

Natural Resources receives grant to end ‘shocking’ fish practice

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

To determine fish populations in a stretch of water, the Tribe’s Natural Resources Department employees usually have to shock the fish.

Literally.
With electricity.
Although more than 90 percent survivable, the practice is still tough on fish, said Tribal Fish & Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen during the Tuesday, Feb. 22, Legislative Action Committee meeting.

“It’s nothing I think the fish enjoy,” Dirksen said. “It’s not fatal, but it is hard on fish to do it. And it doesn’t capture everything.”

The shocking practice may soon end.

During its Wednesday, Feb. 23, meeting, Tribal Council approved accepting a one-year, \$100,362 Endangered Species Program grant from the Bureau of Indian Affairs that will train Tribal employees in how to measure fish populations using environmental DNA.

“It is the future of biological sampling,” Dirksen said. “eDNA is a way of getting a whole profile of the species within a stream by just taking water samples.”

The grant will purchase a machine to analyze for environmental DNA and contract with Oregon State University for staff training in field collection and lab protocols that would determine species presence from water samples.

“Annually, the Fish & Wildlife staff evaluate streams prior to timber sales to determine appropriate stream buffer widths,” the executive summary states. “This is currently done by walking the stream reach and electro-shocking to determine fish presence and therefore necessary buffer widths. ... Surveying for fish using eDNA collected from water samples provides an alternative that is non-invasive and may reduce the overall cost of stream surveying.”

“I never realized that you tased fish to get their count,” Tribal Council member Jon A. George said.

“This technique, if we learn it through this grant, can be applied to all sorts of areas,” Dirksen said.

“It can be used for terrestrial species, too. It gives our staff the capacity to expand in an area that I think will be really beneficial.”

- In other action, Tribal Council:
- Approved accepting a maximum \$200,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Education to continue developing curriculum related to the Native American experience in Oregon and making the curriculum available to school districts statewide;
 - Approved accepting a \$100,000 Oregon Department of Transportation grant that will be used to offset the cost of bridge materials at the 338-acre Chahalpam conservation property in Marion County. Dirksen said the property routinely floods and, combined with an already acquired \$276,125 grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the ODOT grant will help fund the building of a new bridge and installation of culverts;
 - Approved the enrollment of two infants into the Tribe because they meet the requirements outlined in the Tribal Constitution and Enrollment Ordinance;
 - And approved adding 18 more Tribal members to the historically important Restoration Roll, bringing this year’s total to 39. Tribal Council added 204 people to the roll in 2019, 127 in 2020 and 189 in 2021. The names will now move forward to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland for approval. Also included in the Feb. 23 Tribal Council packet was an approved authorization to proceed giving Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson the ability to create and operate an annual Indigenous Placekeeping Artist Fellowship, which will be funded up to a maximum of \$15,000 by the Tribe, Oregon Cultural Trust and the Oregon Community Foundation.
- Tribal Council also approved the 11 a.m. Sunday, March 6, General Council meeting agenda, which will feature a presentation by the Cultural Resources Department and be held via Zoom.

To watch the entire meeting, visit the Tribal government’s website at www.grandronde.org and click on the Government tab and then Videos. ■

Grand Ronde Tribe, ODFW enter into shellfish agreement

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals staff writer

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted on Friday, Feb. 18, to approve a memorandum of understanding with the Grand Ronde Tribe that allows Tribal members to harvest shellfish under a special gathering permit rather than a recreational shellfish license in the Trask Hunting Unit and the ocean adjacent to the unit including Tillamook Bay.

Under the new agreement, Tribal members would still follow Oregon sport fishing regulations regarding species, daily bag limits, sizes, harvest methods and seasons.

“Shellfish have always been an important foundation for our lives as Tribal members,” Grand Ronde Tribal Council

Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said. “They appear in our traditional stories, nourish our bodies, adorn our regalia and historically served as a currency for our dealings with other Tribes. To be able to return to our fishing grounds and to harvest shellfish under a Tribal permit is something that will support us for generations to come.”

Kennedy, Tribal Council Secretary Michael Langley and Tribal member Andrew Freeman testified before the commission.

Friday’s vote was the final step in the approval process after Tribal Council voted to approve the MOU during its Feb. 9 meeting. The agreement will now be sent to the commission and the Tribe for signatures. ■

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‘The biggest impact will be quarantine’

MASKS continued
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ing and Early Childhood Education employees.

“We have kept a vigilant eye on state guidelines and CDC announcements throughout the pandemic,” Spirit Mountain Casino Sponsorship Administrator Jocelyn Huffman said. “The recent announcement by the state to lift the mask mandate is also being closely monitored. Once the state makes an official announcement to lift the mandate, we will follow suit and comply with all guidelines.

“Cleanliness and safety have always been a top priority for Spirit Mountain Casino. We will continue to provide sanitizing stations and take extra care to make sure guests and employees experience a clean environment.”

Casino General Manager Bruce Thomas said during a Wednesday, Feb. 23, Facebook Live event that he was been authorized by the Grand Ronde Gaming Commission to follow state rules regarding mask wearing within the facility.

The lifting of the mask mandate in Oregon will come near the two-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic spreading throughout the state in mid-March 2020.

The Willamina School District is leaving the final decision on whether to continue masking up to its School Board, which will meet on Monday, March 14, to decide

the issue.

“Oregon Department of Education is asking districts to solicit community input regarding the mask mandate,” Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick said. “We have surveyed our staff so far and plan to do the same with our families. (The) final decision rests with the elected School Board. If a district chooses to make masks optional, we will need to update our ‘safe return to school’ document to reflect the change and what it means to quarantine, isolate and (do) contact tracing.”

Zimbrick said that school districts that choose not to mask will have the burden to conduct contact tracing whenever a positive test occurs, whether or not it is in the school setting. The “Test to Stay” program, which allows COVID-19 negative students to continue attending school even if they are in close contact with a positive case, will not be an option because it is only allowed where universal mask wearing is in place.

“The biggest impact will be quarantine,” Zimbrick said. “Currently, students can return after a five-day quarantine followed by five additional days of wearing a mask at all times. If masks become optional, mask wearing would still be required for those five days following a quarantine. If a person refused to wear the mask (for) the additional five days, they would need to stay at home in quarantine for the full 10 days.” ■



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