

Extension hosts noxious weed education

By Leslie Mitts
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OSU Extension at Warm Springs hosted an educational forum recently to inform people about weeds.

According to Jon Valley, a Deschutes County employee available to answer questions and speak to community members, educational tools like the "weed wagon" help people to be able to identify weeds and learn about types of noxious weeds that should be removed.

Noxious weeds can be difficult to control because seeds can remain viable for years and have extensive root systems.

However, they can be controlled if people report weed sightings and take steps to prevent their spreading.

The weed wagon was parked in the community center parking lot during the forum, making its first appearance in Warm



Rico Thompson browses brochures in the "weed wagon" as Owen Danzuka Sr. looks on.

Springs since being purchased for use by the Interagency Weed Management Team.

The event also included presentations and speakers, with topics ranging from common

weeds of the range, seeding for fire rehabilitation, local range treatments plots, grazing for weed management, and how to recognize invasive species.

Participants included the

Oregon Department of Agriculture, the county weed departments, Central Oregon Agriculture Research Station, the BIA and Fire Management.

Biomass transmission line project assessment released

The Resource Management Interdisciplinary Team recently approved for public review a project assessment pertaining to the proposed Biomass Transmission Line.

The project would develop 85 acres in a narrow swath running from Warm Springs Forest Products Industries to Round Butte Dam.

The Resource Management Interdisciplinary Team (RMIDT) unanimously passed a motion to release the project for public review and comment during a February 28 meeting.

The transmission line will cover a distance of 15 miles. The poles carrying the line will be 80 feet tall and they will be spaced 350 apart.

A 12-foot wide maintenance road will be used to

access the line.

The line will transport electricity generated at the Warm Springs biomass power plant to the Round Butte switch yard, where it will be sold to Portland General Electric.

The project assessment followed a process outlined in the Integrated Resources Management Plan.

Resource professionals gathered comments from tribal members, planned the development and analyzed for its potential impacts.

Tribal members have 30 days to comment on the Biomass Transmission Line Project Assessment.

Copies of the document are available at the Warm Springs Power Enterprises office.

Biologists find challenge in supporting both kokanee and bull trout

(AP) — The 228 tiny kokanee swam in a white plastic bucket only a few days after hatching in the Metolius River.

On their way downstream to Lake Billy Chinook, they ran into a detour: an 8-foot-high fish trap, and, eventually, the bucket, as part of an effort to track the number of kokanee making the trip.

Trapping that many kokanee this early in the season was really unusual, noted Megan Hill, a fish biologist with Portland General Electric.

But it's a welcome turn for fisheries managers, who have seen the kokanee population decline in recent years.

The fish are pulled in many directions: federally protected bull trout prey on them, anglers seek to snag them and biologists are about to try to coax some of them to migrate past the Pelton and Round Butte dams to the ocean.

And with these multiple pressures, plus uncertainty over what's going to happen when an add-on to the dam changes water currents and temperatures, biologists are keeping a close eye on the kokanee, to make sure the population can remain healthy.

"We're putting a lot of demands on this kokanee population," said Brett Hodgson, Deschutes District biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "The question is, how can we best manage the situation to try to meet those three demands?"

The kokanee population has been up and down since scientists started monitoring it closely about 15 years ago.

Kokanee, a landlocked version of sockeye salmon, quickly became the biggest game fish in Lake Billy Chinook after the reservoir filled in 1964 upon completion of the Pelton Round Butte dam complex, said Don Ratliff, senior aquatic biologist with PGE. The population has declined rapidly since then, he said. While anglers normally catch an average of 70,000 kokanee a year, and caught 135,000 in 2000, last year they only pulled in 16,000.

One of the reasons for this decline, Ratliff said, is bull trout, and the predator-prey relationship it has with kokanee. Bull trout, a larger species that eats both kokanee and small bull trout, is listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

But the bull trout population in Lake Billy Chinook is robust, and there's even talk of transferring some of them to the

Clackamas River basin to help populations there, said Peter Lickwar, a fish and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

And Ratliff sees a connection between the high bull trout numbers and the peak of the kokanee numbers. After the kokanee population reached its high around 2000, the number of bull trout soared.

