

Pacific lamprey swarm Umatilla River

Best numbers of the eel-like fish in years

East Oregonian

Record numbers of Pacific lamprey made a ripple in the Umatilla River. Scientists with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation counted more the 2,600 of the prehistoric fish migrating up the river to spawn this spring, according to the Bonneville Power Administration. The fish are native to the Columbia River Basin and significant to American Indian people, but lamprey were functionally extinct in the Umatilla Basin from the late 1960s through the early 2000s. Less than five years ago, only a few hundred lamprey returned to the Umatilla River each year. “Lamprey are culturally important and a critical First Food for tribes,” according to Aaron Jackson, fisheries biologist with the tribes. “And while they’ve been around for millions of years,



AP Photo/Gosia Wozniacka

A Native American man shows off a lamprey, an eel-like fish caught at Willamette Falls, a 40-foot waterfall south of Portland in 2015. An ancient fish that’s a source of food for tribes in the Pacific Northwest, lampreys have been in drastic decline in recent decades, but numbers have increased this year in the Umatilla.

until rather recently, managers failed to understand their importance within the food web. Our focus now is to continue lamprey supplementation actions to bol-

ster the overall numbers of lamprey in the Umatilla and other ceded area basins.” The Bonneville Power Administration has funded

most of the tribe’s lamprey projects since the early 1990s, with much of the money going toward lamprey research and improving instream passage.

BPA ratepayers during the last decade invested just more than \$5 million in the Umatilla Basin for lamprey. “We understand the cul-

tural significance of Pacific lamprey to the tribes, which is one reason we’ve funded lamprey projects in the Umatilla,” according to Lorri Bodi, vice president of environment, fish and wildlife with the Bonneville Power Administration. “As a food source for other creatures, lamprey are also very important to a healthy functioning ecosystem such as in the Umatilla River so it’s great to see our efforts paying off.” Pacific lamprey spend the majority of their lives as tiny larvae, living in Northwest streams from three to seven years before migrating out to sea. Adult lamprey have a sucker-like mouth that allows them to be parasitic in the ocean. They attach to fish and other marine mammals for feeding. Lamprey usually live in the ocean for one to three years before returning to fresh water to spawn. Similar to salmon, lamprey die after spawning and their carcasses provide marine-rich nutrients to streams.



Tiffany Boothe/Seaside Aquarium

A female northern right whale dolphin washed ashore on Manzanita Beach.

Mysterious whale dolphin washes up on Oregon coast

The Oregonian

A rare right whale dolphin washed up on the Oregon coast last week, marking only the fourth time in more than 20 years one of the creatures has been spotted along the Northern Oregon coastline. On Friday, the animal was found at Manzanita Beach and staff from Nehalem Bay State Park quickly reported the beached cetacean to the Marine Mammal Stranding Network, a group that works to save stranded animals and learn how and why they became stranded. Despite being identified in the 1800s, little is known about right whale dolphins, so named for their resemblance to right whales. They look like a cross between an orca and a bottlenose dolphin, usually sporting black skin with a white stripe on their bottom sides, and they are highly social, sometimes travelling in groups of up to 2,000. They range all across the North Pacific, as far east as Japan and from Alaska in the north to Baja California in

the south. It’s unclear what, if any, migratory pattern they follow and there is no estimate for their global population, though experts think there are roughly 14,000 of them swimming off the North American coast. Globally, the right whale dolphin’s primary threat comes from high-sea drift nets, which hang like virtual walls in the water, sometimes 10 miles wide at depths of up to 50 feet. These nets, which were unregulated until recently, catch anything that swims into them, including right whale dolphins. Experts say these nets are responsible for a 24 to 73 percent population decline in right whale dolphins. In Oregon and California, fishing outfits are now required to use pinging devices, which warn unwitting cetaceans to the presence of the nets. It was unclear what killed the creature discovered in Oregon. The animal was taken to Portland State University for a necropsy, but the results were inconclusive. More tests were being run to see if experts could pin down an exact cause of death.

