

Salmon, steelhead fishing closes early on Columbia

Endangered run tracking below preseason forecast

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Recreational fishing for salmon and steelhead will close early on the Columbia River, beginning Saturday.

Fisheries managers for Oregon and Washington made the announcement Wednesday, based on a lower number of wild fall chinook returning to the Snake River than previously anticipated. Snake River fall chinook have been listed as a threatened species since 1992.

Preseason forecasts initially called for a run of 579,600 chinook. However, only 412,700 have made it back, or about 71 percent. Forecasts have also been downgraded for Columbia River coho and steelhead.

Under federal law, harvest can't exceed 15 percent of the fall chinook run. John North, who manages fisheries on the Columbia River for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, said they have already exceeded that mark, based on the revised projections.

"Once you exceed that limit, the expectation is you won't impart any further mortality," North said.

The season typically runs through the end of the year, North said. In addition, ODFW is closing the seasons for coho and steelhead to assure no chinook are accidentally killed by catch-and-release.

The closure will run all the way from Buoy 10 on the lower Columbia to the Highway 395 Bridge between Kenne-



In this Sept. 30 photo, a school of steelhead and chinook salmon swim in a pool on the mainstream of Oregon's Siletz River. Steelhead are an ocean-going variant of rainbow trout that, like salmon, return to their native streams to spawn.

wick and Pasco.

"It was a disappointment," North said. "On the positive side, it was generally later in the season."

Columbia River coho are currently tracking at about 66 percent of the preseason forecast, and just 53 percent for steelhead. North said the runs tend to be cyclical, based on river and ocean conditions.

"Salmon are very cyclical," he said. "They tend not to be consistently stable."

Fall chinook runs have been very strong in recent years, with the number of adults returning past McNary Dam

in 2014 and 2015 shattering the 10-year average.

This year's lower fall returns are also reflected on the Umatilla River at Three Mile Falls Dam. According to the most recent data, there have been 1,186 chinook, 824 coho and 54 steelhead counted at the dam for 2016. That compares to 1,630 chinook, 1,195 coho and 159 steelhead at this time last year, and 2,306 chinook, 3,415 coho and 852 steelhead in 2014.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Umatilla County readies to take on septic inspections

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County is all but ready to take on the state's on-site septic system inspection program.

The county board of commissioners at its meeting Wednesday morning in Pendleton voted 3-0 to adopt the fee schedule and enforcement ordinance for the program, according to county records. The fees and regulations are essentially the same as what the state used.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality had two employees to inspect

septic systems throughout several counties in northeast Oregon. Joe Fiumara, the county's environmental health supervisor, told the board that the situation led to waits of five or six weeks for site evaluations, at times.

"Our attempt is going to be to reduce those times, and so the contractors were excited about that piece," Fiumara said.

The county also plans to streamline some of the paperwork process, he said, such as eliminating the state's fees for public records.

"I don't like to charge people to get free records," he said.

That could be unique in county departments, which can charge a minimum of \$1 for even a simple digital record.

Commissioner Bill Elfering added the county is moving toward online applications and credit card payments. Fiumara said some of that online access will happen right away and would be a boon to residents who don't have quick access to county offices in Pendleton.

The transition from the state to the county, though, is not complete. Fiumara said the county is waiting on the agreement from the state

environmental department.

Fiumara also said he initially will be handling inspections alone, but the intent is to train two other staff. And he said growing pains are likely as the county takes this on, but the goal is to make the change as smooth as possible.

County counsel Doug Olsen explained the septic inspection program also requires enforcement of regulations and laws. While the county adopted the state statutes and DEQ regulations, he said, the county can use its own enforcement ordinance to address violations.

WALDEN: Scheduling medical appointments an issue

Continued from 1A

the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' power to hire and fire VA employees who are performing poorly.

After veterans in attendance complained that all of that has not seemed to fix the backlog of claims and appeals at the VA, Walden agreed with them that Department of Veterans Affairs administrators should be doing more to fix the VA's ongoing problems on their own instead of waiting for mandates from Congress.

"We're not managers, we're legislators," Walden said. "We're supposed to set policy, not do the day to day management."

He said there are still improvements the legislature is looking to make, however. One complaint he said he has heard from veterans during his tour of the state is that they are merely told when their medical appointments will be with no consideration of their schedule and no negotiation if the time and date conflict with something important like a college final. If the private industry can offer people a choice in scheduling just about anything, Walden said, surely the VA could come up with a system.

"It seems to me we could get a bunch of 12-year-olds and computers and they could do it," he said.



