Obsession with perfection

LINDSAY MURDOCK
FROM SUN UP TO SUN DOWN

I sifted through the drawer to find them. Everything was crowded and shoved in the small space that seemed to have turned into a catch-all for all things random and unusual. Rubber bands, chip clips, a small book of matches with only one match left, cookie cutters, a pen — and there along the right side toward the back were the measuring spoons.

Old and treasured describes them best in my mind. They are four pieces of goodness held together with a simple, small ring. In fact, they have held me together for years now in more ways than one. Baking soda, nutmeg, cinnamon, vanilla, cumin, salt, and even cream of tartar have been measured and stirred into my life over and over again. These four spoons have seen the depths and have measured out just the right amounts of almost everything in my life.

I dangled them from my fingertips, watching them sway back and forth as I closed the drawer. Lost, but now found. In the dark for what seemed to be forever, but with the reach of a hand were suddenly shimmering in the best of ways.

I've measured a lot of things in my life and a lot of things have measured me.

As a teacher, I have grown to measure success by test scores, by results, and by percentage correct. As a woman, I've measured my worth by the number on the scale, and as silly as this even sounds, by the number of likes and comments on a photo I've posted or a paragraph I've written. Here's the thing though: Those measurements mean nothing really in defining my worth. Absolutely nothing.

Those test scores didn't sit at my front table early before school with me and a few precious children who weren't afraid to ask for help. Those numbers and measurements don't know how hard I've worked to get one single sentence out of student #23 all year long. And that number on the scale hasn't walked miles with me up and down our gravel road breathing in some of the most amazing views Umatilla County has to offer. Those things we feel pressured by, they tell us nothing except that perhaps we are pushing too hard for what we feel is perfection.

Perfection can't be held in your hand. It can't be stirred in to add the right amount of anything to what you're mixing up in your mind. But recently, I've found that perfection can ruin some really good things. It can take all of your hard work and effort — the tears you've shed and the plans you've made, the hours that were spent doing what you knew was right and good in every sort of way, — and create the biggest mess of a mixture you've ever seen because rather than looking at the growth made along the way, you're searching the horizon for the end.

It creates opportunities for you to take out those measuring spoons and dip into jealousy, bitterness and huge amounts of frustration. And before you know it, you're mixing together some of the worst traits buried deep inside of you into this concoction called your life. Everything good is suddenly tainted and you find yourself surrounded by a giant bowl of something you're not sure how to get yourself out of.

One of the most profound things I've learned while teaching fourth grade is how hard it is to teach when testing and scores define you whether you want them to or not, and how challenging it can be to work with people you've known for years, as well as people you've just met, when there is so much pressure to not only do things well but do it without ceasing.

Teachers compare and measure each other in the best and the worst of ways. They are each other's biggest and best cheerleaders, but they're also the hardest on each other too — and often unintentionally. I don't know how to fix that. I don't know how to stop measuring something that isn't supposed to be measured in the first place. But I do know that I'm done using measuring spoons or sticks on the people I live and breathe this hard and ever-changing profession with.

I'm going to spend the remaining months of this school year measuring salt and vanilla, and maybe even some chili powder once in a while. And I'm going to let the people in my world grow and bloom in their own unique and amazing ways without comparing them, or myself, to anyone or anything. Perfection is overrated. And measuring up to anything — especially the standards of others — isn't worth losing your joy over.

Teaspoon and tablespoon are two completely different words, and when you're first learning to measure, they can easily be confused when you're reading a recipe with abbreviations. My theory is that a little goes a long way. Let's spend our time pouring tablespoons of kindness, mercy and grace all around. That's the stuff that's worth measuring.

