

Vandals cause damage at Sherars Bridge

By Leslie Mitts
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Vandals struck the day-use area at Sherars Bridge, causing damage to signs and parking areas.

Oliver Kirk, Natural Resources law enforcement manager, arrived at the area on March 23 and noticed deep tire tracks in the parking area.

During his inspection, Kirk said, he realized that signs reading "Day use permits required on tribal land" were missing.

Two signposts had been broken off, and each sign was removed.

"It's hard to say whether or not its alcohol influenced, or hate," Kirk said.

According to Kirk, "There are non-Indians that are opposed to the day-use fee."

The fee was established several years ago, and all profits go to the tribal general fund, Kirk said. In return, the tribes benefited the area by improving it drastically.

According to Kirk, "The area was really rocky and really hard for any vehicles to get in and out."



The parking area at Sherars Bridge was damaged.

Oliver Kirk photo

In addition, Kirk said, miscellaneous car parts and other garbage littered the area.

Now, he added, "The tribes went in there and then they filled in all that and made it nice and accessible for the tribes and the public."

Vandalism has a history at Sherars Falls during the past few years—in addition to graffiti damaging the pictographs, toilets have been stolen and the fee box broken into.

With that, Kirk said, "The only ones they're really hurting is the tribes."

The repairs to the area will be extensive, Kirk said. In addition to replacing the signposts and signs, the parking area will have to be graded and the gravel compacted.

In Kirk's opinion, the vandalism is only costing the tribes in the long run.

"I don't know whether its hate related or disgruntled fish-

erman or our own people just driving down there," he said. "It's not good—it just makes the tribe spend more money."

In the end, Kirk added, "I just wanted to bring this to the attention of the tribal people."

Kirk said he hopes that by publicizing the vandalism, it will curtail the activity.

No suspects have been identified. Anyone with information is encouraged to call the police department.

Oregon farmers want to increase Columbia River irrigation

(AP) — Economic development officials from Eastern Oregon packed a hearing room last week to drum up support for a contentious bill to siphon off 500,000 acre-feet of water annually from the Columbia River to help farmers grow higher value, water-intensive crops.

Environmentalists said the proposal, dubbed the "Oasis Project" by supporters, would harm salmon that swim up the Columbia River each year into creeks to spawn throughout Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

"The fact that we have every salmon stock in the Columbia either extinct or listed under the Endangered Species Act says enough," said Rick George, a biologist who works for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. "We have turned that habitat inside out."

The proposed measure, which received its first legislative airing last Thursday, April 22, would allow up to 500 million gallons a day to be pumped from the Columbia River, including during dry summer months when water is critical for both farmers and fish.

Advocates of the proposal said it could generate \$220 million per year and as many as 7,300 new jobs by reinvigorating rural communities.

However, critics said it runs counter to Oregon's current "bucket-in, bucket-out" policy that requires water users to replace any water they withdraw from the river.

A better plan, some environmentalists say, would be to build water storage facilities and divert water from the Columbia during high flow periods in the winter months. But water specialists said that would cost millions of dollars.

In neighboring Washington, Gov. Christine Gregoire cleared the way for more withdrawals from the river to make additional irrigation water available to farmers on that side of the river.

Of the water that's diverted from the Columbia for irrigation in the Northwest, Washington already pulls over 30 percent while Oregon takes just 7 percent, according to advocates of the bill.

State Rep. Mike Schaufler, who supports the bill, said Oregon should use more water from the Columbia to generate greater economic growth. "We could take advantage and we're not. It's a shame, it's criminal," said the Happy Valley Democrat.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski's office said that the governor does not support the bill but is seeking funding for a study to determine if Oregon can withdraw more water from the Columbia without harming native fish species.

For thousands of years salmon traveled over 1,000 miles from the Pacific up the Columbia River and into smaller creeks to spawn in alpine environments like the Willowa and Blue mountains in Oregon, and the Rocky Mountains in Idaho. Their numbers have declined drastically in recent decades and many biologists say it is the result of the extensive dam system on the Columbia that hinders their migration.

In the early 1990s, after the first listing of a Columbia fish under the federal Endangered Species Act, Oregon began limiting new water entitlements. Scientists say seasonal restrictions help support spawning salmon and steelhead but farmers say they need more water from the Columbia because groundwater is drying up.

News from Indian Country

Number of Indian basketball referees growing

GREAT FALLS, Mont. (AP) — In two decades as a high school basketball official, Spike Bighorn probably has worked at least 500 games in Montana, counting boys' and girls' contests.

