

Hot Lake resort aims to become veterans care center

Will need \$44M investment

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian



Staff photo by George Plaver

Hot Lake Springs could become the Veterans Restorative Care Center under a proposed plan involving four different organizations.

Hot Lake Springs, an historic hotel and mineral spa located 10 miles east of La Grande, may become an alternative care center for disabled veterans under an ambitious proposal unveiled Friday.

But it will take \$44 million in investment to make it a reality.

David and Lee Manuel, who restored and reopened the resort 13 years ago, are in the process of selling to a group of partners that plan to create the Veterans Restorative Care Center, specializing in natural medicine to heal soldiers with physical and mental injuries.

The center would be owned and operated by the Warrior Bonfire Program, a Mississippi-based nonprofit organization that brings wounded veterans together for small, therapeutic retreats. Medical services would be provided on site by the National University of Natural Medicine, based in Portland.

Finally, Dyne Aquaculture, of Texas, wants to build a facility across the street to annually raise 20 million pounds tilapia, a freshwater fish raised for meat, along with a four-acre hydroponics farm. All profits will go back to support the veterans center, and Dyne Aquaculture estimates they could create as many as 200 direct jobs.

The team will lay out its vision and begin fundraising during an open house Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the resort. It is expected to cost \$14 million to buy and re-purpose the property, and another \$30 million to build the first phase of the aquaculture project.

"Our goal in all of this is to be self-sustainable," said John Bickel, founder and CEO of Dyne Aquaculture.

Historically, Hot Lake

Springs was a healing place for Native American tribes prior to 1812. The building was also a sanitarium in its heyday in the early 1900s, where geothermal waters were used and experimented with to cure patients.

Bickel, who is himself a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel and disabled veteran, first came up with the idea for the Veterans Restorative Care Center while looking into Hot Lake Springs as a potential location for his aquaculture business. Though it seemed like a great spot, he said he had no idea what to do with the resort.

"I've never done anything with hospitality," he said.

Earlier this year, the Warrior Bonfire Project came on board and they soon reached out to the National University of Natural Medicine — the oldest accredited naturopathic school in North America. All four partners held a three-day meeting in June to work out their model.

Lee Manuel, who along with her family began restoring Hot Lake Springs when the

building was falling apart, said they are honored to step aside for such an honorable project.

Mike Chesne, vice president of outreach for Warrior Bonfire, said they will come up with a vetting process for accepting soldiers and their families, and could get started sometime within the next year, if everything comes together.

Chesne, who spent 25 years in the military including nine tours of duty in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, said he realized the value of natural medicine and group trips for veterans after he was wounded and sent home in 2008. Doctors had him on 27 different pills, he said, as he struggled to regain his identity.

"Literally, I thought I was crazy," Chesne said.

The suicide rate among veterans is reaching an epidemic rate, Chesne said, now averaging 22 every day. He said he hopes the Veterans Restorative Care Center can offer an integrated solution for soldiers into the future.

"I found a new mission. That's brought me here," he said.

Ruling forces discussions on breaching dams to save salmon

By **BECKY KRAMER**
The Spokesman-Review

SPOKANE, Wash. — A federal judge is forcing discussion of a radical step to save endangered salmon: taking out four dams on the Lower Snake River.

The public will get a chance to weigh in at meetings throughout the Northwest starting next month.

"Scientists tell us that removing the four Lower Snake dams is the single most important action we could take to restore salmon in the entire Columbia-Snake river basin," said Sam Mace of Save Our Wild Salmon.

The four dams produce about 5 percent of the Northwest's hydroelectric power. They allow barges to ship goods between Lewiston and Portland. But they also hamper salmon migration to some of the best remaining fish habitat.

Commercial interests have long opposed removing the Lower Snake dams.

"We think those dams need to stay in place because of the multiple benefits they provide," said Terry Flores, executive director of Northwest River Partners, which represents public utilities, port districts and farm groups.

"They provide clean, carbon-free energy. We think they're an important part of the Northwest economy and the environment," she said.

Three federal agencies will hold public hearings across the region this fall to discuss the creation of a new salmon plan.

Back in May, U.S. District Court Judge Michael H. Simon sided

with fishing groups, environmentalists, the state of Oregon and the Nez Perce Tribe, finding that the latest of five federal plans for protecting the fish wasn't adequate. He ordered the agencies to prepare a new one by early 2018.

Simon said federal agencies had "done their utmost" to avoid considering breaching the Snake River dams, ignoring strong suggestions to do so by a previous federal judge.

While Simon said he wouldn't dictate what options agencies should consider, he said a proper analysis under federal law "may well require" considering breaching, bypassing or removing one or more of the four Lower Snake River dams.

Salmon advocates said the ruling is the closest the region has come to dam breaching since 2000, when the Army Corps of Engineers did a study of taking out the Lower Snake dams.

The four dams produce about 1,000 megawatts of electricity on average, which is enough to meet the needs of about 800,000 households each year. But despite millions of dollars spent on fish passage improvements, adult salmon still die in the reservoirs behind the dams.

"The four dams on the Lower Snake River have had a devastating impact on salmon, steelhead and Pacific lamprey, and in turn on the Nez Perce people," said McCoy Oatman, vice chairman of the tribe, which is also advocating dam removal.

The Snake River is the gateway to millions of acres of pristine, high-elevation habitat in central Idaho, southwest Washington and

northeast Oregon, which could help salmon survive in a warming climate.

"We have the healthy rivers, but the salmon aren't making it back," Mace said.

In a typical year, only about 40 percent of the Idaho sockeye counted on the Lower Columbia River make it back to their Idaho spawning grounds. During last year's drought, mortality was in the 99 percent range. Warm water in the four Lower Snake reservoirs is a contributor.

The economic argument for the dams isn't as strong as it once was, Mace said.

The Lower Snake dams were built from the 1950s to the 1970s, with navigation as a primary goal. But that barge traffic has dropped in recent years as the region has invested in rail capacity, Mace said.

"These dams weren't built for flood control. They're not big water storage dams and their power benefits are replaceable," she said. "It's time to call the question on them."

Salmon advocates "downplay the value of the dams," said Flores, of Northwest River Partners.

Dams provide more operating flexibility than other renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, Flores said. Electricity generated from wind turbines and solar panels can't be stored easily. But dams can store water, releasing it during periods of high demand for electricity.

Breaching the four Lower Snake dams would require the Northwest to build a natural-gas-fired plant, the Bonneville Power Administration said this spring.

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