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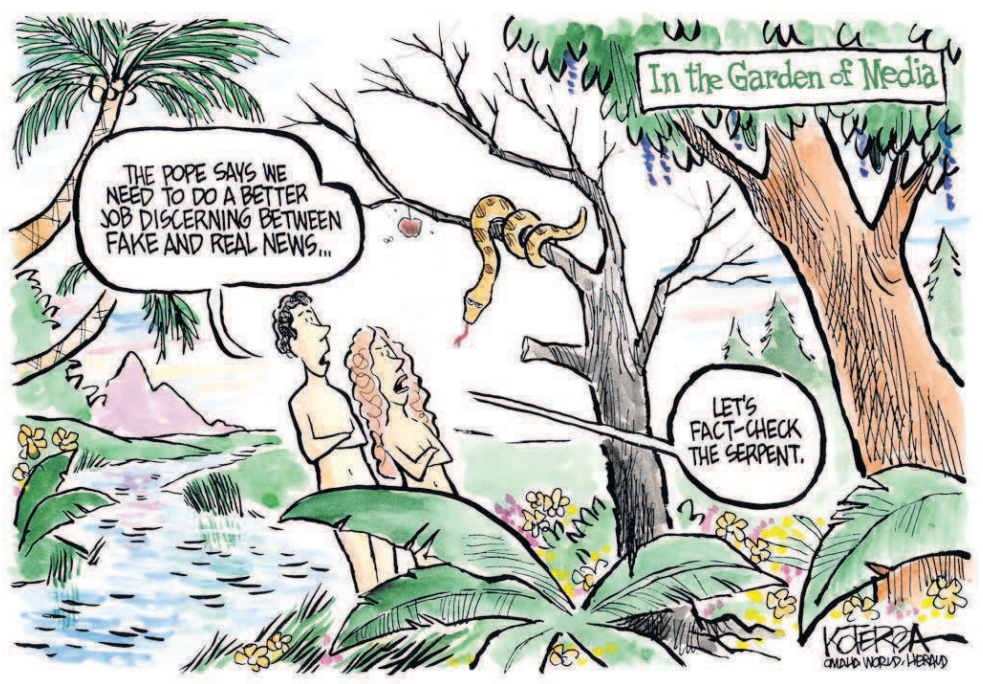

To protect chinook salmon, protect their genetic diversity

By ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP
For EO Media Group

Genetic diversity is essential to long-term adaptability and survival of any species. By that measure, upper Columbia River chinook salmon are in deep trouble. A new study, published Jan. 10 finds that within the past century, the chinook salmon in the upper Columbia River have lost almost 70 percent of their genetic variation.

But their Snake River cousins have lost only about 30 percent of their genetic variation, making Snake River chinook a potentially more resilient fish.

Bobbi Johnson, a graduate student at Washington State University, compared the genetics (mostly mitochondrial DNA) from modern fish with fish remains found at Native American sites. The ancient samples came either from middens (places where encampments piled food waste and scraps) or were supplied to her by the Colville, Nez Perce and other tribes from their archival or heritage materials.

> Johnson's samples included a 7,627-year-old salmon vertebrae found at a fishing encampment site on the Columbia.

Her 346 ancient samples from the Columbia, Spokane and Snake Rivers included a 7,627-year-old salmon vertebrae found at a fishing encampment site on the Columbia at Kettle Falls, Wash.

All of the ancient Columbia River samples came from sites above Grand Coulee Dam, which ended salmon runs in the 600 miles of main-stem river above it.

Johnson also analyzed fin clips of 379 contemporary chinook from the Columbia, and Snake. Her results confirmed what biologists have long suspected: The genetic diversity of chinook salmon has declined significantly.

The research revealed other things as well. Prior to European settlement, spring, summer and fall runs of Columbia River chinook swam (and spawned in) the entire river. Today, the Columbia River fall chinook spawns only in Hanford Reach.

Most of Johnson's study examined mitochondrial DNA. She and her partners in the study tallied details from the same segment of each fish's genetic code.

Haplotypes (groups of genes passed down through generations) figured prominently, as did determination of nucleotide diversity (an estimate of overall genetic variation.)

While not a way of defining "sub-species," this information shows how closely related different individuals are. Present-day Columbia River chinook are sort of all married to their second cousins. More than 2/3 of their genetic diversity has vanished.

Genetic lineages that were present 1,000 years ago are absent today. In the Snake River fish, the loss is less devastating. Only about 1/3 of the gene variations found in ancient samples are missing today.

The vanished gene sequences likely controlled a range of sometimes subtle variations in physical appearance (size, color) to behaviors (the length of time at sea, the timing of return). Now lost, these variations cannot be recovered except through mutation or genetic drift.

Why the difference between Columbia and Snake River chinook diversity? Johnson has a few ideas.

First, there's the possible influence of pre-contact Native American harvest. Both Snake River and Upper Columbia River fish would have been caught at about the same percentages at Celilo Falls.

But the Columbia River fish were subjected to another intense fishery at Kettle Falls. It's estimated that the Colville tribe alone harvested almost 300,000 pounds of chinook at Kettle Falls (on the Columbia) each year.

The Snake River system has no equivalent passage barrier/fishing opportunity. Fish bearing the full spectrum of genetic variation were able to navigate the Snake River and its tributaries to reach their spawning grounds.

