

Lamprey Scarce This Year

■ Oregon Public Broadcasting reporter tags along.

By Ron Karten

At Willamette Falls, the water is polluted, and it is not getting appreciably better. At the same time, the importance of lamprey to the Native way of life is undiminished.

Natives are going to continue to hunt them and eat lamprey because "that's their culture, that's their life," said Mike Kamosh, a forester in the Tribal Natural Resources department. Kamosh participated in this year's Tribal lamprey harvest at Willamette Falls.

Grand Ronde's Natural Resources Department also monitors the health and habitat of local lamprey, so the annual lamprey harvest that this year took place on June 29 caught the eye of Oregon Public Broadcasting reporter Ann Dornfeld, who came along for the story.

"The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) is ok with point sources of pollution," said Kamosh, "but they have nothing for recording fertilizers and pesticides and other non-point sources going into the river."

"Look at the river at Eugene, Albany, Salem," said Tribal member and Tribal Director of Development Pete Wakeland, who also helped with this year's harvest. "It gets progressively dirtier. When I get done with one of these harvests," he added, "all I can taste is oil from the Willamette."

And perhaps this year, the lamprey felt about the same way. The catch all day, maybe 20 fish, compared with last and recent years when the crew brought home as many as 125-150 fish.

"Maybe another Tribe was here earlier," suggested Kelly Dirksen, Tribal Fish & Wildlife Coordinator who organized the event.

"Maybe the water flow was less than usual," suggested Mike Wilson, Manager of the Natural Resources Department, and also along for the gathering. "Maybe the pollution had something to do with it, too, but that wouldn't have come up so fast as to make a difference in one year."

On the same day, the Cultural Resources department put two Tribally-made canoes into the Willamette River at Independence.

This was the first time since 1881 that Tribal canoes have been in the Willamette, said Eirik Thorsgard, a Cultural Protection Specialist in the Tribe's Cultural Resources department.

The plan was for the caught lamprey from Willamette Falls to the north and the canoes from Independence to the south to meet in between at Wallace Marine Park in West Salem at five that evening for a Tribal picnic.

OPB reporter Ann Dornfeld intended to taste a fresh-caught lamprey in order to finish her story, but it was not to be. While Tribal members partook of hotdogs, hamburgers, potato salad and watermelon, the lamprey chilled their heels in an ice cooler, only to be frozen later at the Tribe's Portland office.

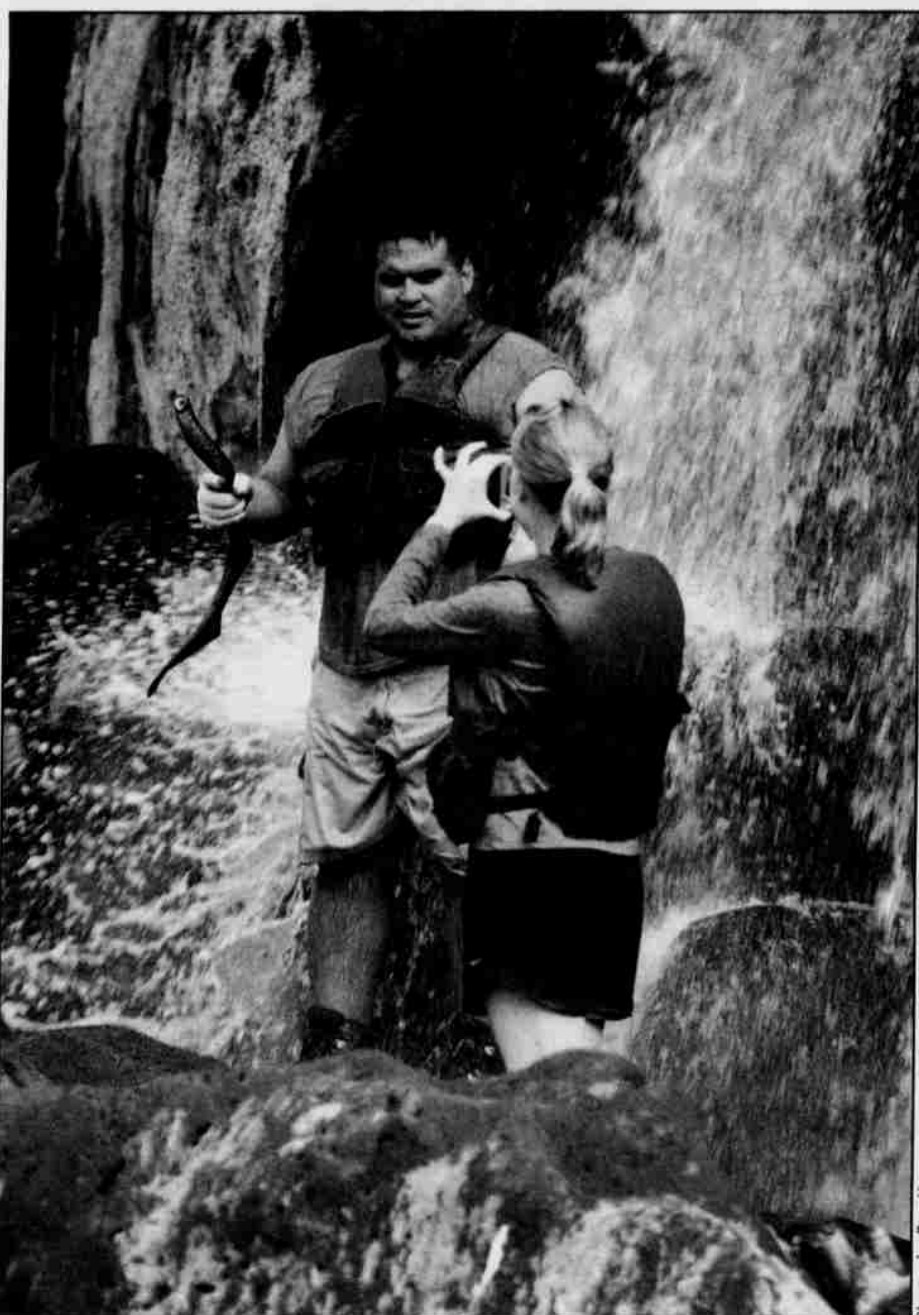
As *Smoke Signals* went to press, the lamprey remained frozen in Portland, or possibly barbecued one recent afternoon, depending on who you ask, but another harvest was planned for July 23, and that afternoon at the Tribe's Natural Resources Department, there will be another attempt to skin and gut them, to boil and barbecue them, and for the sake of journalism, Dornfeld promises, to taste them, too. ■