He has blown the whistle for at least 50 district and divisional tournaments, adding a few hundred more games to his distinguished resume.

He recently officiated at his 18th state tourney when he worked the Class C boys' event at Four Seasons Arena here.

He's called fouls and interpreted rules with hundreds of different officials from every nook and cranny of Montana. He's probably been yelled at (and cheered by) hundreds of thousands of fans in countless school gyms plus some of the state's biggest arenas.

But the state's most promi-

nent American Indian basketball official still hasn't worked a major event with another Indian referee.

"It's going to happen. We're making gains in that direction," Bighorn said before working the Class C boys' championship game between Hays-Lodgepole and Big Sandy.

"When I started, there probably were less than 10 Native Americans working high school games in Montana. Now — and I'm talking off the top of my head — there are probably 40 or 50. And that's going to continue to grow," he predicted.

Bighorn, a member of the Assiniboine and Sioux tribe from the Fort Peck Reservation in northeastern Montana, notched a personal milestone earlier this season when he worked a district tournament in the Billings area with another

Indian referee.

And just a few weeks ago in Butte, an Indian from Ashland, Roger Knows His Gun, officiated at the state Class B boys' tourney in Butte for the first time.

Considering the keen level of interest in basketball on Montana's seven Indian reservations, increasing participation of American Indians in the key officiating role should be a goal, Bighorn said.

"Basketball is a big part of life for Native American schools," said Bighorn, who grew up in Brockton and served a number of key positions on the Fort Peck Reservation — including a two-year stint as tribal chairman. He also taught high school and served as a school administrator before going to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bighorn, 46, currently

works in Billings as Regional Education Director for the BIA.

"The kids growing up need role models, whether they're teachers, coaches or officials," said Bighorn. "I encourage people to get involved in officiating as an avocation. It's a good way to stay close to the game and stay in shape, and make a little money. But it's not for everyone."

Bighorn got a later start than most referees, waiting until he was 26 before he called his first game. He had played basketball at Miles Community College before finishing up his undergraduate work at Dickinson (N.D.) State. After earning a master's degree in business administration at Gonzaga, he returned to Brockton where he taught school and worked as a volunteer assistant coach.

Nome's only substance abuse shelter shut down

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Nome has eight bars, five liquor stores, two private clubs that sell booze, and three restaurants with beer and wine on the menu, but there's not a single residential substance abuse treatment center in town. The closest one is a plane trip away in Kotzebue.

For five years, Nome's Kusqi House stood out as the place for the region's drug-addicted and alcoholic women to live while they received outpatient treatment.

But Kusqi became trouble itself. Last fall, some of the residents began drinking at what was supposed to be a safe place for recovery, according to a report to the state from the Norton Sound Health Corp., which ran Kusqi. A couple of "highly intoxicated" residents got into a fight. One had her infant taken away. Police were called out a couple of times. There were reports of drug dealing too, the report said.

Now Norton Sound has es-

entially shut down Kusqi while it revamps the program. The last resident left Feb. 16, and the corporation is not filling the slots. Yet the state still is sending grant money to the Native health corporation for Kusqi. Officials say they want to lend a helping hand as the corporation regroups.

"In a situation like this, where this is really the only show in town, it is definitely in our best interest to help them and support them," said Chris Carson, grants manager with the state Department of Health and Social Services.

The health department provided more than \$3 million in various grants to the corporation last budget year. This year, the corporation expects to receive a like amount and anticipates spending \$302,000 of it on Kusqi.

State officials said they didn't realize treatment grant money was being used to run Kusqi House until a news reporter raised questions. "It falls outside

our normal practice," said Stacy Toner, acting director of the state Division of Behavioral Health. "The housing costs slipped in without it being treatment."

The turmoil at Kusqi stands out, but it is just one area of struggle for the financially pinched Norton Sound Health Corp.

Flat funding from the U.S. Indian Health Service and rising costs for salaries, fuel and other expenses pushed the corporation, with an annual budget this year of \$56 million, into the red, said Trevor Colby, Norton Sound Health Corp. president and chief executive officer.

The board has cut about \$3 million from what managers wanted to spend, said Colby, who started in the top job at the end of October. Reserves are down to about \$1.8 million. Turnover is high. The tribal organization runs the only hospital in Nome and provides outpatient services there and in 15 surrounding villages.

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