Rep. Greg Walden gestures while speaking to a group of veterans on Thursday at the VFW post in Hermiston.

After the backlog of claims and appeals for medical care at the VA reached a peak, Congress implemented the Veterans Choice Program, which gives some veterans with immediate medical needs a voucher for care elsewhere if the VA can not see them within 30 days. Walden said legislators hope to eventually expand that into a program in which all veterans can get their less serious medical needs met through a list of preferred providers in their hometown.

Attendees at the Thursday meeting said it seemed like there was a pervasive attitude problem with VA bureaucrats that had led to many of the problems the system faces, another assertion Walden did not dispute.

He recounted an experience

when a homeless veteran in Bend suffered serious burns from a propane tank explosion on Christmas. Walden contacted the VA after media reports that the man had been at the top of the list since summer for one of the housing vouchers for homeless veterans in central Oregon that had been sitting unused in an office for months. He was told that the rent vouchers hadn't been distributed yet because it would be inconvenient for a qualified employee from Portland to travel out to Bend and stay in a hotel.

"This is the mentality," he said.

Veterans also brought up compensation for Agent Orange exposure, noting that some people were exposed to Agent Orange

while transporting it at sea or handling it at airfields in Thailand, but only those who were stationed in Vietnam are compensated. Walden said Congress is looking to expand the definition of who qualifies for compensation.

He also noted that there were ways Congress was looking to support veterans outside of the VA. Walden said he hoped that the government could work with employers and colleges to help veterans count certain aspects of their military training toward certifications.

As an example he referenced a young veteran he met recently who, while deployed overseas, regularly drove gasoline tanker trucks on narrow roads along cliffs in a war zone wearing night goggles. But when the man got home he discovered that he would still have to go through the same process as a civilian to qualify for a commercial driver's license to drive a semi truck in the daylight on Interstate 84.

"It seems we need a better partnership with higher education to recognize what military training is equivalent to," Walden said.

He thanked the veterans for their service to their country, and for their willingness to meet with him and let him know what is "working and not working on the ground."

PENDLETON

Two in trouble for school fires

East Oregonian

Pendleton police caught two boys in connection to fires at two schools.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts reported officers caught them Tuesday, the same day as the fires.

"We used the internal cameras to identify persons coming/going from the damaged restrooms," the chief said in an email.

Roberts also stated he could not identify the children by name due to their ages.

The Pendleton Police Department at about 10:30 a.m. Tuesday responded to a fire call at Sunridge Middle School, 700 S.W. Runnion Ave., Pendleton. Pendleton Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Penninger said someone started the fire in at least three separate points in the bathroom near

the school cafeteria. School staff extinguished the flames and all students left the building.

The investigation led police to arrest a 12-year-old boy for arson, according to Roberts. The youth "was on conditional release for severely damaging a pickup last week with a sledgehammer while skipping school."

The second fire was Tuesday afternoon at Washington Elementary School, 1205 S.E. Byers Ave., after an 8-year-old boy urinated on an electrical outlet in a bathroom, causing some light smoke and charring along the wall. That fire also led to a school evacuation.

Roberts said due to the boy's age and the limits of Oregon law, "no criminal charges can be brought," and the Pendleton School District will handle any discipline.

Sheriff launches drone program for searches

East Oregonian

help save lives."

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office announced this week the launch of a new drone program.

The remote-controlled aircraft is for search and rescue, emergency management and other purposes.

"Drone technology is helping public safety agencies find missing people faster and can provide assistance to distressed victims in many types of disaster incidents," according to the written statement from the sheriff's office. "During a search and rescue mission, this tool will help us view a much larger area much faster than with traditional methods, and can direct ground searchers and provide aid to a victim more quickly, which can

reported consulting during the past several months with Steve Chrisman, Pendleton's airport manager and economic development director, Darryl Abling, the range manager at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, Pendleton, and staff at the city's drone range for advice and direction on how to use drone technology.

Sheriff's Sgt. Dwight Johnson oversees the search and rescue unit and is managing the drone program. He completed testing and requirements to obtain a remote pilot certification from the Federal Aviation Administration. The sheriff's office also is recruiting more staff to test and become certified.

BOARDMAN

City to sponsor fall cleanup

East Oregonian

Boardman residents will have the chance to spruce up their homes and yards, with a little help from the city, during a community-wide fall cleanup event that will run through the month of November.

The city has garbage vouchers available, up to a \$50 limit, valid at both the Finley Butte Landfill and North Morrow Transfer Station. Anyone interested can pick up a voucher at City Hall, 200 City Center Circle, beginning Oct. 31.

For more information, call 541-481-9252.

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

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