

Around Indian Country

Invasive fish now close to critical salmon habitat

An invasive predator is threatening to sink millions of dollars in salmon and steelhead recovery, and it's inching closer to creating a crisis on the Columbia River.

Northern pike were thought to be over 80 miles from Grand Coulee Dam and the salmon and steelhead below.

This month the Confederated Tribes of the Colville captured a northern pike in Lower Lake Roosevelt near the Grand Coulee Dam.

That means the predator fish are now less than 10 miles from the critical salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River. In addition, the Spokane Tribe just caught their biggest pike ever, measuring 47 inches and weighing 27.5 pounds.

"We are at a critical moment

in time where impacts to salmon and steelhead by northern pike can be fully prevented," said Washington Invasive Species Council Executive Coordinator Justin Bush.

The continued spread of northern pike will constitute an environmental emergency which will require swift action to slow down or stop, Bush said.

The Washington Invasive Species Council, Native American tribes, state and federal agencies, provincial and regional organizations, and others are united in this effort, but more must be done, and quickly, he said.

"Continued spread of northern pike also threaten tribal, commercial and sportfishing harvest of salmon and steelhead in Washington and Oregon."

Official, Klamath Tribes at odds over water talks

Department of Interior official Alan Mikkelsen—he spent the week in Klamath Falls and Medford—said he will return to the Klamath Basin next month to continue water talks, but that he has no plans to reach out to the Klamath Tribes based on their last interaction.

Mikkelsen said earlier this month his last communication with the Klamath Tribes was in August

during a meeting of the Tribal Council. He said he felt disrespected during the last meeting and has not requested to meet with the tribes since that time.

"When you stand in front of the general council for two hours and basically have a very difficult discussion, at some point you have to throw your hands up ... There were personal attacks made..."

Logs will be building blocks for stream restoration in Yakima basin

Modern science and centuries-old cultural ideals converged last week as a helicopter lowered logs into the nearby Little Naches River while Yakama Nation tribal members shared a ceremonial song celebrating salmon's importance to their way of life.

Former tribal council Chairman Jerry Menninick and four others, including council Vice Chairman Virgil Lewis, followed the solemn song with praise for the "wood fiesta" stream restoration project underway as they spoke.

"I'm truly amazed at what has been accomplished this last couple of decades," said Lewis, who worked at the tribe's Cle Elum fish hatchery when it opened in 1997.

"I'm really proud of our staff and what they've been able to do."

Yakama Nation Fisheries habitat biologists Scott Nicolai, Kelly Clayton and Ashton Bunce designed the ambitious project to continue efforts to restore historic salmon runs in the Yakima basin.

Like other projects in the basin, this one involved collaboration from several public and private groups.

If all goes according to plan, floodwaters will bury the new logs under gravel and become a permanent feature, creating habitat for fish and slowing the flow of water.

Bunce said the new spawning grounds should benefit chinook

salmon, steelhead and rainbow trout, along with cutthroat and other native species, and it might even eventually bring endangered bull trout back to some of the project locations.

