



Brian Davies/The Register-Guard via AP

Scooped

In this April 3 photo, an osprey, with a fish in its talons, cruises across the Junction City Pond north of Eugene in front of a fisherman trying his luck with a rod and reel. Ospreys winter in Mexico, returning to Oregon each year in the spring, where they feed voraciously on fish and raise their young.

Smoke taint worries winemakers at southern Oregon vineyards

By GREG STILES (Medford) Mail Tribune

MEDFORD — You may remember the marketing phrase: “We will sell no wine before its time.”

For some vintages, that line of thinking remains timeless.

When it comes to vintages impaired by smoke taint, however, it’s best to move them quickly and consume the wine before the taint fully manifests itself.

Northwest grape growers repeatedly have seen smoke from wildfires envelop the region in recent years, raising legitimate concerns about the effects of smoke on the finished product.

Elizabeth Tomasino of Oregon State University’s Oregon Wine Research Institute had disconcerting news about smoke taint for growers and winemakers during a recent symposium.

“To the disappointment of a lot of people, there is currently no way to get rid of it,” Tomasino said in an interview this week. “Any single place that experienced smoke during the growing season will have smoke taint to some extent.”

The issue began to percolate in discussions about three years ago.

“It’s now in the top half to top third of growers’ worries,” she said. “People ask, ‘What can we do?’ And I have to say, ‘I’m sorry, we don’t have anything.’ There are things you can do for almost anything else, but this one is out of your control.”

While ash might be bothersome when it builds up on your car, it doesn’t pose issues in the vineyard.

“A lot of people think when you have ash on the grapes that you have a problem,” Tomasino said. “It’s actually not.”

Instead, aroma compounds are

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Elizabeth Tomasino Oregon State University’s Oregon Wine Research Institute

absorbed through the leaves and grape skins and make their way into the berries, she said.

Some varietals are more susceptible to taint and some are more resistant. Pinot Noir — synonymous with Oregon beyond the state boundaries — isn’t among the resistant.

“Pinot, Merlot, Chardonnay, can’t handle a lot of oak, so they are going to have some taint problems,” Tomasino said. “Wines that can typically handle a lot of oak can handle a decent amount of smoke, because they aren’t overly complex.”

Among the more resistant grapes, she said, are Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah.

“There hasn’t been a lot of white grape research,” she said.

Wildfires at the beginning of the century created hardships for Australian wineries, and over the past decade Western wine regions have seen more than their share of fire.

“Basically, the entire West Coast is having smoke taint problems this year,” Tomasino said.

Liz Wan, an Applegate Valley wine consultant, said the unknowns can be haunting.

“The most frightening thing is not only knowing what it can do, but you

don’t know when it manifests once the precursors are there,” Wan said.

Early tests aren’t necessarily indicative of potential pitfalls, said Wan, who is also the assistant winemaker at Serra Vineyards.

“It can be nerve-racking because it’s not intuitive,” she said. “Most of the time, if your wine is good going into the bottle, it’s going to stay good.”

When smoke taint is in question, you test the lots separately for certain compounds before they create smoke taint,” she said. “The compounds might be in there individually, but during fermentation, the compounds warm up, divide or coalesce.”

It’s one thing to test for the telltale signs of taint, it’s another to avoid the fallout.

Tomasino suggests adding a little oxygen to a small amount of the juice to test its direction.

“Don’t try to have fast fermentation, but have a complex wine that can help incorporate the smoke content without it being so dominant,” Tomasino said.

Once it’s in the bottle, there is no time to dally.

“You have to sell the wine young and get it out the door,” Tomasino said. “Because the smoke taint gets worse over time.”

The good news is that Oregon State, University of California-Davis and Washington State University have reached the second round in obtaining a multi-million-dollar, USDA specialty crop research grant that would fund research over a three- to five-year period.



Colin Murphey/EO Media Group

In this Friday, March 16 photo, Scott Thompson, owner of BlackBerry Bog Farm near Svensen, looks out over his property near the habitat restoration project.

From farms to salmon swamps in Svensen

By EDWARD STRATTON EO Media Group

ASTORIA — The southern banks along Svensen Slough, a side channel of the Columbia River, have transformed over time from historic spruce swamp into fields diked off by European settlers for farming.

Clatsop County and three private property owners along Bear, Mary’s and Ferris creeks, all tributaries of the slough, have partnered with the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce and Bonneville Power Administration to bring more than 60 acres of the swamp back for salmon and wildlife habitat.

Nearly 80 percent of estuarine habitat along the Lower Columbia has been lost to development, said Jason Smith, a habitat restoration project manager with the task force. Salmon depend on the habitat as they move from fresh to salty water.

Aerial photos show portions of the land — diked and drained for agriculture by the 1930s and cut in half by U.S. Highway 30 by the 1970s — slowly returning to wetlands as levees broke down and breached. By the 1980s, most agriculture around the creeks had gone away, Smith said, leaving a crippled levee system too expensive to rebuild to modern-day standards.

“While we don’t want to be taking any serviceable (agricultural) land out of production, because there’s not a whole lot of it, this is no longer serviceable,” Smith said. “It kind of gives us a rare opportunity to bring back the other economic driver for our community, which is salmon.”

With funding from the BPA, the task force will hire contractors this summer to remove about 2,000 feet worth of levees and restore meandering tidal inlets.

A Portland & Western Railroad spur, with trestle bridge crossings over the mouths of Bear, Mary’s and Ferris creeks, will not be affected by the project.

The former agricultural fields are mostly filled with reed canary grass, a largely invasive species used in pastures and for shore stabilization.

