

‘What a beautiful day this is’

PLATFORM continued
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on Oct. 3 and worked throughout the month to complete it. On Oct. 24, ceremonial fishers began dipnetting from the platform.

The structure was designed in consultation with the Tribe’s Cultural Resources Department staff and Tribal fishers.

Employees who worked at the falls included Fish & Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen, Biologist Brandon Weems, Aquatic Biologist Torey Wakeland, Wildlife Technician Matthew Zimbrick, Maintenance Technicians Nick Kimsey and Daniel Mooney, Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier, General Manager David Fullerton, Utility Maintenance Supervisor Joe Loomis, Engineering and Public Works Manager Jesse White, Maintenance Supervisor Andrew Freeman and Tribal Career Development Case-worker David DeHart.

Planning for the platform construction has been ongoing for several years, White said. Once the Tribe obtained authorization from the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife to harvest 15 ceremonial fish at the falls in 2016, employees worked on several fronts to plan for platform construction.

“There were many items to be considered for in the planning including access, location, property ownership, design/engineering and safety, among others,” White said. “Earlier this summer when it appeared the waterway structure registration would be issued, staff finalized the location for three permanent anchor systems from which the platform could be erected.”

White said that the Tribe has more than two decades of experience navigating the falls for various reasons including lamprey harvest and study, and salmon fishing.

“This experience was helpful in navigating the challenges presented by waterway access,” White said. “We were fortunate to have good weather conditions and the



Photos by Danielle Frost

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy gifts West Linn City Councilor Terri Cummings with a canoe paddle during a Friday, Oct. 26, reception held at the McLean House in West Linn to celebrate the completion of the Tribe’s ceremonial fishing platform at Willamette Falls.

construction progressed smoothly and was completed sooner than expected.”

The platform was removed by Wednesday, Oct. 31, which was the final day of the extended fishing season.

“In the coming years, it is our expectation to install the platform as soon as practicable prior to the start of the fishing season in May, and remove the platform by the end of the season in late July,” White said.

The platform will allow the Tribe to take fish at the culturally appropriate time of year instead of later in the season when water levels are lower and rocks are exposed.

Wakeland said the construction was a “long and arduous” process.

“Getting the generator over there was probably the toughest part,” he said. “We had to use pulleys to bring it over. This was a gigantic team effort and to be able to stand on the platform was awe-inspiring.”

Platform celebration

Despite the legal and other hurdles of the past few months to make the platform a reality, Friday’s event at the McLean House was all about celebration and gratitude.

It began with singing and drumming, followed with an invocation led by Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George.

All Tribal Council members except Michael Langley, who was in Denver, attended the reception and enjoyed a lunch of traditionally cooked salmon, chicken, shrimp, salad, sandwiches and several trays of desserts.

Those who wanted to see the platform were escorted to a lookout on the Oregon City side of the falls while Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta and Tribal members Chris Rempel and Troy Douglass prepared salmon over an open fire.

Jon George described the feeling of seeing the platform completed as one of elation.

“I felt so giddy looking down and seeing the Tribal fishers dipnetting at the falls,” he said. “There was so much feeling of pride and accomplishment. How proud I am of our men and women. ... What a beautiful day this is. To be able to stand there, look across the river and see

that beautiful site, everything that led up to this and everything that was against us, I think of how proud our ancestors would be now.”

Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. said the platform will have a “huge impact” on the culture of the Tribe.

“To be able to have this today for future generations, to fish in the spirit of our ancestors, is pretty cool,” he said. “The resistance we received is unfortunate, but we got through. The people who did the work deserve a big thanks as well.”

Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier said he could feel the history at the fishing site.

“It was really cool to see what has been a historic spot for us surrounded by modern features, and seeing us fishing in the background of all of this,” he said.

Employees who assisted with the celebration included Public Affairs Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark, Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez, Tribal Services Representative Lisa Archuleta and Temporary Administrative Assistant Shannon Ham-Texeira. Recently retired Elders Activity Assistant Daniel Ham drove a bus to and from Grand Ronde for Tribal members who wanted to attend the event. ■



Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier stokes the fire to help prepare traditionally cooked salmon for lunch at a Friday, Oct. 26, reception held at the McLean House in West Linn to celebrate the completion of the Tribe’s ceremonial fishing platform at Willamette Falls.



Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy speaks to those gathered at a Friday, Oct. 26, reception held at the McLean House in West Linn to celebrate the completion of the Tribe’s ceremonial fishing platform at Willamette Falls.