

OUR VIEW



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Boxes of school supplies line a meeting room Thursday, Aug. 5, 2021, at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston. The Hermiston School District purchased the supplies with emergency relief funds from the CARES Act and will provide the items at not cost to all students in the district to alleviate the financial burden on families of purchasing school supplies.

Backing up words with action

It will be a tall order to find a better feel-good community story in the near future than the decision by the Hermiston School District to pay for all school supplies for elementary and middle school students for the start of the school year.

The district will also waive pay-to-play fees for grades 6 through 12.

All supplies will stay in the classroom, so parents will need to buy some school items for homework, but the move by the district is an extraordinarily decision.

The funds for school supplies comes from federal COVID-19 relief funds, while the district will use its own general fund to take care of the fee waiver.

The federal money was crucial for the district to be able to cover the expense of the school supplies

but the district, its leaders and school board members should be lauded for thinking outside the box to help our youth.

Providing school supplies can be, and often is, a stressful episode for many families. The cost can be high, and if a family has more than one or two children the final tally can be prohibitive.

That's why this decision by the district is so important to so many families. To have a potential challenge like purchasing back-to-school supplies terminated means some families will not be burdened at a time when events — such as the COVID-19 pandemic — are already creating more stress than normal.

Actions by school officials — such as board members, administrators or teachers — often only see the light of day if there is some

type of controversy. Their consistent hard work is also often forgotten or overlooked.

Yet, this decision by the district shows a degree of excellence and community care that is outstanding. The district made the right decision, and its officers, teachers and board members deserve to be lauded.

The district officials did a commendable and honorable thing by these two decisions. They clearly put the care of students — and, to a degree, their parents — to the forefront. That shows a group of people who not only say the right things about students and education but also back it up with action.

Nowadays that is a rare circumstance.

The Hermiston School District deserves a great deal of credit for its actions on this one. We applaud it.

OTHER VIEWS

Working together, bold action can secure a thriving future for the Columbia Basin

Over the many years I have engaged with stakeholders and tribal partners about a path forward in the Columbia Basin, one thing is clear: The status quo isn't working. Iconic salmon and steelhead stocks continue to decline, with several now on the brink of extinction. As we know, extinction is irreversible. However, there is still time for a collaborative solution that will benefit all in the region.

The Columbia and Snake rivers are economic drivers that we have developed for local and regional prosperity. Salmon and steelhead are keystone species critical to the region's ecosystem and the economy, as well as subsistence and cultural health for tribal peoples who have fished the rivers since time immemorial.

I know that abundant salmon and steelhead populations can coexist with a robust, growing regional economy that includes affordable and renewable power, water for agriculture, and affordable transportation of goods to regional and international markets, while being respectful of Tribal culture, history and treaty rights. But, if action does not come swiftly, the losses will be substantial and irreversible.

Decades of development, including the mainstem dams and reservoirs placed between critical alpine nursery areas and ocean feeding grounds, have had devastating impacts on wild salmon and steelhead. For nearly 30 years, these species have remained listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. Now, the climate crisis is compounding those impacts through warmer waters, lower river flows and deteriorating ocean conditions.

Through it all, the federal agencies responsible for operating dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers have continuously failed to meet the minimum needs of the fish required by the ESA.

This is not a time for entrenched thinking or political ideology. I was one of the first lawmakers to offer my support when Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson proposed \$33 billion in economic investment to help ensure a healthy future for the Columbia Basin while respecting the history, culture and rights of the region's Tribal people.

Simpson's proposal reflects the clear science: Removal of the Snake River dams must be part of a comprehensive solution for salmon and steelhead in the face of climate change. His proposal also recognizes that the dams cannot be removed without first replacing the essential services they provide, investing most of the \$33 billion in the energy, agriculture and commodity transport sectors, and calls for a moratorium on litigation.

In addition, just over a year ago, I partnered with the governors of Idaho, Washington and Montana to launch the Columbia Basin Collaborative, aimed at working toward robust



Kate Brown

goals for salmon and steelhead while also ensuring regional prosperity. We hope to have the Collaborative chartered and funded this year so it can begin its work in earnest in 2022.

If it were up to me, none of this would have to be decided in court. Unfortunately, that was not a view shared by the Trump administration or the federal agencies in charge of dam operations. Oregon, along with other plaintiffs, is in litigation over Trump-era rules that are unlawful, as well as the federal plan for dam operations that is inadequate to protect salmon and steelhead.

Before we took this step, while the federal government completed its plan, Oregon helped negotiate the interim period of litigation-free dam operations and good faith, providing constructive input throughout the process, all in hopes that federal agencies would bring forward a legal plan. They did not.

