

BLOOMIN' BLUES

Leafy Aster, *Symphotrichum foliaceum*

Photo by Bruce Barnes

Don't diss this aster

By BRUCE BARNES
For The East Oregonian**Common name:** Leafy Aster
Scientific name: *Symphotrichum foliaceum*

About 25 years ago, plant taxonomists — those who name plants and catalogue what plants belong in which family and genus — started reorganizing the Asters.

There were then 23 species of Aster in northeast Oregon. Now there is only one of these bearing the genus name *Aster*, and that one is the only Aster in North America still in the *Aster* genus. The rest of those in northeast Oregon are categorized into 8 genera, the largest of which is the genus *Symphotrichum*.

Although there are good scientific reasons for these changes based on molecular and DNA studies, it drives some of us a bit nutty trying to keep up and avoid getting very confused by the changes. (I know I've mentioned this before, but I still get confused ... even though I use my computer to help me keep track.)

The name Aster is Greek, meaning star, based on the appearance of the flower heads with outer rays (ray

petals) around the rims. The name *Symphotrichum* is a combination of the Greek symphysis meaning junction, and trichos meaning hair, possibly referring to a mix of stiff hairs on the plant used as the basis for the genus. *Foliaceum* means leafy.

Leafy Aster is variable in some characteristics, but in general it is about 2 feet tall, there are many leaves on the stems, and the leaf bases sometimes nearly encircle the main stem.

The leaf edges are smooth and their upper surfaces are without hairs. The flowering heads are at the top of the stems, each head with many yellow disk flowers at the center, and 15 to 60 pale violet to purple ray flowers around the edge.

Some Indian tribes in the Pacific Northwest used the plant for several purposes. These included using it as a wash for sores on horses. Medicinal uses for humans included a decoction of roots for loss of appetite, stomach swelling, dyspepsia, and indigestion. Another root decoction was used mixed with salmon oil to treat venereal problems.

Where to find: There is an abundance of this plant along the sides of the upper end of Mill Creek Road out of Walla Walla.

Seriously stressed steelhead

Worst-ever start to season as low flows, "the blob," voracious sea lions take toll

By ERIC BARKER
of the (Lewiston) Tribune

Steelhead are setting a record at Lower Granite Dam and it's not a good one.

The run's performance is so poor that fisheries managers are considering restrictions to upcoming seasons.

The dam about 30 miles west of Clarkston on the Snake River has never seen a worse start to the steelhead run. Between June 1 and Wednesday, only 393 steelhead have been counted climbing the dam's fish ladder. For comparison, the 10-year average is more than 5,100. Last year, when the A run of steelhead collapsed, more than 3,400 steelhead had been counted there in the same time frame.

You have to go back decades to find anything comparable. In 1990, the count through Aug. 7 was 623.

It's not much better at Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River. There, about 30,000 steelhead have been counted. Only 1943 and 1938, the dam's first year of operation, were worse. It was similarly bad in 1941, 1942 and 1944.

"Things are looking really bad," said Alan Byrne, an Idaho Department of Fish and Game biologist at Boise. "So far the run is not coming in as expected, and our forecast was low to begin with. It's likely that if these trends continue we are not going to meet our preseason forecast."

Fisheries managers are poring over the numbers and looking at updated projections for each hatchery in the basin to determine if enough steelhead will return to meet spawning targets.

Joe DuPont, regional fisheries manager for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game at Lewiston, said any changes to fishing seasons that begin Sept. 1 will be announced the week of Aug. 21. For now, "everything is on the table," he said.

DuPont and Chris Donley, regional fisheries manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife at Spokane, are communicating to make sure any conservation measures taken related to fishing seasons are enforced in both states. Donley said they don't want to have to make changes after the season opens.

"Limits are likely to be affected and, gosh, who knows what else," Donley said. "We are open to any kind of conservation and we are talking to anybody we can about it. We want to put the decision (out there) once and put the right set of rules out there."

Idaho has never closed a steelhead season. In 1995, the B run was so poor that the state implemented catch-and-release-only regulations on the Clearwater River during the fall but allowed some harvest in the spring of 1996.

In 2013, the state shut down harvest on Clearwater River B-run steelhead that were 28 inches or larger but allowed anglers to keep smaller fish.

But the more plentiful A-run supported fishing during those years. Fisheries managers knew this year's A-run fish — those that spend just one year

on average in the ocean — would be poor.

But they thought it would be better than last year, when low river flows and high temperatures in 2015 hammered out migrating juveniles. The juveniles that survived the river hit the ocean to find it occupied by "the blob," a massive area of warm water with depleted levels of the tiny creatures young fish feed on.

The results were an almost complete collapse of the 2016 one-ocean component of the run.

Because of the poor performance, fisheries managers braced themselves for the effects of the low flows and the blob to take their toll on this year's B run. They predicted a return of only about 7,300, including just 1,100 wild steelhead.

But they expected the A run to start to rebound. The preseason forecast called for a return of 112,100 A-run steelhead to Bonneville Dam, including 33,000 wild fish and 79,100 hatchery fish. Typically about 50 percent of the A run counted at Bonneville head up the Snake River.

As Byrne said, the run to date is not on a trajectory to match the forecast. Protecting wild fish and making sure hatcheries take in enough adults to meet spawning needs will dominate any decision to alter fishing seasons.

"Do we have enough fish to meet broodstock? If that is in question, then you don't want to allow any fishing mortality," Byrne said.

