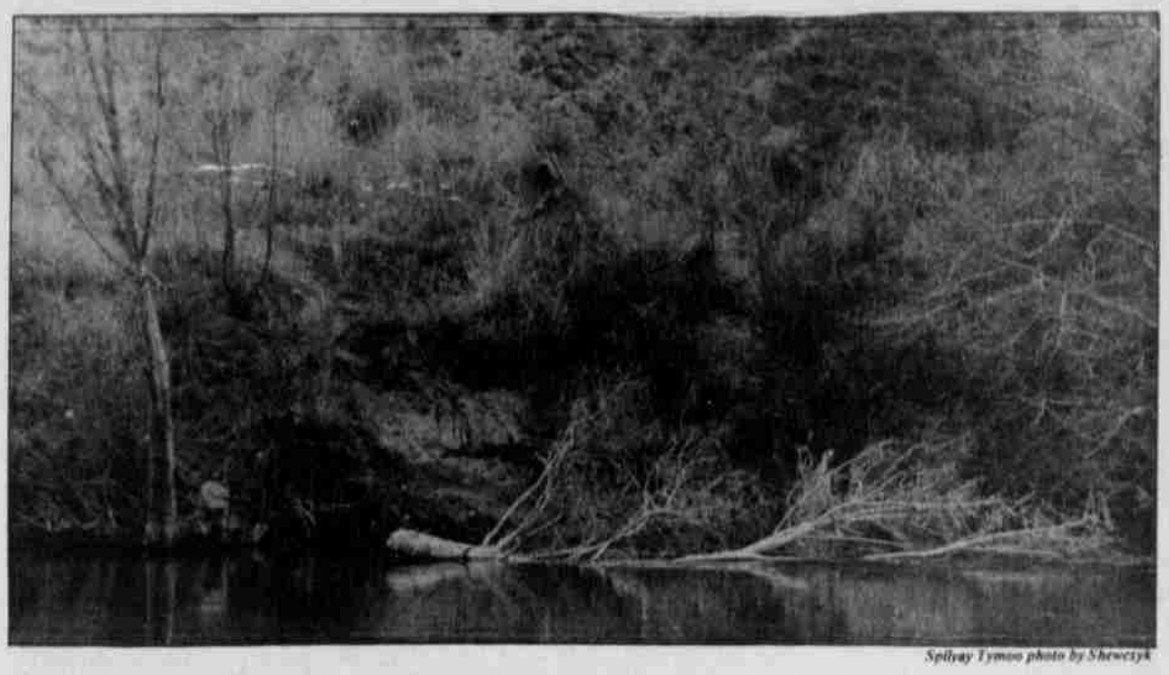
Trees crucial to fish, insects, wildlife



Spilyay Tymoo photo by Shewczyk

On alder tree can make a difference along a river's edge where vegetation is critical to fish, insect and wildlife communities.

Vegetation growing along the edges of rivers are critical in providing food and cover for fish and some wildlife as well as being essential in maintaining bank stability. But too often little attention is paid to the importance of this riparian environment.

Trees, grasses and shrubs along the bank serve as both homes and food sources for insects which in turn serve as food for fish inhabiting the streams. Shade and protective cover on hot summer days is found under leafy boughs and in grassy areas.

Recently another alder tree on the Warm Springs side of the Deschutes River was cut. The tree was left laying. Probably cut for use in a meat or fish smoker the loss of the tree could imperil the existing micro-community.

This is not the first incident of tree cutting along reservation streams. Warm Springs Natural Resource department hopes to stop this from happening again for the sake of riparian area protection. The department is looking into a source of alder wood to be available to community members for their use in smokers. Notice will be given when that wood is available.

Everyone benefits with protection of the river environment and everyone can help.

Sturgeon fishery needs protection

Submitted by Gene Greene
Natural Resources Department

During the late 19th century, the Columbia River sturgeon catch increased due to technological improvement in preservation and shipping methods. However, by the early part of this century the catch dropped significantly.