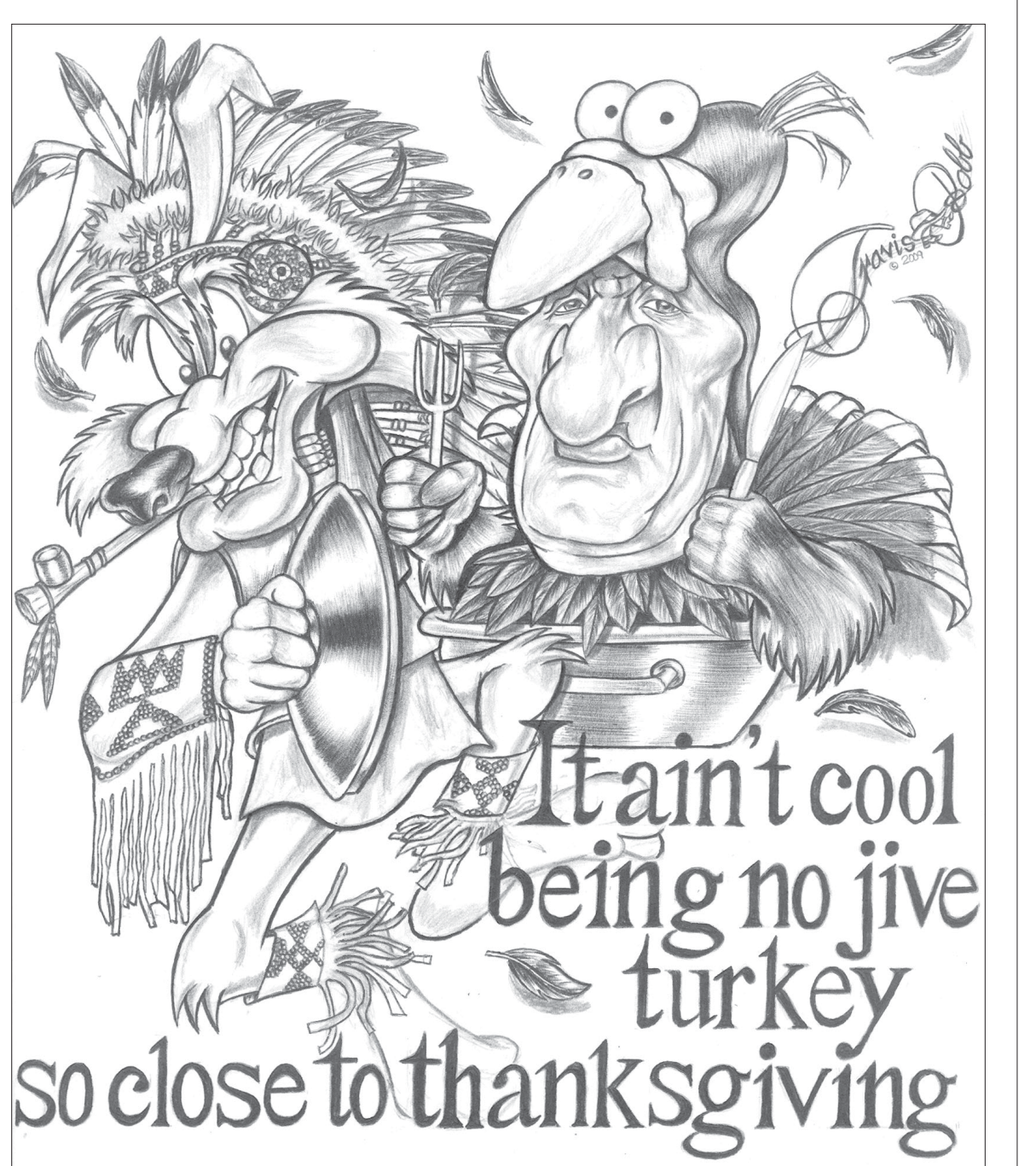
By creating more side channels and places to store cool groundwater, the project should create the type of colder habitats those fish prefer as river temperatures rise.

Clayton, Nicolai and others hope their innovative efforts can become a model for others, widening the scope of what's possible as they try to restore forests and watersheds.

Additional forest restoration and the Yakama Nation's hatcheries contribute toward shared objectives, which Lewis said align with the elders' wishes to take care of nature and "make it like it was."

Much remains to be done, but Menninick said progress can already be seen as salmon have returned to some of their native runs, spawning in places where there have been restoration projects.

The Nature Conservancy's director of forest restoration and fire, Reese Lolley, praised the increased pace and scale of the work done on places like the Little Naches, in the same area where he stood watching the Norse Peak fire in 2017.



Wishing Warm Springs Happy Holidays! ~ Travis Bobb

For Our Tribal Veterans

Jayson Smith photos



Veterans advocates, the community and especially young people celebrated Veterans Day in Warm Springs with a parade and ceremonies, November 11.