Natural Resources Biologist Kelly Dirksen, with lamprey in hand, talks to Oregon Public Broadcasting reporter Ann Dornfeld.

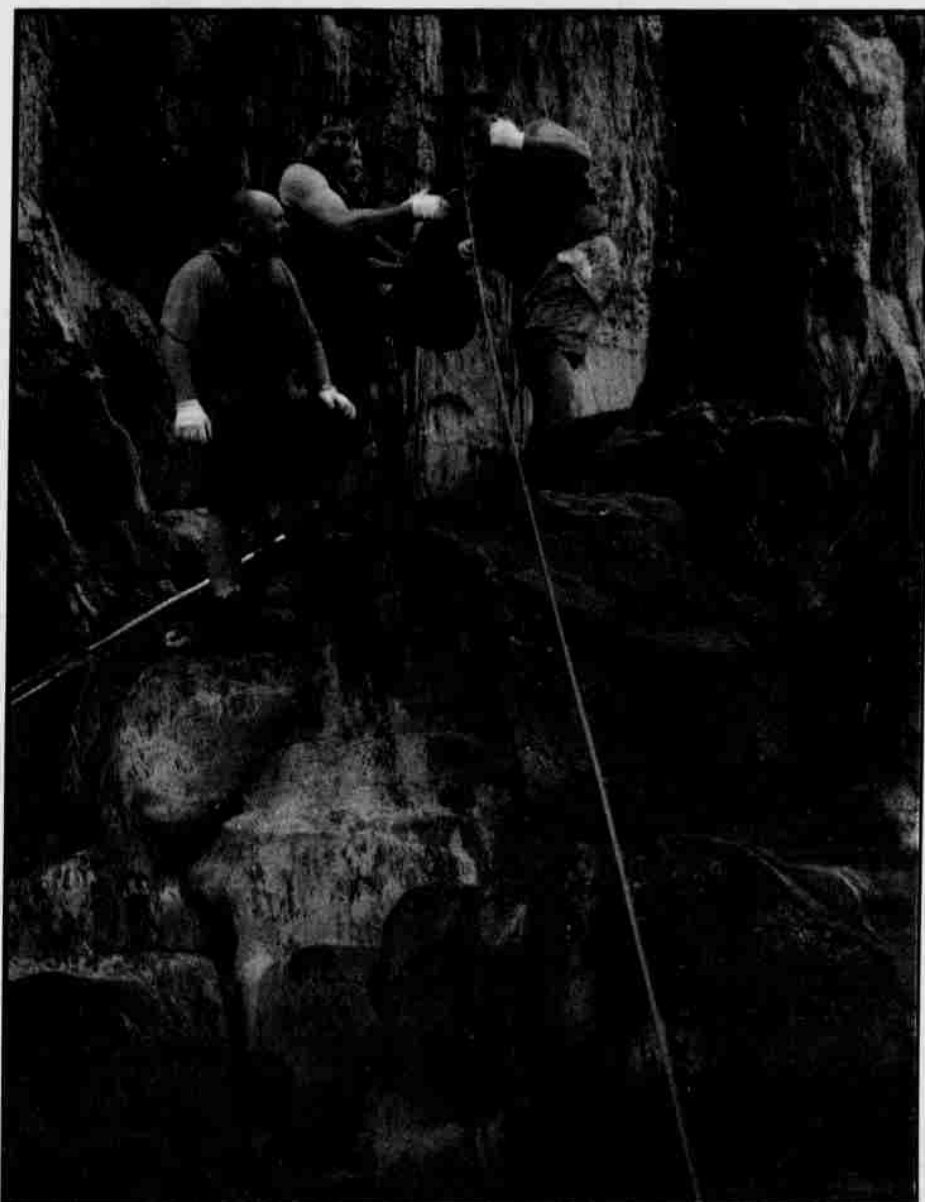


Pete Wakeland hands off a lamprey to Mike Kamosh, who bagged it. The catch was 20 lampreys for the day.



▲ Tribal member and Director of Development Pete Wakeland poses while OPB reporter Ann Dornfeld takes his photo.

◀ Natural Resources staffers Mike Kamosh, (l to r) Mike Wilson and Pete Wakeland rig up a slide to bring in a bag of lamprey at Willamette Falls.



Photos by Ron Karten