"They went through the roof in 2002," he said of the bull trout. "We all wondered if it was a sustainable population, and it looks like it wasn't."

That's because last fall, the number of bull trout spawning in the Metolius River dropped by more than a third, from 974 to 601. So the bull trout population now appears to be declining, following the pattern of its kokanee prey, he said.

"It's kind of a slingshot effect that echoes through the ecosystem," Ratliff said.

The kokanee population seems to be on a slight upswing now, he and Hodgson agreed.

"What it appears we have is a normal predator-prey cycle, and there appears to be a trend where the two populations are starting to adjust and normalize to each other," Hodgson said.

But the question, he said, is whether fisheries managers should try to stem any increase in the numbers of bull trout to let the kokanee take off to meet these demands, or if they should just let it be, Hodgson said.

"I think there is agreement that there is a predator-prey relationship between bull trout and kokanee," he said. "Where the uncertainty lies, is whether there needs to be more aggressive bull trout management."

What adds another layer of debate is the bull trout's threatened status. The Metolius run of bull trout is one of the few runs of the fish in the country that people can catch, and allowing anglers to catch and keep even more would require a change in federal regulations.

Ratliff said he would like federal fishery managers to approve a recovery plan for the bull trout, so that once they hit a certain level, people could catch and keep more so the bull trout population could become more stable.

"We have more than we need spawning, and they appear to be affecting other species in the lake," Ratliff said.

But Hodgson said the state wildlife department is taking the "wait and see" approach, and that increasing the catch on a federally listed species isn't ap-

propriate at this time.

That's especially the case because things are about to change in Lake Billy Chinook, said Lickwar, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and PGE are in the process of installing a fish passage facility at Round Butte Dam to collect fish that people will truck to downstream portions of the Deschutes River. But it will also change the water currents and temperatures of the reservoir, Lickwar said, and so the agency wants to see how that affects bull trout and kokanee and other fish populations before changing the management of bull trout.

And there are other things that could prey on kokanee, or affect their population, he said,

noting that populations without either anglers or predators still cycle up and down.

And, a previous study found that bull trout actually eat more insects than they do kokanee.

"We're trying not to move too quickly to a conclusion and progression of action that might not necessarily be the best to pursue," Lickwar said. "What I guess we've tried to support is a little bit of patience in trying to watch how things develop."

There are many unknowns about the interaction between kokanee, bull trout and their ecosystem in the reservoir, said Mike Gauvin, fisheries management supervisor with the tribes.

"The reality is, until this thing turns on in 2009, we really don't know how the fish are going to respond to it," he said.

But when that happens, the fisheries managers will have a better handle on what direction to go in, and how to balance the risks and benefits to the different species of fish.

While there are no plans at the moment to cut back on how many bull trout are munching on kokanee, the state and tribes are cutting back on how many kokanee people can catch.

With the kokanee population down, and the bull trout population up, anglers are casting their lines for bull trout in the spring months instead, Hodgson said.

"I think through a reduction of the harvest, and adjustment of bull trout numbers through just natural predator-prey relationships, hopefully, optimistically, we're going to see the ko-

kanee population increasing," Hodgson said.

The Warm Springs tribes and PGE are also keeping a close eye on the kokanee population. As part of the federal relicensing process for the Pelton and Round Butte dams, the dams' co-owners are required to bring back the chinook, steelhead and sockeye that used to return from the ocean to the upper reaches of the Deschutes Basin, but are now blocked by the dams.

"We would utilize the robust stocks of kokanee in Lake Billy Chinook to jump-start a sockeye run," said Gauvin, with the tribes. "The key for us is to find a balance between how many fish can go out, and how many fish need to stay in that lake."



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