Johnson also believes it likely that the Nez Perce and other tribes along the Snake included a greater diversity of other fish (sturgeon, suckers, pikeminnows), thus lowering their total catch of salmon and helping the chinook retain a greater amount of genetic diversity. Ancient samples from the Snake river included these species of fish along with chinook and other salmon.

Once Europeans arrived, they tended to target the large chinook that were bound for the upper Columbia, thus further depleting the fish's genetic pool. More contemporary factors in the loss of diversity include the introduction of millions of hatchery fish and the overall challenges of navigating today's oceans.

Whatever the reasons, Snake River chinook have retained a greater percentage of their genetic diversity than their upper Columbia cousins. They are, potentially, more resilient fish. And that is good news for us and for the fish.

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Ellen Morris Bishop holds a doctorate in geology and specializes in the exotic terranes of the Northwest.

Americans want wild horses protected, not slaughtered

ELLIE PHIPPS PRICE
Comment

Most Americans want to preserve wild horses on the Western range. Their independence and unbridled freedom symbolize the qualities that make our country great. But their future in 10 Western states is in jeopardy, thanks to a Trump administration proposal to reduce wild populations to extinction levels by killing as many as 90,000 of these iconic animals.

According to a recent poll, it's a plan that 80 percent of Americans, including 86 percent of Trump voters and 77 percent of Clinton voters, oppose. But will Congress listen? Congress must reconcile the differences in spending legislation created by the Interior Department. The Senate version prohibits killing and slaughter; the House version allows it.

Mass killing of mustangs is certainly not what Congress intended when it unanimously passed the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act in 1971, designating these animals as "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West" to be protected from "harassment, capture, branding and death."

But what was intended to be a wildlife protection law has been implemented by the agency in charge — the Bureau of Land Management — as if it's closer to a pest-control statute that is designed to benefit ranchers who graze livestock on the public lands where wild horses live.

Ranchers who hold federal grazing permits pay $1.87 per animal per month to graze their livestock on public lands. Compare that to the average fee on private lands in the West, which is over $22 per animal per month. It's a sweet deal for ranchers, courtesy of U.S. taxpayers.

BLM policy has long favored this special interest group, even though they represent just 3 percent of American ranchers and produce less than 3 percent of American beef. The path forward to protect wild horses exists, but to get there, we need to deal with some real-world facts.

Fact #1: BLM's population limits for wild horses are not "appropriate"; they're extinction level.

The BLM's "Appropriate" Management Level for wild horses and burros is 26,900 on 27 million acres of BLM land. That's the number of mustangs that existed in 1971 when Congress unanimously acted to protect them because they were "fast disappearing."

In 2013, the National Academy of Sciences concluded that the agency's Appropriate Management Level was "not transparent to stakeholders, supported by scientific information, or amenable to adaptation with new information and environmental and social change." Yet "getting to Appropriate Management Level" — a goal that is simultaneously unscientific and unattainable— continues to drive the agency's unsustainable roundup and removal program.

Fact #2: There's room on the range for wild horses and burros.

Wild horses aren't overrunning the West. They're not starving. In fact, they're not even present on over 80 percent of BLM rangelands grazed by livestock! (Livestock grazing is authorized on 155 million acres of BLM land; wild horses and burros are restricted to 26.9 million, which they share with livestock.)

Privately owned livestock vastly outnumber federally protected wild horses and burros on public lands. In Utah, for example, wild horses graze on just 2.1 million of the 22 million acres of BLM land grazed by livestock. In Nevada, ranchers have two-thirds of federal rangelands to themselves; in Wyoming it's three-quarters.

Fact #3: Slaughter is not a solution, but birth control is.

Not only is slaughter politically untenable, it also won't solve the problem. Slaughtering horses requires the BLM to continue rounding them up, which everyone agrees is unsustainable.

Fortunately, a humane alternative is available. In 2013, the National Academy of Sciences recommended that the BLM use PZP fertility control to manage wild horses on the range.

The vaccine is cost-effective, it can be delivered remotely by dart, and it prevents fertilization without affecting the horses' natural behavior.

Economic modeling shows that the agency could achieve its population goals and save $8 million in just one of 177 habitat areas by using fertility control. Despite this, the agency currently spends zero percent of its budget on birth control, promoting slaughter instead.

It all comes down to this: Will Congress stand with the American people by rejecting the distorted "facts" voiced by a self-interested few? Will Congress force the Bureau of Land Management to pursue a humane and sustainable program, or will it allow the mismanagement to continue?

The answer may not only determine the future of our wild horses, but also of the very public lands on which they live.

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