By the early 1950's the states of Oregon and Washington passed a six foot maximum length restriction for harvest, in order to protect the brood fish in the declining population. Since inception of this regulation populations have been increasing.

With the curtailment of salmon and steelhead fishing seasons on the Columbia River and the increased value of sturgeon and their roe, fishing pressure on the sturgeon by sport and commercial fishermen has steadily increased.

For example the Zone 6 (Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam), Indian Commerical fishing sturgeon harvest has been doubling each year for the past four years. In 1981 the commercial harvest was 2100 fish and by 1986 the harvest increased to 9500 fish.

Similarly the sport fishing in Zone 6 has increased dramatically; however, the actual harvest figures are uncertain at this time.

The sturgeon, a slow growing fish, takes approximately 12-15 years to reach the legal three-foot size for harvesting. After this age a sturgeon is vulnerable to the fisheries for an average of seven years while they grow from the three foot minimum size to the six foot maximum size. The female sturgeon reaches maturity at an average age of 18. Therefore she is in a legal harvestable size as a 5 to 6 foot fish.

Sturgeon growth rates vary. Sturgeon that have free access to the marine environment have a constant growth pattern while sturgeon landlocked by dams have a irregular growth pattern.

The difference in growth patterns (trends) is probably a reflection of food supply. Populations, free to migrate to a marine environment have more food supplies available throughout their life history than landlocked populations.

When errors are made in sturgeon management practices it is not visibly noticable for 15 to 20 years, due to the sturgeon's slow growth patterns. (The sturgeon has a 20-year generation cycle as compared to an average four-year cycle for salmon.)

Much is still unknown about sturgeon including their reproduction cycle rate, the age at which they become fully mature, their mortality rate in catch and release fishing, and the age at which they stop growing.

It is known that the circular hooks proposed for sturgeon fishing do not tear the mouth of a sturgeon as severly as standard hooks presently used. They also avoid incidental body snagging which occurs when sturgeon locate and cover a food source or bait.

A coordinated effort by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the National Marine Fisheries Service and the states of Oregon and Washington to answer some of these questions will begin this year. Research will be conducted on early life history and predation. Studies will also be conducted to determine how many young sturgeon drift downstream to lower pools and how many remain in the pool where they were hatched.

John Elliott, a research biologist for ODFW, will be involved in this study to determine population size, density and harvestable surplus. The study is scheduled to last five years but due to the slow growth rates for sturgeon it should last for ten years or longer. The study will also involve tribal input.

Some of the recommendations of the U.S.F.W.S. based on their limited studies conducted in 1976-78 are as follows: The population in each reservoir under the legal size (less than 12 years of age), and over legal size (greater than 19 years of age) should be monitored to determine the status of recruitment into the harvestable populations, and the status of the spawning population. Sport catch and effort should also be determined and monitored annually.

The following additional programs should be developed:

1. Obtain life history information for fish under three years of age and over 28 years of age.
2. Determine the status of the population by monitoring age class consumption. Implement a program of sampling representative index areas during a designated time period (3 to 5 weeks) on a periodic basis (every 3 years).
3. Evaluate present harvest regulations by determining length at maturation male and female sturgeon, and fecundity at length. Present size regulations are designed to protect the mature and reproducing sector of the populations.
4. Locate spawning and rearing habitat, and determine requirements so that protection can be provided.
5. Annually determine sport catch and effort through a creel census program.

Sampling by lengths for female sexual maturation indicate that less than one percent of the fish are ready to spawn at 4-5 feet. A little over six percent are sexually mature between 5-6 feet. This indicates that the majority of spawners are over six feet in length and these are the fish that need to be protected. It is a well known fact to avid sturgeon fisherman that most "cavier fish," fish that contain eggs, are over six feet in length.

With many unknowns regarding the sturgeon but some known information based on limited study and historical date, we would be better off by taking a conservative approach to the sturgeon fishery due to the length of time that it takes to recover once over-harvested.

