

Sea lions continue to eat endangered fish

Bill in Congress supported by Northwest lawmakers

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

All the time, money and sacrifice to improve salmon and steelhead passage in the Willamette River won't mean a thing unless wildlife managers can get rid of sea lions feasting on the fish at Willamette Falls.



Shaun Clements

That was the message Tuesday from Shaun Clements, senior policy adviser for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, who met at the falls with Liz Hamilton, executive director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, and Suzanne Kunse, district director for U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Oregon.

The group watched as several sea lions patrolled the waterfalls and nearby fish ladders. Clements said there could be as many as 50-60 sea lions in the area on any given day in April or early May, and the animals are responsible for eating roughly 20 percent of this year's already paltry winter steelhead run.

As of May 22, ODFW has counted just 2,086 winter



EO Media Group photos/George Plaven

A sea lion searches for salmon and steelhead at Willamette Falls.

steelhead at Willamette Falls. That's less than half of the 10-year average and 22 percent of the 50-year average.

ODFW applied in October 2017 to kill sea lions from Willamette Falls under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, though Clements said he does not expect a decision from the National Marine Fisheries Service until the end of the year. The department also tried relocating 10 California sea lions to a beach south of Newport, Oregon, earlier this year, only to see the animals return in just six days.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to build a water temperature control tower and floating fish screen at Detroit Dam farther up the Willamette Basin to aid salmon and steelhead survival, a project that could cost up to \$250 million and leave farm-



Sea lions continue to prey on salmon and steelhead at Willamette Falls, prompting a bill by Democratic Rep. Kurt Schrader to lethally remove sea lions where they are causing the most problems.

ers without water in the reservoir for up to two years.

But Clements said it would be a wasted investment if not enough fish can even make it past the falls.

"Certainly for winter steelhead, if we don't deal with (sea lions), whatever we do in the upper basin isn't going to help," Clements said. "If you're managing other

sectors, you have to manage sea lions as well."

Schrader is co-sponsoring legislation to provide greater flexibility for managing sea lions in the future. The Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act would extend the authority for killing sea lions that prey on endangered salmon and steelhead to states and tribes.

Comments sought on grazing project

Blue Mountain Eagle

The Blue Mountain Ranger District of the Malheur National Forest is soliciting scoping comments regarding an environmental analysis to re-authorize grazing on five grazing allotments through the Roundtop Complex Grazing Allotments Project. The planning area includes the Beech Creek, Herberger, John Day, McCullough and Roundtop allotments.

The document can be accessed on the Forest Service website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54067>.

The 30-day scoping period begins today, June 6, with publication of the legal notice in the Blue Mountain Eagle. Only those submitting specific written comments during a designated opportunity to comment will have standing to object to the project.

Written comments concerning the project may be submitted by email, comments-pacificnorthwest-malheur-blumountain@fs.fed.us; fax, 541-575-3319; or hand or mail delivery, Blue Mountain Ranger District, c/o Hannah Smith, 431 Patterson Bridge Road / P.O. Box 909, John Day, OR 97845.

For further questions, contact Hannah Smith, NEPA planner, at 541-575-3031 or by email, hannahsmith@fs.fed.us.

Rappellers drop into John Day for national training

Blue Mountain Eagle

Rappellers from the 12 rappel bases located across the nation descended on John Day for the National Rappel Recertification Academy in May. More than 65 rappellers attended this year's academy, along with trainers, helicopter pilots and support personnel. The week included training and recertification exercises on

the rappel simulator tower, mock-up scenarios on the ground and live helicopter rappels in sloped and timbered areas.

The academy has several objectives, including the assurance that all veteran rappellers receive the highest quality training experience possible. The centralization and standardization of academy makes this possible, ensuring all participants meet the same high standard. To de-

velop and promote an attitude of safety is also on the mind of all program managers, and is an integral part of the academy and agency philosophy.

The U.S. Forest Service National Helicopter Rappel Program's primary mission is initial attack. Rappel crews may be utilized for large fire support, all hazard incident operations and resource management activities.

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