The project will purposely alter the flattened fields with hilly hummocks meant to mimic the historic spruce swamps, promote diverse plant growth including wapato and cattails and phase out the canary grass. A diverse plant community will support bugs, rodents, birds and mammals.

The improved nutrients from the wetlands will help provide food for salmon in the river’s main stem.

Much of the Pacific Northwest’s power is hydroelectric. Most of it is created at the BPA’s eight federal dams on the Columbia and lower Snake rivers.

To offset their impact on 13 endangered species of salmon and steelhead, the agency funds approx-

imately \$500 million in restoration projects each year.

BPA has paid for the restoration of nearly 4,000 acres of habitat in the Lower Columbia estuary, said spokeswoman Michelle Helms, and is providing \$632,000 for the Bear, Mary’s and Ferris creeks project.

VOLUNTARY FLOODING

Just as the task force depends on BPA to fund its projects, the group requires landowners willing to return their fields to the tides.

Scott Thompson, who owns BlackBerry Bog Farm with his wife, Bonnie, along Bear Creek south of Highway 30 in Svensen, was one of the three private landowners to show interest in the project. Below the farm lies an L-shaped stretch of wetlands bounded by broken-down levees and the highway, which cuts off another small parcel of wetland he owns to the north.

“We bought this place three years ago, and it had been abandoned for 15 years,” Thompson said. “And we knew when we bought it that Bear Creek was a salmon stream.”

Thompson has taken part in other restoration along Bear Creek and hosts a screw trap to count juvenile salmon coming downstream.

“Part of what we wanted to do as a farm, we wanted to make sure we were good stewards of the land, including the creek, the wetlands and the like,” Thompson said. “We knew there were areas we weren’t going to be able to farm.”

Tim Peitsch, a maintenance foreman at the Port of Astoria, bought his property along the upper reaches of Ferris Creek about five years ago and situated a house over a flood plain just below a bridge on Highway 30. With the task force paying to restore the flood plain and him retaining ownership afterward, there are no downsides to the project, Peitsch said.

“Part of the reason we bought the property and situated the house where we did is to be able to enjoy viewing the habitat,” he said.

GOOD PROJECTS

The project includes two large plots of land along Mary’s Creek, the farthest west of the three tributaries. The eastern bank is owned by Dean Budget and Sandra Gadwood. The western banks passed into Clatsop County ownership through tax foreclosure.

“This project is probably as good as any for stabilizing shoreline,” said Julia Decker, a county planner. “With all the changes going on in the world, anything we can do that keeps the flood plain intact, stabilizes shoreline, expands habitat, these are good projects.”

Fisherwomen come together for sport, camaraderie

By JEFF VICTOR Laramie Boomerang

LARAMIE, Wyo. — Fly-fishing is not just a man’s sport, but it can sometimes feel that way to the women who want to break in.

Enter the University of Wyoming’s Fish N’ Chicks — a student group that brings together women who want to learn about the sport, share their expertise or just go fishing with others who share their interest.

“The reason this group was created was to have a relaxed atmosphere for women to be able to learn about fly-fishing and to be able to learn about it with other women,” said Maggie Jordan, the club’s president.

Jordan said she has been fishing since she was old enough to lift a fishing pole, and fly-fishing since she was 12 years old. She said she enjoys fly-fishing because it offers an excuse to get outdoors and appreciate wildlife — but in such a male-heavy sport, women can often feel underestimated.

“I still find it really intimidating to walk into one of the fly shops in town,” Jordan said. “I want to go ask, ‘Oh, how’s the fishing?’ — like all the other guys do. It’s just I feel you get looked at



Laramie Boomerang via AP

Amy Phillips, vice president of University of Wyoming’s Fish N’ Chicks club, practices casting in Depot Park in Laramie, Wyo., on Saturday, March 24.

different. (They think) it’s great that women are going out there fishing, but they don’t expect you to know very much. And sometimes, we don’t, and it kind of is hard for someone to put themselves out there to try to learn.”

A newcomer to the group, Dominique Lujan moved to Laramie in January to pursue a master’s in zoology.

“It seemed like a cool group of girls, so I decided to join the club and it was just a way for me to get involved with the fly-fishing community here in Laramie,” she said. “It was kind of nice that it was fellow college women who also enjoy fly-fishing.”

Lujan said she started fishing four or five years ago when her academic interest in aquatic ecology, and especially fisheries, put her in contact with the sport. Since then, she had been involved with other fly-fishing groups and found the woman-centered Fish N’ Chicks welcoming.

“It’s just easier to get involved with girls who understand your interests,” she said. “In the field that I work in, it’s mostly a male-dominated field, so it’s kind of nice to just have other ladies that like to do the things you do.”

The club also provides

an opportunity for more experienced fisherwomen to share their knowledge with those newer to the sport by demonstrating how to tie a fly or how to handle fish.

“We have people from all skill ranges,” Jordan said. “(Some) are great at it and don’t need to learn too much more, and then there’s girls who have never fished before at all. So, the skill range is all over the place.”

Jordan added the group meets up about once a month when the weather is nice, to practice a skill or take a day trip to locations just outside of Laramie to get out and practice their skills.

But the group’s biggest event of the year is a float trip on the Bighorn River by Thermopolis.

“We’re doing a big float trip, which we usually do at the end of the year, which is something we really look forward to and what we do all our fundraising for.”

Throughout the year, Fish N’ Chicks provides an opportunity for women to enjoy a favored sport with other enthusiasts or to learn fly-fishing from other women.

“Honestly, most guys aren’t very good at teaching that kind of thing,” Jordan said. “They just don’t understand.”