

George opens consulting firm

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Kathleen Feehan George brings her wild side to work.

"I've always loved spending time in wild places," says the 39-year-old Grand Ronde Tribal member who now lives Pendleton. "I remember how much I loved family camping trips as a kid, the opportunity to be in the forest for days."

She adds that her love of forests and rivers was maybe recognition that "where I grew up in the Willamette Valley (Milwaukie), wild places were shrinking as all sorts of development expanded."

Feehan George brought that love of the wild to Grand Ronde as the Tribe's Environmental Coordinator for six years from 1996 to 2002, when she developed the Tribe's first environmental program.

She moved to Pendleton and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation where she honed her skills as a Water Quality Policy analyst and later as Senior Policy analyst.

Her focus on environmental issues, but maybe even more so on the people who make things happen here in the Northwest, have translated into valuable contacts at Tribal, national, state and local levels.

"She understands what it is to work within the whole regulatory and political context," says Mike Karnosh, Ceded Lands Program manager for the Grand Ronde Tribe, "but she doesn't get lost in the bureaucracy and red tape. She's a people person and that makes it very easy to work with her."

Karnosh met Feehan George when he accepted the Ceded Lands Coordinator position.

"She made sure I was updated on the project and that I had the contacts I needed," he says. "She was really, really, ultra committed to the fish (safe) consumption rate and getting that raised, and so far that effort has really been successful."



Photo courtesy of Kathleen Feehan George

Tribal member Kathleen Feehan George and her son, Sean, fish on the Grande Ronde River in northeastern Oregon in the Grande Ronde Valley recently. George and her family spends a lot of time on the river.

This summer, Feehan George left the Umatillas to open a natural resources consulting firm.

"I started Cedar Consulting," she says, "to provide more flexibility in my schedule so I could spend more time with my two young sons, (Noah, 7, and Sean, 3, are also members of the Tribe), and to enable me to continue working with Tribes and government agencies on natural resource policy and problem solving."

Feehan George and husband, Rick George, have been raising their sons with an appreciation for the state's natural resources.

Feehan George is particularly tickled to have a photo of herself and son, Sean, fishing on the Grande Ronde River, which, of course, is in the Grande Ronde Valley all the way across the state from the Tribe.

The Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission recently selected Feehan George to assist in the update of its strategic plan, Wakan-ish-pum Wa-kish-Wit, Spirit of the Salmon. The goal, she says,

is to adapt the plan to the current challenges and opportunities facing the Fish Commission's member Tribes — Umatilla, Nez Perce, Yakama and Warm Springs — in their efforts to restore and protect Columbia Basin salmon.

"Extremely professional, very proficient" is how Aja DeCoteau (Yakama), Watershed Department manager for the Fish Commission, describes Feehan George. DeCoteau is working with Feehan George on the project.

Feehan George also recently joined the Board of Directors for Columbia Riverkeepers, anxious to jump in and lend a hand wherever the care and feeding of rivers is concerned.

In her work, she keeps the whole ecosystem in mind.

"Tribes have a unique role in speaking up for resources that are not generally valued by non-Tribal people, but Tribal people know to be important species," she says.

One example is the work that Oregon Tribes, particularly the Grand Ronde, are leading on the eel-like Pacific lamprey.

She sees the dwindling numbers of Pacific lamprey as an example of a larger problem.

"Pacific lamprey have been a component of the Columbia aquatic ecosystem for thousands of years," she says. "This ancient species evolved to thrive in the same clean, cold, complex, river system that supported salmon populations. Also like the salmon, lamprey have suffered from the drastic physical and chemical changes that have been made to the Columbia River system."

"From my experience working on natural resource policy in Oregon, I know that only Tribes can speak for the critical importance of regulators keeping in mind their responsibility to acknowledge and protect Tribal resources, because certainly no one

else will.

"Local, state and the federal governments are under tremendous pressure to do their work expediently and at the least cost. While we all want efficient government, we can clearly see the damage done to Tribal interests when the Tribes do not have a seat at the table."

"I've been very pleased to see our Tribe speaking up for the protection of the natural resources that support Tribal culture both on and off the reservation. After 13 years of working in this field, I know that the Tribes are often the best and strongest voices for protecting and restoring healthy natural systems."

"I have seen the ability of Tribes to change Oregon public policy by bringing the best science to the table and working with all parties. I know that when the Tribes engage with the state on these issues they do make a difference and I believe that the recovery of Oregon fisheries depends on it."

"While lamprey population reduction is reported from around the state, to date not much is being done at the state or federal level to protect and restore this cultural resource. If public policy is going to change to stop and reverse the precipitous decline of lamprey in Oregon, it will be the Tribes who demand it and make it happen."

In November, Feehan George presented a talk about Tribal treaties to the Environmental Law Education Center's Conference on Contaminated Water and Sediment.

"When the Tribes signed the treaties, they did not envision that the U.S. would allow the use of the rivers and fish resource in a way that would ultimately diminish fish availability, viability and quality," she said.

In Feehan George's world, it comes down to a simple question: "Are Oregonians serious or not about having fishable, swimmable rivers?"

"We spend a lot of time up on the Grande Ronde River," Feehan George says of her family. "My boys are really enjoying learning to fish this year. Noah was very excited to catch his first native fish this summer, a bull trout from the Grande Ronde, but he was pretty disappointed when we explained to him that this was a special endangered fish that we needed to carefully return to the river ... and he couldn't keep it."

"If we can't articulate protective goals," she told the conference, "we can't possibly hope to accomplish them." ■

NW Natives Club Member Meeting
 When: Tuesdays and Thursdays
 Time: 1 - 2 pm
 Where: Clubs Workroom Bldg. 2/178
 Chemeketa Community College

For more information please contact
 Jeremy Bailey, Club President at:
 jbaile16@my.chemeketa.edu
 Or Club VP Patrick Franks at
 pfranks1@my.chemeketa.edu

Ad created by George Valdez

Chinuk Family Night set for Jan. 25

There will be a Chinuk Family Night from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 25, in the Tribal Community Center.

For more information, contact Kathy Cole at 503-879-2249. ■