BLOOMIN’ BLUES

Well-known watercress has many uses

By BRUCE BARNES
For The East Oregonian

Name: Watercress
Scientific name: *Nasturtium officinale*

This week the plant is a member of the mustard family. For most people, watercress is probably the best known plant in the family, excluding the yellow stuff in jars at the grocery store. Watercress makes a nice, lightly tangy addition to any salad, and occasionally shows up in the produce section of grocery stores. I’ve even seen it growing as a weed in well-watered lawns in Portland. It grows wild across southern Canada and the U.S., and is originally from Europe and Asia. The plant in the wild is usually growing in shallow fresh water or wet mud. “Cress” is a name for any plant in the mustard family, not all of which may be safe to eat. The water part of watercress should be obvious. The meaning of *Nasturtium* is not so simple; both genus and species of the scientific name of this plant has been changed at least three times in the last 10-15 years, depending on which author made the changes. The name “nasturtium” in this case has nothing to do with the *Nasturtium* bedding flowers that



Photo by Bruce Barnes

Watercress, *Nasturtium officinale*

people plant in their gardens. The translation of the name refers to the mustard oil smell and means “nose twist.” *Officinale* is a Latin term that was applied to plants with medicinal uses. Watercress has pinnately compound leaves, with a central midrib and about six oval or lance-shaped leaflets along the sides of the midrib and one leaflet at the tip. The leaves vary widely in size depending on how long it has been growing, nutrients available, and water.

The flowers are quite small, white, with four rounded petals, and are grouped into crowded clusters at the tips of stems. Although watercress was not introduced in North America until the 17th century at the earliest, many Indian tribes made use of this plant. Medicinal uses included reducing fevers, kidney and liver problems including cirrhosis and gallstones, headaches, and dizzy spells. The leaves were used by many tribes

as salad greens or cooked like spinach, and sometimes cooked with bacon grease. **Where to find:** Almost any place with slow-moving fresh water or consistently wet mud is a potential location for it. This includes ditches, rocky seeps, springs, and slow-moving side-pools of streams. If you plan to try eating it, be aware that not all members of the mustard family are safe to eat, and there are many which appear nearly alike.

Environmental, fishing groups sue Oregon over coho salmon

GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

PORTLAND — A coalition of environmental and fishing groups filed a federal lawsuit Wednesday against the state of Oregon, alleging logging in the state’s two largest forests is threatening the survival of coho salmon that breed in streams flowing through the coastal region. The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Eugene challenges the state’s logging policies in the Clatsop State Forest and the Tillamook State Forest. It alleges the Oregon Department of Forestry is in violation of the U.S. Endangered Species Act because of the logging, and is illegally engaging in activities that result in the death of a threatened species. The agency has not followed through on implementing a species management plan required under federal law that would help preserve salmon habitats despite logging and mitigate damage, court papers allege.



AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus, File

In this 2017 file photo, a juvenile coho salmon is held by a fish biologist at the Lostine River. A coalition of environmental and fishing groups have sued Oregon over allowing logging on state forest lands and allege the activity is damaging streams used by coho.

Ken Armstong, a spokesman for the Oregon Department of Forestry, said his department could not comment on pending litigation. “Poor logging practices by the Oregon Department of Forestry is causing real harm to the Oregon coast coho and commercial fishing families who depend on these magnificent fish

for their livelihoods,” Glen Spain said, the northwest regional director for the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations and the Institute of Fisheries Resources, both plaintiffs in the case. “Stronger protections for streams to protect the coho ... is decades overdue.” Together, the forests

cover a half-million acres stretching from the Washington state border to the central Oregon coast. About 2,500 miles of roads have been built in them to accommodate logging, according to court papers. Logging activity increases the risk of landslides and of sediment falling into the streams where the salmon breed and grow to maturity before venturing to the Pacific Ocean. Seven streams critical to salmon habitat flow through the Tillamook State Forest and several others run through the Clatsop State Forest, according to the lawsuit. Between 1 and 2 million salmon returned to their natal streams in this region — an area stretching from Seaside to Port Orford — in 1900. The number of returning coho salmon has now dropped below 76,000, court papers say. Other plaintiffs are the Center for Biological Diversity, the Native Fish Society and Cascadia Wildlands.

OUTDOOR BRIEFS

Heceta Head Lighthouse to close in July for repairs

YACHATS (AP) — The Heceta Head Lighthouse will shut down for July for repair work. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department said Tuesday that the lighthouse would close on July 1 and will reopen by July 31. The repairs will address several cracked interior metal columns on the facility’s upper floor and will cost about \$135,000. The lighthouse lens will be covered during the work to protect it from damage. The historic assistant lighthouse keeper’s house, which the U.S. Forest Ser-



AP Photo/The Oregonian, Randy L. Rasmussen, file

This 2011 file photo shows the Heceta Head Lighthouse on the Oregon coast near Yachats.

vice operates through a concessionaire as a bed and breakfast, will remain open. Heceta Head is a working lighthouse and was built around 1894. Its beam can cast light 21 miles out to sea. It’s believed to be the most photographed lighthouse in the United States.