Fisheries managers will give themselves ample time to make that decision. Steelhead season doesn't open on the Snake, Salmon and Grande Ronde rivers until Sept. 1, and fishing often doesn't heat up until later that month. Donley said he is confident measures in place now are protecting the fish as they migrate upriver.

Anglers are talking about the poor run numbers, and many likely will choose to target other species. Idaho will open fall chinook fishing next Friday and Washington is poised to move up its fall chinook opener to match Idaho's.

Fisheries managers are expecting a return of about 27,000 fall chinook to the Snake River.

As in past years, DuPont said, only a fraction of the fish will be available for harvest. He said about 8,000 of the chinook will have their adipose fins clipped, signaling they can be kept by anglers.

But this year, anglers will be allowed to keep jack chinook — those under 24 inches in length — even if the adipose fin isn't clipped. There will be no daily limit on jacks. Anglers will be allowed to keep up to six adipose fin-clipped adults per day.

In past years, the fall chinook season has opened Sept. 1. DuPont said the season is being moved forward on the calendar because the fish will be present by the middle of the month, and the quality of the meat is better in the early part of the season.

Randy Krall, owner of the Lewiston tackle shop Camp, Cabin and Home, said aside from fall chinook many anglers likely will concentrate on species like bass and walleye because of the poor shape of the steelhead runs.

"I think the biggest thing is the interest in walleye," he said. "There is a lot of people interested in walleye and wanting to learn. It's fun how things are shifting gears."

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BRIEFLY

Structural hazards force closure of Burnt Cabin Bridge

PENDLETON — The Umatilla National Forest has closed Burnt Cabin Bridge on the Walla Walla Ranger District after trail crews discovered some of the 120-foot wooden bridge's structural supports had collapsed, and other beams were severely rotted out.

Forest staff first discovered the bridge was deteriorating in 2013, and since then it has been inspected periodically by engineers to determine whether or not it was safe for public use. The bridge was finally closed Wednesday, and will remain closed until further notice.

"The bridge was installed in 1989 utilizing trees from the local area," said Larry Randall, forest recreation manager. "We were surprised to see the condition of the bridge deteriorate so quickly."

Burnt Cabin Bridge is located six miles up the popular South Fork Walla Walla Trail at the junction of Burnt Cabin Trail. Closure signs will be posted on the bridge, as well as at the Burnt Fork and Walla Walla trailheads.

Alternate access to the South Fork Walla Walla Trail is available via Rough Fork trailhead or the South Fork Walla Walla River trailhead. Forging the river to go around the bridge is not recommended due to high water.

For more information, contact the Walla Walla Ranger District at 509-522-6290.

Paving project closes road, parking lot at Lookingglass Hatchery

ELGIN — Public access to Lookingglass Hatchery is closed weekdays from sunrise until 6 p.m. as workers continue to pave the entrance road and parking lot.

The road will be open after 6 p.m. on weekdays and on the weekends, though the presence of construction equipment and gravel piles may make parking difficult. Paving should be completed by early September.

For questions or more information, contact the hatchery at 541-437-9723.

Campfires prohibited on state parks as eclipse looms



Some structural supports have collapsed beneath the Burnt Cabin Bridge, located six miles up the South Fork Walla Walla Trail. The bridge is closed until further notice.

Photo contributed by U.S. Forest Service.

As eclipse watchers descend upon Oregon for the big day Monday, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has banned campfires on all state parks — including all Oregon beaches — until further notice.

The announcement was made Wednesday, Aug. 16 as a fire safety precaution.

"Most state parks are already under a fire restriction due to hot, dry conditions," said MG Devereux, the agency's deputy director. "We are expanding these restrictions to prevent any unintentional fires in state parks that would add an unnecessary burden to firefighting efforts."

Charcoal briquettes, torches and candles are also prohibited at state parks. Only fuel sources that can be turned off instantly, such as propane stoves, will be allowed.

"We understand this is an inconvenience for campers, especially those who might not see an immediate local need for fire restrictions," Devereux said. "We appreciate your patience and

understanding."

Visitors planning a trip should plan ahead and check with park staff for the most current information.

Campfire bans are also in place on the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur national forests, as well as on lands protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry's Northeast Oregon District. Fire danger is extreme in most local areas.

Wallowas unit meetings schedule

HERMISTON — The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has scheduled a pair of public meetings — one in Hermiston and one in Joseph — as the agency prepares to update its master plan for state parks in Wallowa County.

The Hermiston meeting will be held Wednesday, Sept. 6 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Oxford Suites Hotel, 1050 N. First St. A public meeting will also be held

the following day, Thursday, Sept. 7, from 6-8 p.m. at the Joseph Community Center.

An updated plan is needed to guide recreational use and resource management at Minam and Wallowa Lake state parks, as well as the Wallowa Lake Highway Scenic Corridor, over the next several decades. The last master plan for these parks was completed in 2001.

Public input will be taken at the meetings, or those interested can submit comments directly to Ian Matthews at 503-986-0744 or ian.matthews@oregon.gov.

For more information about the master plan, visit www.wallowastateparksplan.com.

Portion of Oregon Coast open for clamming

ASTORIA (AP) — A portion of the Oregon Coast is open for razor clamming.

The Daily Astorian reports beaches from Tillamook Head to Cascade Head have been open to

diggers since Friday.

Digging had been closed along the entire Oregon Coast because high levels of a marine toxin were found in clam meat. But three rounds of testing have shown those levels dropping below the threshold established by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Harvest remains closed from Cascade Head south to the California state line and from Tillamook Head north to the Columbia River. The latter area closes annually from July 15 through Sept. 30 for conservation reasons, regardless of whether biotoxins are present.

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