As co-managers, we must recognize our responsibility to protect the reproducing population to reasonably assure that we won't be known as the people who more or less destroyed a viable fishery resource. This can be done by not giving in to the demands of handful of people. With more studies programmed for the future alternatives could be developed for the fishery which could be beneficial to more people.

Governor to act on state riparian forestry rules

Riparian areas are fragile systems. A high diversity of plant and animal life is supported on streamsides. The existing insect and plant life contributes to water quality and the stream structure.

The sensitivity of riparian areas has finally been acknowledged by those who work in the forests of the state. A riparian habitat technical task force composed of foresters and biologists have agreed that water quality is important, that maintaining healthy streams is essential.

It's felt by biologists that the state Forest Practices Act written in 1982 and revised in 1985 fails to provide adequate protection for riparian areas. The task force recommended higher standards for protection of these areas while at the same time "accommodating reasonable timber management objectives in a manner that the task force feels best serves Oregon's resources."

A suggestion made by the task force includes the creation of buffer strips for various streams, the size of the buffer dependent on the stream's importance. "Most of the fish habitat values in a buffer strip occur in the first 100 feet from the stream even though the actual width of the riparian ecosystem may be considerably wider. . .All riparian ecosystems are valuable for wildlife resources, regardless of the distance of the aquatic zone. Aquatic and riparian zones usually need to be left with minimum or no structural changes. Timber management activity can occur in the zone of influence as long as major habitat components remain." Consultation with fish and wildlife biologists during forest operation planning would provide information for options on given streams. It is only through such cooperation that efficient resource management for Oregon can occur.

With the presentation of this task force report a list of proposals have been outlined by the Board of Forestry. Governor Neil Goldschmidt was scheduled to act on the riparian forestry rules on March 4 but asked for a month delay on the decision. The delay was requested by Goldschmidt's natural resources assistant Gail Achterman to assure the rules are based on sound ecnomic and biological analysis.

Both timber and environmental groups are concerned with the proposed changes to the Forest Practices Act regulations. Tree farmers question proposals regarding protecting specific numbers of conifers near streams while environmentalists feel the proposals do not sufficiently protect fish and wildlife habitat.

The department of forestry reported that buffer strips from 25 to 100 feet wide on streams would pose no threat to Oregon's timber economy. There would be increased costs to do this in approximately 20 percent of the operations.

Agreement reached to end logging wars in Washington

This article is reprinted with permission from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

by Jane Hadley

Seattle—Leaders from the timber industry, Indian tribes, environmental groups and state agencies yesterday agreed on a sweeping settlement of long-standing disputes over the impact of logging in this state.

Participants said the agreement would protect the interests of fisheries and wildlife as well as the timber industry.

The leaders said the agreement won't necessarily result in less logging or more logging, but better logging.

The goal is to allow timber companies to take the maximum number of logs from the land while still protecting fish, wildlife and water quality, said James Waldo, a Seattle lawyer and chairman of the Northwest Renewable Resources Center, the non-profit organization that sponsored the negotiations.

"This is a historic-type situation," said Bill Wilkerson, former director of the state Department of Fisheries and now state revenue director.

"This is the only state in the union that has decided to lay down the arms."

State Lands Commissioner Brian Boyle said the accord "has the potential of resolving long-standing disputes that we've never ever come close to resolving before."

Obviously, this agreement is tremendously exciting and important to the future of our timber, fishing and wildlife interests in the state of Washington," Wilkerson said.

The agreement covers a variety of different issues, including logging along streams and rivers; abandoned roads, which have been blamed for devastating mud slides; protection of Indian religious grounds and archaeological treasures; and the cumulative effects of multiple clear-cuts within a river basin.

It applies to state and private —not federal— lands and must be approved by the state Forest Practices Board to become effective. The agreement was presented to the board December 15 and Boyle, who is chairman of that board, predicted it would be "received with glee."

Many of the hottest, hardest-fought battles have taken place before that board.

Public hearings would be scheduled early next year before the proposal is adopted.

