

DENNIS DAUBLE
THE NATURAL WORLD

A brief history lesson in salmon, trout names

Imagine yourself as a naturalist, two centuries ago, when up to 20 million Pacific salmon and steelhead returned annually to spawn in the Columbia River Basin.

Several species of resident trout also ranged throughout the Columbia and Snake rivers and their tributaries at the time. How would you describe these strange and wonderful fish when only one species, the rainbow trout of eastern Russia (*Salmo gairdneri*), had previously been accounted for?

Journal passages from the 1805 Lewis and Clark Expedition alluded to five different salmon and trout west of the Rocky Mountains.

Included in their list were “salmon” (chinook salmon), “white salmon-trout” (coho or silver salmon), “salmon-trout” (steelhead/rainbow trout), “red charr” (possibly sockeye salmon), and “speckled” or “mountain trout” (cutthroat trout). Other salmon and trout species were either scarce or the explorers failed to recognize them as different.

For example, there was no mention of pink or chum salmon when both are seasonally abundant in coastal waters. In their defense, Lewis noted on March 2, 1806, “I have no doubt there are many other species of fish ... which we have not had the opportunity of seeing.”

In contrast to how newly discovered plants and animals were saved for further study, early naturalists had no means to preserve fish specimens. William Clark, the principal mapmaker and illustrator of the Expedition, made sketches of only two of 11 fishes encountered in western waters: the eulachon or Columbia River smelt, and “white salmon trout.” Rarely were any measurements taken.

Only when the U.S. Exploring Expedition conducted surveys to determine the most feasible route for a transcontinental railroad did thorough description of salmon and trout of the Pacific Northwest take place. Consequently, the taxonomy of various trout and salmon species remained in flux through most of the 19th century.

Approximately 50 species of western trout were initially catalogued by early naturalists. The renowned ichthyologist, George Suckley, in an 1861 treatise titled, “On the North American Species of Salmon and Trout,” managed to pare

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Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Tamaracks blend in with their green coniferous neighbors during the spring and summer, but each autumn these deciduous conifers put on a show as their needles turn yellow-orange before falling off.

Tamaracks brighten the Blue Mountains every autumn

JAYSON JACOBY
ON THE TRAIL

Whoever named the Blue Mountains didn't account for the tamaracks.

Perhaps this person, whose identity is lost to history, never saw the mountains during autumn.

Because when the tamaracks — a deciduous conifer common in much of the mountain range — are in the midst of their seasonal shedding of needles, blue would not seem to be the color most likely to occur to a viewer.

Or maybe “Yellow Mountains” just didn't sound right.

Tamaracks — formally known as the western larch — not only fail to hold onto their needles year-round like their neighboring firs, pines and spruces, but before the needles fall they transition from their usual pale green to gaudy shades of orange and yellow.

At the peak of their autumnal show, tamaracks positively glow in contrast to their more dour coniferous cousins. And they have plenty of needles to show off — they're in bundles of 15 to 30 at the end of each twig, compared with, say, pines, which produce from two to five per bundle.

A single tamarack in a grove of evergreens is almost as con-



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Tamarack trees brighten the landscape on High Mountain, north of the Anthony Lakes Highway. The pile in the foreground is of trees cut as part of the East Face project, designed to create fuel breaks along roads.

spicuous as a candle in the night.

But to me the more stirring sight is a hillside where tamaracks predominate — where their great splashes of brightness briefly illuminate scenes that for most of the year are comparatively staid.

There is a surfeit of spots around Northeastern Oregon to behold the glory of the tamaracks.

They're sufficiently profuse on the east slopes of the Elkhorn Mountains, for instance, that even from Baker City, a distance

of 10 miles or so, the bands of tamaracks are easy to discern.

The effect is accentuated by the tamaracks' preference for a relatively narrow elevation range — generally between about 5,000 and 6,500 feet, although they grow at much lower elevations on cooler, north-facing slopes.

From Baker City the tamarack zone is clearly delineated during the month or so when the needles are especially colorful.

Typically the show peaks around Halloween. By Thanksgiving it's likely that most of the needles will have detached, coating the ground with a soft yellow layer that for me is one of the defining sights of this part of Oregon.

I could no more pick a favorite place to look at tamaracks than I could choose the most stirring vista of the Elkhorns or the Willows.

The options are just too numerous, too compelling.

But during a hike on Halloween morning in the old Anthony Burn country north of Anthony Lakes Highway, I was reminded that this area is particularly well-endowed with tamaracks.

Although the 1960 wildfire, which burned about 20,000 acres, left in places a near monoculture of lodgepole pines, tamaracks have also thrived in the ensuing decades.

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Cove artist's artwork selected for ODFW contest

Debra Otterstein scratchboard piece wins upland game bird stamp art competitions

By **ANDREW CUTLER**
The Observer

COVE — Debra Otterstein loves capturing animals and outdoor scenes through a variety of artistic media.

One of those pieces, a scratchboard piece of three chukars, will be the face of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's collector stamp series. Otterstein's piece took first place in the upland game bird category. She was one of three artists selected, joining Buck Spencer of Junction City and Kathy Peckham of Ridgway, Colorado.

“I was so excited,” she said.

Spencer, who won the waterfowl category, Otterstein, and Peckham, who won the habitat conservation category, will each receive \$2,000 for their winning artwork.

“The sales that they get from my artwork help to support their conservation efforts, and that's, as a wildlife artist, that's important to me,” Otterstein said. “I believe in living alongside wildlife, not destroying wildlife. I like their effort.”

Otterstein, who has lived in Cove for nearly 20 years, has entered the ODFW contest for several years, but this is the first time a piece of hers has been selected a winner.

“I've been entering for a few years, and I've come in second and third, and so it was wonderful to be selected as the winner,” she said.

Otterstein said scratchboard art can be a very labor intensive artistic medium.

“I used a white clay-board and added ink that I then scratched off exposing the white clay that I again added ink to,” she said.



Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife/Contributed Photo

Cove artist Debra Otterstein, with her scratchboard piece of three chukars, won first place in the upland game bird category for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's annual collector stamp series contest.

“I repeated the process until I achieved the effect I wanted.”

Otterstein said the medium is very different from painting. Otterstein also does feather painting and acrylic painting on flat canvas.

“A small piece can take up to 20 hours, so that one is quite a large piece, so it took a lot longer,” she said. “I do a lot of different things.”

Otterstein, who went to high school in Gooding, Idaho, has been painting

since high school. She said it wasn't until her junior year that she discovered her artistic ability.

“I realized, Oh my gosh, I really like doing art and I have some ability for it,” she said. “I didn't grow up in a family that was artistic,

so it was kind of a surprise to me, so I've been doing art since then.”

The artwork was judged at the ODFW's Salem headquarters by independent judges and unfortunately not open to the public, however, the People's Choice Award for 2022 is now open for online voting until Nov. 8.

“We are excited that local artists won both the waterfowl and upland game bird contest,” said Kelly Walton, an ODFW assistant game biologist. “This is the first Oregon stamp contest win for Debra Otterstein and Kathy Peckham, who have each been entering for several years. Spencer won the habitat conservation and upland stamp contests last year, so it is quite the accomplishment to say that he has now placed first in each of the contests. Although the number of entries was down slightly this year, we had many good entries that made for a tough choice for our panel of judges.”