



Aldwin Keo catches small lamprey in a stream on the Warm Springs Reservation.

Lamprey return is down this year, again showing need for tribal restoration effort

This year's Pacific lamprey return in the Columbia River is nearly 30 percent lower than the average run in the past 10 years, according to counts from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers taken at Bonneville Dam.

The dismal numbers come after decades of slow and small progress in restoring populations of the important fish after it was driven to the brink of local extinction in the 1990s and 2000s.

Last year's returns were higher than the 10-year average. Experts cautioned returns can vary substantially year-to-year.

The 87,365 adult eel-like fish that traversed Bonneville as of September 14 make up 10 percent or less of pre-dam returns.

Ms. Porter, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, is the Lam-

prey Project lead at the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

"People say they returned in the millions, and you could walk over their backs. Or, at Willamette Falls, it was like Medusa's hair with all the fish hanging off the rocks," Laurie said.

"They were abundant and plentiful, and they are not now."

Life cycles interrupted

Lamprey survived 450 million years pretty much unchanged.

Problems started for the foundational Columbia River Basin fish with the arrival of Euro-American settlers in the Pacific Northwest.

Native nations depended on nutrient-rich lampreys. The fish were a key part of many local nations, tribes and bands' diets.

Fishery: work is with lamprey survival

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The project includes Keo working as a member of the Confederated Tribes to increase knowledge and connection to a fish that was a traditional first food and cultural symbol.

'First food' is another name for foods that are staples at tribal feasts, served at large gatherings, and deemed historically significant to the river tribes.

Keo's work at University of Idaho continues more than two decades of effort to understand the migration behavior of adult lamprey.

The research has helped develop effective fish passage for the species in the Columbia Basin, and im-

proved co-management of lamprey and salmon by regional tribal, state and federal management agencies.

University of Idaho researchers played an important role in the construction of lamprey passage systems—modifications to dams that allowed lamprey to pass over the dams similar to fish ladders built for migrating salmon.

The passage systems were developed by NOAA-Fisheries, the university and Army Corps of Engineers two decades ago and have been installed at many dams in the Pacific Northwest.

The history of the lamprey in tribal culture includes a creation story that

Keo has learned from a video posted on YouTube. He recounts:

Lamprey was a gambler, and he was at a stream beating Beaver and Muskrat at the stick game—a gambling game—and collecting their possessions when Coyote, the creator, passed by.

Coyote challenged Lamprey to a game. He beat Lamprey over and over, until Lamprey had no more possessions to gamble, but Lamprey refused to quit.

He bet his arms and legs and lost, but still refused to concede to coyote. Because of his lack of humility in defeat, Coyote chastised Lamprey.

'Your mouth got you in

trouble,' Coyote told him. 'Now you have to swim upstream sucking on rocks.'

Keo's research will make sure the Pacific lamprey flourishes and continues to travel the Columbia River and its tributaries in sustainable numbers—and climb the same rapids and falls it has scaled for centuries, by sucking on and squiggling up rocks.

Article by Ralph Bartholdt, University Communications. Photos by Aldwin Keo and University Visual Productions, University of Idaho News.



Lamprey, among most important traditional tribal foods.

Dams—along with pollutants from industry, declining ocean food stocks, invasive species, rampant habitat destruction, warming river temperatures and other factors—interrupted that, said Ralph Lampman, lead biologist of the Yakama Nation's Pacific Lamprey Project.

Bonneville Dam, for example, monitored how many lamprey passed during the day from its

completion in 1938 until 1969. During that time, it saw daytime returns of between 50,000 to 400,000 a year, meaning total returns then could have numbered more than a million because daytime counts only capture a fraction of the fish. Just 25 percent of the lamprey that the dam counted this year came during the day.

Lampman suspects returns were two to three times more still because lamprey are

so hard to count.

But the dam stopped counting in 1969 and, by the time it began again in 1994, the population had collapsed with returns varying from roughly 100,000 to fewer than 7,000 in the decades that followed.

Restoration efforts

"Some pretty scary years from a conservation standpoint, where all of us in the region, especially our tribal partners, were really concerned about the status of Pacific lamprey in the Columbia Basin," said fish biologist Sean Tackley of that era.

He's the fish policy and program manager with the Northwest division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the agency that operates most of the major Columbia Basin dams that lamprey must negotiate.

"Those low counts in the

late '90s and early 2000s really prompted a lot of the efforts that you're seeing today across the basin," he said.

Those efforts include lamprey ramps, which allow the fish to climb up a chute to an alternative passage that's easier for them. Resting boxes, another example, are bolted to the bottom of the fish ladder and allow lamprey to take a break from the ladder's fast currents.

Ramps, resting boxes and similar projects modify infrastructure that was originally designed for salmon to accommodate the lamprey, the much older, much different looking fish. Salmon are more popular for conservation efforts due in part to their huge comparative appeal to non-Native Americans, and also to being listed by the Endangered Species Act.

AGENCY DISTRICT

2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

OCTOBER 7, 2024
6PM - DINNER
7PM - MEETING

AGENCY LONGHOUSE

SEEKSEEQUA DISTRICT MEETING

2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

OCTOBER 8, 2024

6pm - dinner
7pm - meeting

SEEKSEEQUA FIRE HALL

SIMNASHO DISTRICT MEETING

2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

OCTOBER 9, 2024
6PM - DINNER
7PM - MEETING

SIMNASHO LONGHOUSE

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