

Large field set to compete in EAGLE CAP EXTREME

By ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP
For EO Media Group

As the all-volunteer staff of Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog Race readies the 2019 course, there's already some good news for this year's event.

As of Monday, 25 sled dog teams are registered for the 15th running of the Eagle Cap Extreme. That count includes seven competitors in the Iditarod-qualifying 200-mile race and another seven, including local veterinarian Jereld Rice, in the classic 100-mile race. It's one of the largest fields to compete in race history.

Oregon Field Guide, one of Oregon Public Broadcasting's premiere TV programs, will be here to film the race — for the second time. Oregon Field Guide covered the race in 2009 and they are back a decade later.

"The scale of the Eagle Cap Extreme is really unprecedented," said Ian McCluskey, Oregon Field Guide producer. "It has really grown over the years. It has become an epic race in distance and landscape, the only sled dog race west of the Rockies that offers an Iditarod qualifier. It just felt like we needed to document it."

McCluskey is bringing an unusually large team of two producers, an associate producer, two cameras and two cameramen to film the race. They will cover aspects of the event including the vet checks, race finishes and the awards banquet. Better technology and better cameras are part of the reason for returning, McCluskey said.

"We are interested in covering several stories in addition to the race as a whole," he said. "They include the two father-son teams of Brett Bruggeman and his son Spencer, and also the high percentage of women in the race. We tend to associate sled dog racing with hardy frontiersmen with beards. But there are a lot of up and coming, very capable young women athletes as well as more experienced women racers in the ECX. And there will be some unanticipated stories that we will find as well."

Many of the racers are returning veterans, including crowd favorites Clayton Perry, Gabe Dunham and previous winner Brett Bruggeman in the 200-mile event. April Cox, Hugo Antonucci and Rex Mumford return for

the 100-miler. Local favorites Morgan Anderson of Enterprise and George Garcia of La Grande and last year's winner, Jane Devlin of Bend, will run the two-day mid-distance race.

The dogs used in sled dog racing come in many varieties. Most teams consist of Alaskan huskies—a mix of Siberian husky, hounds, German shorthaired pointer, and other breeds that bring sight, stamina, speed and strength to the team. Alaskan huskies are generally very good with other dogs and gentle with people. Musher David Hassilev's team includes Chinook dogs — an American breed with mastiff lineage. Connie Star will run her team of registered Siberian huskies in the two-day mid-distance race.

The Eagle Cap Extreme kicks off with an opportunity for the public to meet the mushers and their teams at the vet checks on Jan. 23, from 9-11 a.m. on Main Street in Joseph, and 1-3 p.m. on Main Street in Enterprise. There will also be a sled dog event or two at the vet check event in Wallowa from 9-11 a.m. At the vet checks, dogs are secured to the musher's trucks or trailers, and undergo brief exams by a team of sled-dog specialty veterinarians led by Yukon Quest Head Veterinarian Kathleen McGill — to ensure that the dogs are in tip-top condition. Visitors can meet the canine athletes — and the equally friendly, enthusiastic mushers and veterinarians. More than 30 high school FFA members will be on hand to help at the vet checks.

At each vet check, a musher will provide a presentation about their dogs, sled, and dog sled racing to students and adult visitors. Schools, including Enterprise and Joseph Elementary, Cove, and La Grande schools, learn about the mushers and dogs in history and geography classes, then bring students to the vet check events. Elgin Elementary School often brings its fourth-grade students to meet and cheer on their favorite mushers and dogs at the race's start.

The potluck dinner at the Joseph Community Center on Jan. 23 at 6:30 p.m. offers another opportunity to learn about the race if you can't make it to the vet check (or even if you can). This is where mushers draw their numbers and the race starting order is determined. It's a great place to meet mushers,



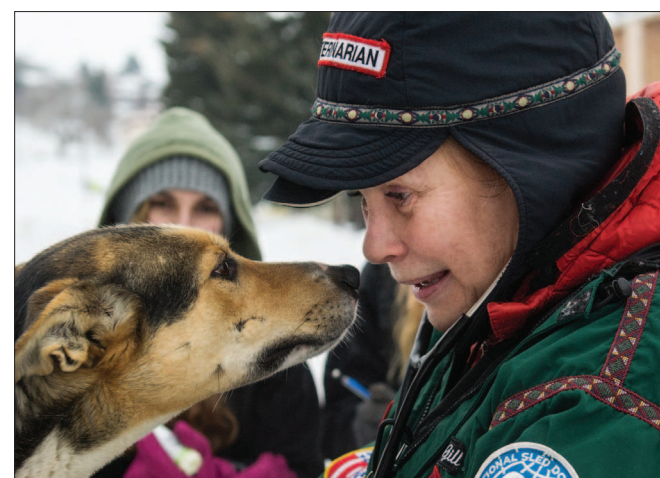
Students from Elgin enjoy getting to know sled dogs at Ferguson Ridge in 2018, just before the race starts.

their families, and assistants. Kids' artwork from around the county is on display. The event is free and open to the public. Please bring a potluck dish to share.

The race begins at noon on Jan. 24 at Ferguson Ridge Ski Area, Tucker Down Road, Joseph. If you plan to go, the ECX provides parking and a shuttle service to the race start. It's best to come an hour or so early. Each team gets an individual start, and you can wish your favorite racers well as they mush down the start chute. Racers will be starting until about 2 p.m.

Racers finish at varying times. The 22-mile junior race concludes late Thursday afternoon. The 100-mile winner generally crosses the finish line on Friday afternoon. The 200-mile winners arrive at the finish around midnight Friday or very early Saturday morning.