Participating in the accord were representatives of a number of Indian tribes; the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission; the Washington Environmental Council and the National Audubon Society; the Washington Forest Protection Association, which represents large timber companies; the Washington Farm Forestry Association, representing small landowners; Weyerhauser; Georgia Pacific; Plum Creek Timber a Burlington Northern subsidiary; Simpson Timber; the Northwest Water Resources Committee, and the state departments of Game, Natural Resources, Fisheries and Ecology.

One part of the agreement involves a new process of cooperative forest management.

The scenario would go something like this; A timber company with big logging plans would call in tribal, environmental and other representatives and describe its plans and ask the representatives what their concerns were. The group then would try to find a way to play around any problems.

They could call in a team of experts in soils, hydrology, biology, forestry, fisheries and other disciplines to study the particular land tracts involved, but the experts would not be pitted against each older.

The state Department of Natural Resources would coordinate the teams, whose members could come from state agencies, tribes or private organizations.

If the timber companies and environmental and tribal groups still could not come to an agreement, the state Department of Natural Resources would make a decision, which could be appealed to the Forest Practices Board and, as a last resort to the courts.

Timber owners who don't want to go through that process would have to follow existing and proposed new forest practices regulations.

The area of most controversy involved logging along streams. The state Forest Practices Board had proposed a regulation that would require timber owners to leave 30 percent of the trees or bushes in a 50-foot zone along a stream. No group was happy with that.

The regulation proposed by the new agreement is much more complicated, with standards that vary widely according to the specific stream, topographic and other conditions on the land to be logged.

That, in fact, is a theme of the accord: to apply controls more on a case-by-case basis and taking into consideration what is going on in the surrounding river basin.

But while this approach is more agreeable to both environmentalists and timber companies and a cornerstone of the agreement, it will cost money to implement because it will require many more field visits than currently take place.

Boyle said a "very soft" estimate is that state agencies all together might need $4 million to $5 million a year to provide all of the personnel needed.

The legislature will be approached for money, and the tribes probably will turn to the federal government to pay for their increased costs.

A related major aspect of the agreement calls for field monitoring to evaluate protection methods and also to address any harmful cumulative effects of logging activities within a river basin.

The agreement also calls for beefing up field enforcement of forestry regulations. And it would amend the state Forest Practices Act to allow more time and better review of proposals to log environmentally sensitive lands.

The agreement pledges to keep small landowners solvent. Owners of 30 acres of land orless who would be severely affected by streamside requirements would be allowed to cut down more trees near the stream.

After the press conference, several weary participants, who in the past have hardly talked to each other, said they learned a tremendous amount about one another during negotiations and learned to trust and communicate with—and even like—each other.

Environmentalists Marcy Golde and Judy Turpin said they came to realize that they want timber to remain a strong industry in this state because what replaces logging often isn't environmentally better.

"I do not want this to be a wet Southern California with suburban sprawl all over the place," said Golde.

