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COHO from page 1B

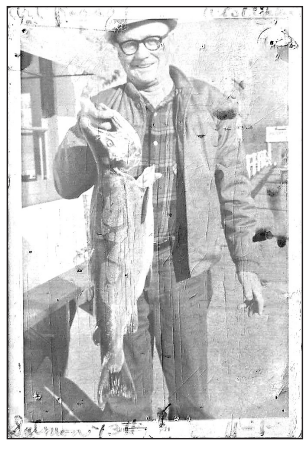
fisheries officials in 2003, it was the first time in 10 years that nonhatchery coho could be kept at Siltcoos and Tahkenitch lakes. Though numbers have remained stable since fishing was opened, most anglers on the two lakes agree that a few factors continue to hurt the coho habitat on Siltcoos and Tahkenitch. In 1963, the International Paper (IP) in Gardiner was one of the ma-

ior employers in the area. The plywood business was booming, and operations required a significant increase in water needs for the mill. It was estimated at the time that the mill would guzzle some 8,500 gallons of water a minute. At the time, that was nearly equal to the water needs of an average winter day for the entire city of Eugene.

IP owned the water rights to both Siltcoos and Tahkenitch and built dams on each in order to collect the water for use at the mill. At the south end of each lake, giant pumps were installed to draw water and send it to Gardiner. The mill closed in the late 1990s and in 2016 Industrial Harbor USA, LLC of Centralia, Wash., bought the site and the water rights to the two lakes. They maintain and operate the dams to this day.

The hope was that the dams would keep water levels for both lakes nearly constant the year around and also provide plenty of water to the mills. Some hope was lost when fish numbers seemed to steadily decrease and the consensus among locals who fish for wild coho on Siltcoos and Tahkenitch is that the dams are the number one reason the coho fishery is so precarious.

Each dam is equipped with fish ladders for spawning salmon to transverse the structures though that is far from foolproof. In 2015, ODFW Fish Passage Program Coordinator Ken Loffink said, “Both sites (Tahkenitch and Siltcoos) have dams that can be partial barriers to native migratory fish migration. Both sites also have fish ladders that provide (or offer) fish passage at low flows when the dams are not open. I’ve



The fall wild coho run has filled the fishing resorts around Siltcoos for as long as anyone can remember. (Photo courtesy Westlake Resort)

been to both sites and inspected the fish ladders associated with each site several years ago, and while not perfect, I found the ladders to provide fairly good fish passage conditions at both dams. Both fish ladders are currently operational and in good working order, and fish have the ability to travel up those if they choose. Many fish choose not to use the ladders, though, and instead wait for a rain event and travel through the dam when the dam is subsequently opened.”

Some locals believe the dams keep the lake at an unnaturally low level, in turn creating less than optimal conditions for coho. Loffink believes this to be partially true.

“Yes, the dams contribute to some delay in the lower river, but I believe a combination of factors is going on. In dry years (such as this year and last year), there may not be a strong environmental cue for fish to travel upstream until a significant pulse of freshwater comes down the system. This also occurs in a lot of our coastal estuaries, though it is likely more pronounced and more visible in the smaller basins such as Siltcoos,

Tahkenitch, Tenmile, etc.,” said Loffink. “Significant rains also signal the time that the dam operators need to open the gates at each site to maintain the proper lake levels. In general, when fish get a strong environmental cue to move upstream from a rain event, the dam is usually open to allow for free passage. When the dam is closed, the fish ladders still provide a viable option for passage as well. The biggest issue is at Siltcoos Lake, where the high tide can flood out the fish ladder entrance, eliminating much of the attraction flow. However, once the tide goes out again, the ladder will flow normally again and produce good attraction flow.”

These factors, along with eutrophication caused by runoff of land from construction around the lake and introduction of nonnative warm water species, have certainly created a less hospitable environment for wild coho but that doesn’t mean all hope for success is lost.

Coho average 8 pounds but can grow significantly larger. The largest wild coho ever caught in Oregon was caught on our own Siltcoos Lake in 1966 by Ed Martin. It tipped the scales at 25 pounds, 5.25 ounces.

Even in the best of times, wild coho are a difficult catch. It is said that, on average, it takes 40 hours of fishing to catch a wild coho on Siltcoos Lake. But, as Scottish author John Buchan once said, “The charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, a perpetual series of occasions for hope.”

With another fall coho run approaching, hope springs eternal this fall on Siltcoos and Tahkenitch Lakes.

the spotlight

A weekly roundup of shopping, savings and doings around town.



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LITTLE from page 1B

I scholarships for a given sport. The ones I know (I apologize because I know I missed some) are Stephanie Osborne, Haley Hunt, Ben Vooge, Collin Cram and Jake Thompson. Of those athletes, I think only Thompson and Vooge advanced to the professional

level. If the athletes of Siuslaw High School hope to continue their sport at a higher level, it is a rough road. Only the hardest workers have a chance to be noticed by coaches of a major university. The individuals and teams of Siuslaw High School have a difficult task

ahead of them. Being one of the smallest 4A schools will challenge you and your team each week to have success.

The path to local immortality is a difficult one. Only those athletes willing to work through all the diversity with a never say quit mentality will make it. Go Viks!

Doing Good. Giving Back.

Do you part and volunteer today to help support these organizations in our community.

Habitat for Humanity

Florence Habitat ReStore
Volunteer to help Florence Habitat for Humanity ReStore. From customerservice to donation coordination, there’s a volunteer opportunity for you! Our greatest need right now is cashiers. We are grateful for your continued support!
541-997-5834 | 2016 Hwy 101, Florence • www.florencehabitat.org

Helping Hands Coalition

We are in need of volunteers on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. We need volunteers to serve food, set up for meals and also prepare meals beginning at 11:00 am and finishing at 2:00pm. New Location: Community Baptist Church, 4590 Hwy. 101, Florence (Across from Fred Meyer)

Oregon Coast Humane Society

relies heavily on volunteers. There are many opportunities to volunteer and a variety of skills and talents are always in need. Volunteer interest forms may be found online, at the shelter and at our Thrift Shop on Bay Street.
www.oregoncoasthumaneociety.org/volunteer/

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To include your organization in this directory, please call us @ 541-997-3441