The ECX concludes at the Eagle Cap Extreme Awards Banquet, Saturday evening at 6:30 p.m. at the Joseph Community Center. Mushers tell their stories of the race and accept their awards, and there is an auction of art, memorabilia and other donated items. Tickets are available through the Eagle Cap Extreme website, <https://www.eaglecapextreme.com> and are \$20 for the general public and \$12 for volunteers. All funds from the banquet and auction support the all-volunteer Eagle Cap Extreme.



Wallowa County Chieftain/Ellen Morris Bishop, File
Dr. Kathleen McGill, head veterinarian for the Eagle Cap Extreme, gets to know an Alaskan husky at the Enterprise Wednesday afternoon vet check in 2018.



Wallowa County Chieftain/Ellen Morris Bishop, File
Morgan Anderson gets an enthusiastic send-off from spectators as she starts the first leg of the 31-mile two-stage race in 2018.

EAGLE CAP EXTREME HIGHLIGHTS SCHEDULE:

Race Central at the Joseph Community Center. Wednesday, Jan 23- 8 AM — 3 PM, Thursday, Friday 8 AM-10 PM, Saturday 8 AM-3 PM: Listen to radio updates on musher positions, learn about the teams and dogs. Kids Corner with activities, books and events. Vet Checks: Wed. Jan. 23: 9-11, Joseph Main Street; 1-3 PM, Enterprise Main Street.

9-10, Wallowa School. Musher Potluck: Wed, January 23 6:30, Joseph Community Center. Bring a dish. Free. Race Start: Thursday, Jan 24, noon to about 2 PM, Ferguson Ridge Ski Area, Tucker Down Road, Joseph. Shuttle starts at 9:45. Arrive at parking area at least 1 hour early. Awards Banquet: Saturday January 26, Doors open: 5:30.

Dinner (Stangels buffalo!) served, 6:30 Tickets: \$20, available through the Eagle Cap Extreme website: www.eaglecapextreme.com Website: <https://www.eaglecapextreme.com> Listen to the race radio and track mushers on a map: <https://www.eaglecapextreme.com/index.php/volunteers/amateur-radio>

Banned fish trap returns to Columbia as sustainable way to catch salmon

By CASSANDRA PROFITTA
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About half the salmon swimming up the Columbia River come from hatcheries — raised to be caught by fishermen. The rest are wild. And many of those salmon are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

For years, Oregon and Washington have been searching for the best way to catch more hatchery fish while letting the wild fish return unharmed to their spawning grounds. Now, one group says they've found it.

Fish traps were banned on the Columbia more than 80 years ago. But advocates with the Wild Fish Conservancy are revisiting the idea as a new, sustainable way to separate hatchery salmon from wild fish.

At a site near Cathlamet, Washington, about 40 miles upriver from the mouth of the Columbia, Wild Fish Conservancy biologist Adrian

Tuohy stood hip deep in water in a cage just below the surface of the Columbia River.

He turned a crank that funneled a mix of hatchery and wild fish from a holding pen into the cage. The fish were corralled in the river by a wall of netting, stretched across a network of pilings that reach out about 30 yards from the bank. Now, they were swimming around him — so close he could pick out the hatchery fish one by one.

He pulled out all the fish that were missing the secondary fins on their backs, called the adipose fin. That fish is clipped from hatchery fish. Then, he opened a door in the underwater well so the wild fish — with the telltale wild fins on their backs — could swim back out to the river.

"And the fish swim out for the most part untouched," Tuohy said. "That's the beauty of this gear, in contrast to other gear types, is you're able to success-



OPB/Cassandra Profitta

Fish trap operators can pick out the hatchery salmon for harvest and release the wild salmon so they can return to their spawning grounds.

fully release threatened and endangered fish unharmed."

So far, research has found about 95 percent of the steelhead and 99 percent of the chinook salmon released from the fish trap survive. That's far better than the percentage of fish that survive being released from a commercial gillnet — or the tan-

gle net that doesn't catch fish by the gills.

And that's a key factor on the Columbia, where all fisheries are limited by protected wild stocks. As soon as a fishery reaches the cap for impacting wild salmon and steelhead, it has to shut down. So, having less impact on wild fish would allow fish-

ermen more access to hatchery fish.

Friend Or Foe?

When Oregon and Washington started looking for alternatives to gillnets, Blair Peterson saw an opportunity for gillnetters like himself to catch more fish.

He used century-old blueprints to build an experimental version of the fish traps his grandfather used in the early 1900s. It was a fishing method that pulled huge hauls of salmon out of the river, but it also pitted commercial fishermen using gillnets against canneries and other fish trappers.

"The fish traps were not looked on with high regard," Peterson said. "The gillnetter on the Columbia River, he put a lot more heart, soul and manual labor into what he did to catch his fish than what a fish trapper did."

But since the fish traps were banned to prevent overfishing, Peterson said, times

have changed for gillnetters. Now, they're the ones at risk of getting banned as new policies have severely reduced their share of salmon.

"It's been a long, long dry spell," he said. "And you can't live on looking at a gillnet boat. It has to be utilized."

Peterson thinks bringing back fish traps could be a way for gillnetters to catch more fish again. But other gillnetters don't see it that way.

"The gillnetters are still convinced this is an enemy of theirs," Peterson said. "There's no ifs, ands or buts around town that I have broken ranks."

Jim Wells with the commercial gillnetting group Salmon For All said gillnetters are fishing strategically in certain areas at certain times when they're less likely to catch protected fish, and the anchored fish trap can't do that.

"Once a trap is installed, it's there," Wells said. "If things change in season you can't be flexible."