of the Samuel H. Boardman Scenic Corridor, starting some 40 miles south of here.

While that certainly would be a treat, perhaps some future day when glassy seas allow navigating one of the world's greatest near-shore scapes of stone arches, caves, rock islands and secluded beaches, Port Orford Heads hardly is a letdown. In fact, in terms of bang for the buck, this surely is one of the Oregon Coast's most rewarding and accessible areas for ocean paddling.

For one, the coves and inlets in the south face of the colossal stone headlands, and the crescent shape of Port Orford's entire south-facing bay, can foster calmer seas.

"The South Coast is unique in that way, in that we have a bunch of headlands that block the wind and the swell, which enables us to get out on the ocean more often than you can on probably the rest of the Oregon Coast," Lacey says.

It also allows Port Orford to operate the only natural, open-ocean harbor for 600 miles in any direction, and its "dolly dock" — one of only six in the world, where a fixed crane hoists fishing boats in and out of the water — can be seen up close as kayakers come and go from the adjacent beach.

The sheltering headlands also make it predictably possible, depending on tides, to guide small watercraft into sea caves and under natural bridges, including a large, so-called "aquarium arch."

Paddlers here also get to explore Nellie's Cove. From 1934 to 1970, U.S. Coast Guard "surfmen" responded to maritime distress calls by scrambling down 532 steps from the station above (now the Port Orford Lifeboat Station Museum), then launching their rescue boats down a track into the snug harbor. Though the old boathouse burned down in the late 1970s, the ruins include concrete pilings, metal tracks and a high breakwater wall next to a secluded, rocky pocket beach.

"This place is so awesome; I just love Nellie's Cove," Lacey marvels as he stands atop the concrete wall and gazes over the shallow cove, a snorkeling and diving destination that glows like the tropics when the light hits it right.

A big slice of sea life

Just offshore south of Port Orford is Redfish Rocks Marine Research Reserve, a protected reef site where a series of vertebrate-like rocks jut from the ocean.

It is an especially diverse habitat zone for sea life, from fish and invertebrates that thrive in the sandy beds and reefs below to seabirds and mammals that utilize the rocks above the surface.

For recreational boaters like today's party, a more-accessible snapshot of marine life comes into focus below Port Orford Heads, just around the dock's breakwater boulders.

Not only are gray whales commonly seen here from late winter all the way through to the fall migration, and more often than not during summer trips, the heads are home to Oregon's second-largest rookery of Steller sea lions and some of the West Coast's most abundant kelp beds.

While paddling among the swaying bulbs and fronds that form the crowns of these kelp forests — stalks trailing down into mesmerizing aquamarine waters — today's floating tourists encounter an oceanic menagerie.

Gregarious harbor seals and California sea lions course through the kelp and even glide alongside the kayaks, flashing whiskery smiles.

Wispy cotton ball-size jellyfish and their tiny tentacles sway with the sea.

At any place where water laps against rock, varied starfish, anemones and mussels appear between swells.

Gulls, cormorants, common murre and pigeon guillemots swoop, splash and rest on rocks; a great blue heron lifts off from the shore and does a dramatic low pass over the water; a black oystercatcher almost blends in with a wet rock but is betrayed by its hot-lava beak and pure-sunshine eyes.

Lacey says tour-goers on other days might enjoy even rarer sights such as sea butterflies, lion's mane jellyfish, harbor porpoise, ancient murrelets and tufted puffins.

Struck by the greatness of it all

After a mostly silent return voyage, as if entranced by their swishing paddle strokes or lost in the day's freshly made memories, the tour-goers haul their kayaks up from the beach to Lacey's waiting truck and trailer.

Dacotah Splichalova of Port Orford is no stranger to this coast's charms. But even her eyes are open wider after today's outing.

"I call this 'where the wild things are,' this place; there are rocks that just protrude out of the sea, pounded by nature's undulation," she says. "But this is my first time kayaking out there, and so being right up close to this nature and to this wild is such a different perspective. It's like, you can see it from the road and it still looks small, but then when you're right at the foot of it ... you realize how small you are in comparison with all this greatness."