This federal failure left us with no recourse but to ask the courts to intervene to remove the Trump-era rules and inadequate federal plan, and help the region pivot toward a comprehensive solution. Absent comprehensive federal legislation and funding, or a timely and collaborative regional solution, legal action is currently the only avenue available to help address these issues.

It is my fervent hope that the Biden-Harris administration will take steps to reverse the Trump-era rollbacks to environmental stewardship, including this latest federal plan for dam operations, so that we can get all parties back to the table to develop a lasting solution.

While this litigation plays out, Oregon will continue to seek and pursue all opportunities for collaboration. One possible path would be for Congress to fully fund Simpson's proposal and provide the Tribes, Northwest states and key regional stakeholders with time to work with their congressional delegations to develop legislation to implement it. This is not the time for hesitancy. I respectfully ask my fellow leaders in the region: If not Simpson's proposal, then what? If not now, then when?

My priority is to ensure we have robust, harvestable salmon and steelhead populations throughout the Columbia Basin for generations to come. We can do so in a manner that combats climate change with growth in clean and renewable energy, ensures a cost-effective irrigation system for farmers and ranchers, invests in safe and economical transport of goods and secures vibrant recreation opportunities in and throughout the Columbia Basin. It won't be easy. But it's the only way to ensure a vibrant future for the region.

I'm ready to sit down with anyone willing to work with me to make that future a reality. Let's get it done.

Kate Brown is governor of Oregon.

COLUMN

Pelican! Pelican!

The man yelled before reaching the dam on the Umatilla River — "Pelican! Pelican!"

I could not tell if he was angry or excited to see the giant white birds. They stared at him annoyingly but moved away from the fish ladder exit.

A single bird nicknamed "Lonesome Larry" frequented Three Miles Falls Dam on the Umatilla River for years and was almost always there. In the last few years, more than 30 birds reside on the dam's crest where the flow and their observation of the fish ladder entrance and exit are perfect.

White pelicans are native to the West Coast and now are year-round residents in the Columbia Basin. Like the expanding populations of invasive collared or Eurasian doves, some people welcome them while others want to reduce their presence.

White pelicans are not listed under the federal Endangered Species Act but are protected under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Their stark white color and tufted head along with their red eyes always make them look out of place. Their unusual head bobbing, graceful flying and ungainly takeoff always elicit a second look. They have up to 120-inch wingspan, second only to the California condor, and weigh up to 30 pounds.

Both adults have a bright orange bill adored with a vertical plate during mating season. At other times the bill is pale with no plate.

A group is technically called a scoop or squadron. They are more common than the Trumpeter or tundra swans but fewer than the thousands of snow geese now seen here in the winter. In the last few years their range has moved up the Umatilla and Walla Walla rivers. They nest on the ground, usually on an island away from egg robbers.

The closest nesting colony in the mid-Columbia is at Badger Island near the Walla Walla River confluence in the McNary National Wildlife Refuge. The colony has grown to an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 breeding pairs and represent 9% of the western population of birds.

They are known to cooperate and group forage and there is some indication that they do this at night directly below McNary Dam on the Columbia River. They feed exclusively on fish



Wes Stonecypher



Wes Stonecypher/Contributed Photo
A number of pelicans hang out on the Three Miles Falls Dam on the Umatilla River.

and may follow releases and migration of fish. Feeding among individuals is extremely competitive.

Once I watched a 20-pound pelican try to swallow a 10-pound steelhead that had been released from a river return pipe. He did not finish with a meal but the fight was spectacular. You can only admire the optimism and story the bird had after the encounter.

To reduce pelican presences at river return pipes, water sprayers have been installed. Like some biological determinants, the results were different than expected. The adaptable birds learned that when the sprayer came on it was not only a cool shower but also a potential meal being dropped into their laps.

I see pelicans every day and expect them to express a personality to match their stature. They need a legacy like the stork or bald eagle. I do not know why historical numbers of pelicans dropped in the Columbia Basin. They nested in Moses Lake in the 1930s. Whether it was because of DDT contamination affecting eggs, feather take for fashion, fear that they were eating all the fish, or winters too cold. I don't think they were ever hunted for food.

I do know they are very abundant this year unlike last year, when few were seen. I enjoy their graceful landings more than their gangly takeoffs. As most goose hunters know, a decoying goose needs a landing path to land, but a pelican seems to just drop from the sky.

I still yell, "Pelican! Pelican!," every time I see them.

Wes Stonecypher is a biologist and Umatilla resident.

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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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