The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

ODOT may eliminate Nehalem bridge job

Approximately 35 years ago, a new bridge was built over the Nehalem River on Highway 47 about two miles south of Vernonia. The bridge didn't line up with the existing roadway and there were some dangerous "S" curves, but people in the area were told not to worry about it because the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) would re-align the highway.

After many years and many more accidents, a hard-fought campaign by local government and volunteers got the project scheduled for the summer of 1993. Then it was moved to 1994.

At a meeting last week with Columbia County officials (none from this area), ODOT Region 1 Manager Bruce Warner said that Columbia County road projects were in good shape because the only one that might be dropped was (Surprise!) the Nehalem Highway realignment.

This car slid, rather gently, off the highway last week at about the same time Warner was talking.

Warner was out of town this week so The INDEPENDENT talked with Marty Andersen, Reg. 1 Federal Aid Specialist, who explained that ODOT must trim $400 million from their 1995-98 projects because the legislature didn't increase gasoline taxes for that period. When told that shouldn't affect this project because it was originally scheduled for 1993, then 1994, Andersen said it isn't scheduled for bids until late 1995—if at all, but it hasn't YET been dropped.

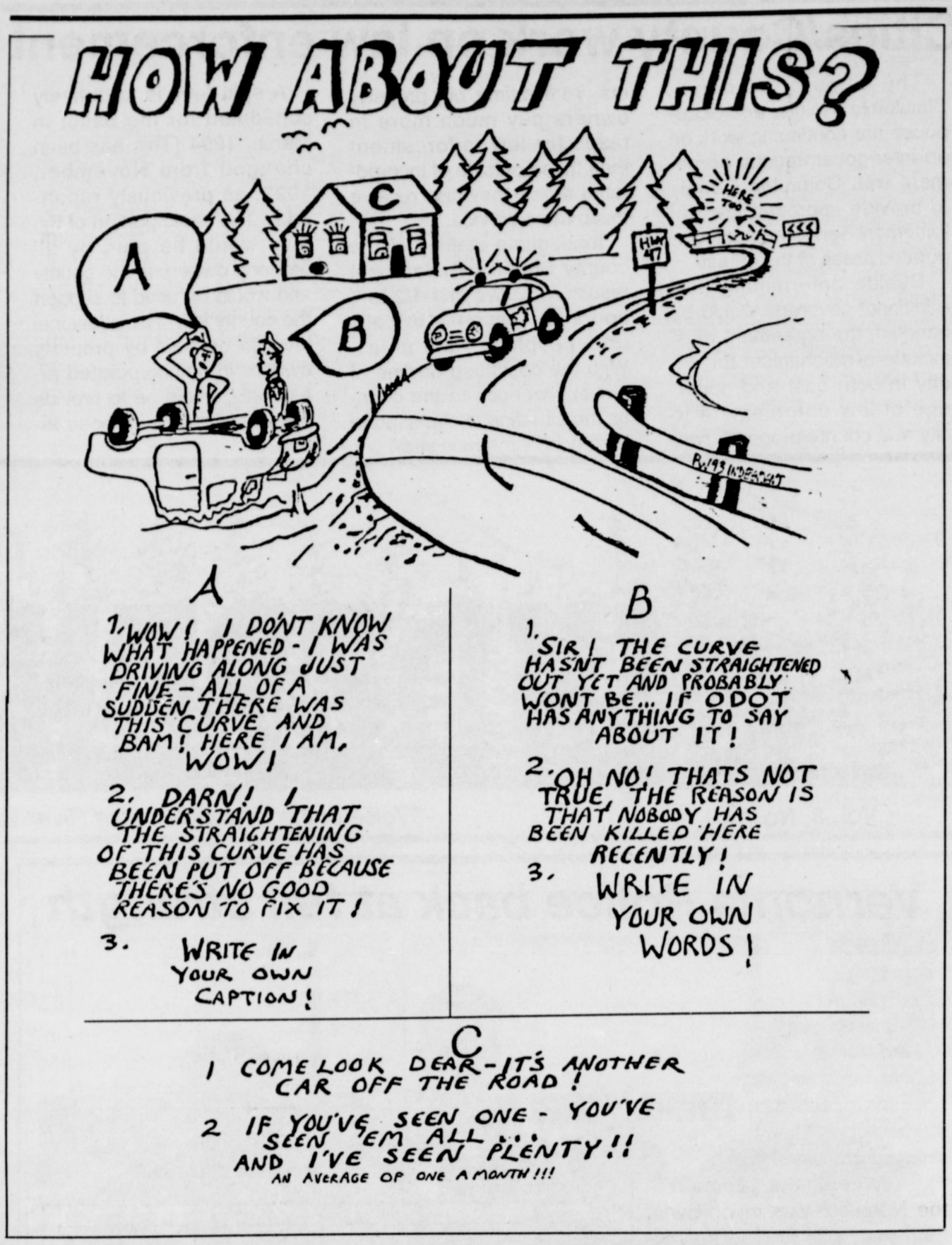
Now is the time for everyone in the upper Nehalem Valley who has to drive that road, to start writing letters. It's time to tell ODOT and our elected officials about our experiences with this well-document danger. Who will be hurt next? The addresses are:

1.) Bruce Warner, Manager
ODOT Region 1
9002 McLoughlin Blvd.
Milwaukie, OR 97222

2.) Oregon Transportation Commission
135 Transportation Building
Salem, OR 97310

3.) Sen. Joan Dukes
Rt. 2, Box 503
Astoria, OR 97103

4.) Rep. Tim Josi
6740 Baseline
Bay City, OR 97109



Ike Says

By Dale Webb, member
Nehalem Valley Chapter, Izaak Walton League

The Nehalem Valley Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America has completed juvenile fish surveys in the local area, with some interesting results. The surveys were conducted under the Salmon Trout Enhancement Program with the help of S.T.E.P. biologist John Casteel.

The purpose of the surveys is to gain a better understanding of local fish populations by documenting their presence or absence and at what density they exist. Electroshocking equipment, seines and combinations of the two, were used to capture the fish.

Most of the surveys we conduct are the presence/absence kind, to determine what kind of fish are present. This year we concentrated more on finding out where Coho salmon juveniles exist in Rock Creek and the upper Nehalem River. In Rock Creek we are finding high concentrations of Coho in the extreme upper headwaters (Sunset Rest Area). As we surveyed farther down the system, fish densities dropped way below normal levels at Keasey and, as we approched Vernonia, became very spotty.

It is hard to draw conclusions as to why Coho salmon are not fully seeded in the Rock Creek system, but it is known that Coho prefer pool type habitat, cover and cool water. In knowing these requirements it becomes clearer why Coho production is isolated to the headwater regions. In the headwaters, the large woody debris is somewhat intact, but as you travel down the system it becomes less and less abundant until there is little to no cover provided for fish to hide around. Fish use this cover not only for protection from predators but for protection from high stream flows in the winter. Rock Creek has plenty of pool but they will move come winter; since the Coho have nowhere else to go, they perish. Rock Creek stream temperatures are also suspected of having lethal effects upon all fish in the lower sections of the system.

I can hear somebody out there saying to themselves "Well, how come the Chinook salmon can do so well in the lower Rock Creek system?" Chinook juvenile salmon emerge from the gravel in the spring when there are good stream flows and cool temperatures. The young salmon begin migrating downstream without having to undergo the elevated summer stream temperatures and high habitat but, without the large woody debris, it is like a house without doors, windows and furniture. You can get renters in the summer winter stream flows without adequate cover. Coho and Steelhead face both problems. In fact the Chinook salmon situation points out that the production problems in our area are related to survival in the summer and winter periods.

For Steelhead fishermen we have a little better news. We found fair numbers of Steelhead in the headwaters of Rock Creek and we continued to find them all the way to Vernonia. Steelhead are harder to survey because they like fast water like riffles, rapids and waterfall areas. A prime example is the concrete cap on the sewerline that flows under Rock Creek at the confluence with the Nehalem River. Each year we find Steelhead underneath this ledge in very turbulent water. It is the very turbulence of this water that is providing cover and elevated oxygen for the fish.

When we surveyed the Nehalem River we

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