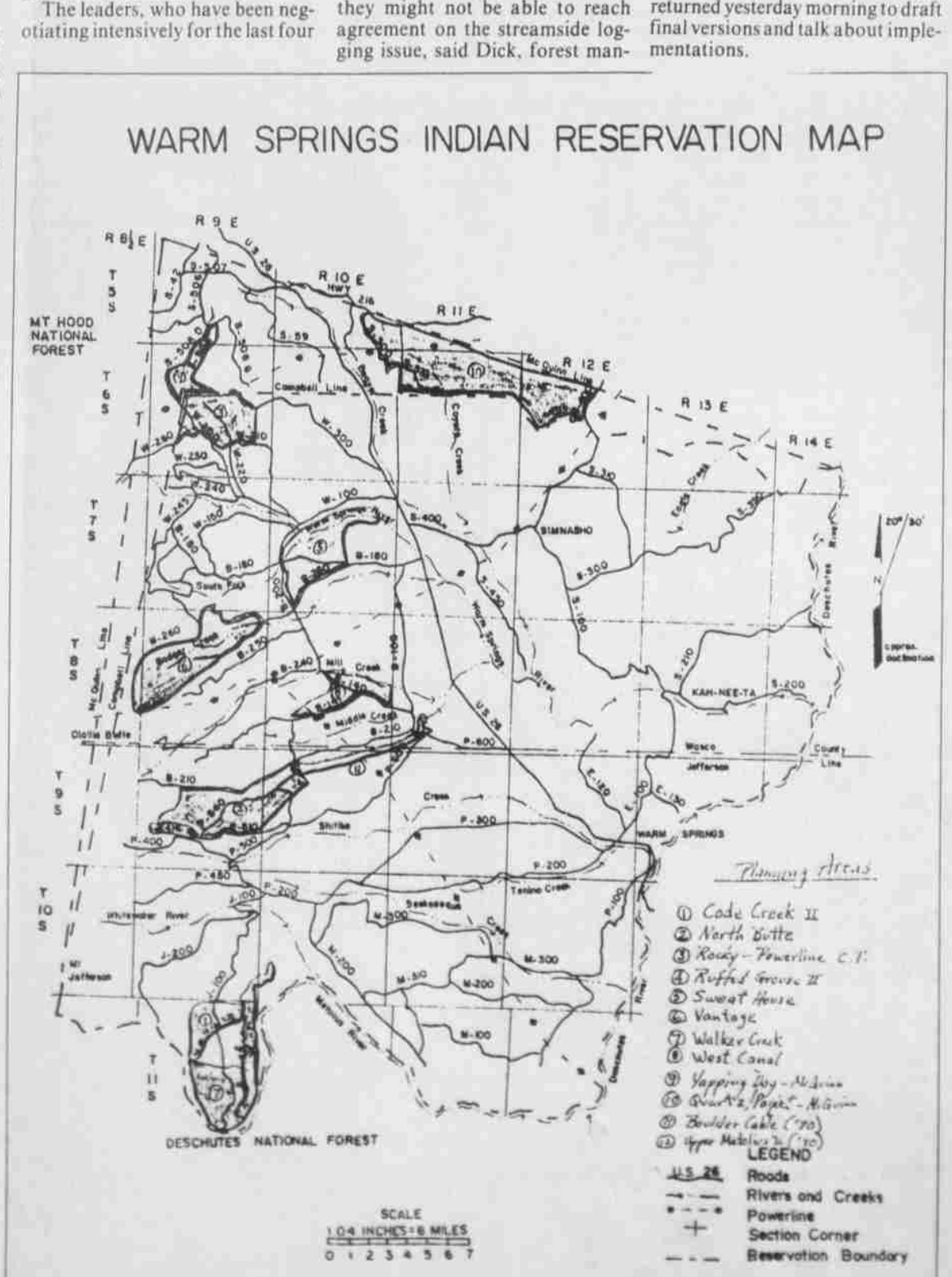
Industry representative Bob Dick said, "I'm tired of fighting. I've been fighting for ten years. I came to appreciate the tribal cultures and what is behind the intensity of environmentalists.

"I came to appreciate why they're what they're doing. I realized Marcy was not just trying to put my people out of business."

The leaders, who have been negotiating intensively for the last four months, came to an agreement at 12:22 a.m. yesterday at a Seattle-Tacoma International Airport motel.

At times during the marathon session Thursday, participants felt they might not be able to reach agreement on the streamside logging issue, said Dick, forest management director with the Washington Forest Protection Association.

But when they finally did, they celebrated for a few hours, went home to sleep for a few hours, and returned yesterday morning to draft final versions and talk about implementations.



Proposed logging units for 1989/90 will be discussed at upcoming public meeting. Field trips will be scheduled in the spring for those wishing to visit the proposed sale units. Locations are indicated on the above map. Any questions regarding the proposed sales may be directed to Jim Akerson, Warm Springs BIA forestry department. Times and dates of meetings will be published in Spilyay Tymoo.