

General Council briefed on Fish and Wildlife plan

Increased sovereignty will mean longer hunting seasons

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

In the near future, Tribal members will be able to hunt a week before and a week after other Oregonians now that the state has approved the Grand Ronde Tribe's Fish & Wildlife Management Plan, which gives the Tribe control over the take of fish and wildlife on Reservation and trust lands.

"It took six years to get this plan through," said Tribal Fish and Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen at the Sunday, Oct. 5, General Council meeting held in the Community Center. "This plan will give us and the Tribe incredible opportunities."

The Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission unanimously approved the plan on Sept. 5, as well as an administrative rule giving the Tribe control over its own natural resources within the parameters outlined in the plan.

For instance, the new administrative rule allows the taking of up to 200 Roosevelt elk annually, but the Tribe will exercise sovereignty over its lands by setting its own harvest limits that do not exceed those OK'd by the state.

Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson said that currently, Tribal members who are hunting with a Tribally issued tag are doing so under the auspices of the 1986 consent decree, which is controlled by the state.

The consent decree established Tribal hunting, fishing and gathering rights and set the Trask Wildlife Unit, north of the Reservation,



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Kelly Dirksen, Tribal Fish and Wildlife Program manager, talks about the Tribe's new Fish and Wildlife Management Plan during the General Council meeting held at the Tribal Community Center on Sunday, Oct. 5.

as the area where Tribal member rights apply.

"We get to issue the tags, but they still come from the state, which is their authority," Wilson said. "As all Tribal members know, that is a bit of a problem because we, being a sovereign government as a Tribal organization, should have that sovereignty to manage our resources. ... A big part of being a sovereign and taking care of those resources is having our own plan."

Dirksen said the plan has three tiers – ceded lands, the Trask Wildlife Unit and the Tribe's Reservation and trust lands.

Dirksen said the Tribe asked the state for influence on any wildlife activities that occur in the ceded lands and that the state recognize how any changes to hunting and fishing regulations in the Trask unit will have a direct effect on the hunting and fishing rights of Tribal members.

The Tribe also asked for and received full management authority for 17 species on Reservation and trust lands, which will be separate from the consent decree and allow

the Tribe to establish its own hunting and fishing seasons.

Dirksen said the Tribe will manage 17 different species, but immediately concentrate in 2015 on four – cutthroat trout, Roosevelt elk, black-tailed deer and Coho salmon.

"These would provide the most immediate benefit for the membership," Dirksen said.

Dirksen said the goal in managing the four species is to gradually increase the take allowed by Tribal hunters.

Once the Natural Resources Department creates them, the Tribe will issue hunting tags for Tribally determined hunting seasons, which will run a week earlier and later than those sanctioned by the state.

"Our goal is to continue to expand that and provide the maximum opportunities for the Tribal membership," Dirksen said.

Dirksen thanked Tribal Council for being "relentless" in supporting creation and passage of the management plan, as well as for working on receiving state approval. He also thanked the Tribe's Legal Department for its many hours of hard work.

"It is such an exciting time to work for the Tribe," Dirksen said. "This is an opportunity that you dream of, to provide this opportunity. I think we will have some exciting things to talk to you about in the future."

Tribal Council Vice Chair Jack

Giffen Jr. thanked the Natural Resources and Legal departments for their work on creating the plan and getting it approved by the state.

"We possess the skills and have always had the skills to manage our own natural resources," Giffen said. "This is a huge opportunity for the Tribe to get back some of its sovereign rights. ... It is a huge step in a much larger goal that the Tribe is after. Each one of these benchmarks that we get to is another huge step in recovering our sovereignty. This is monumental, but we're not where we need to be yet."

Tribal Council member Cheryl A. Kennedy said the Fish & Wildlife Management Plan has been a long-term effort by numerous Tribal Councils to regain the Tribe's sovereignty lost when it was forced to sign the consent decree in 1986.

"I believe that our ancestors are standing tall and proud to see the work that has been done," she said.

Tribal Council member Jon A. George said approval of the plan shows that "we do know how to take care of this land ... it is a great testament to this Tribe."

Tribal Council Secretary Toby McClary called it a "huge accomplishment" despite the oxymoron of the Tribe having to go to the state to seek approval to manage its own lands. "The Tribal membership should be very proud," he said.

In other action, the next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 2, in the Community Center. It will be held in executive session to discuss the proposed 2015 Tribal budget.

Ida Paterson, Kaylene Barry and Isabelle Grout won the \$50 door prizes and Lanae Payton won the \$100 door prize. A pair of earrings and two necklaces created by George were raffled off.

George, Tribal Land and Culture Department Manager Jan Looking Wolf Reibach and members of Tribal Royalty opened the meeting with cultural drumming and singing.

A video of the meeting can be watched at the Tribal website, www.grandronde.org, under the Video tab. ■



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