Member sought for Hatchery Research Advisory Committee

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State University are seeking five new members for the Oregon Hatchery Research Center Advisory Committee.

Five positions, one each representing federal government, conservation, science-at-large, education K-12 and public-at-large, are currently open, with duties running from May 2012 through April 2015. If reappointed, subsequent term(s) will be three years.

Candidates must submit a letter of interest by March 30, 2012. The letter should specify why the applicant is interested and provide three verifiable references. ODFW and OSU representatives will finalize their selections by May 1, 2012.

The 15-member committee advises the Oregon Hatchery Research Center (OHRC) Senior Scientist on activities and functions related to the operation and maintenance of the OHRC. Committee members represent the federal government, local governments, conservation groups, sport fishing groups, the commercial fishing industry, tribes, resource producers (agriculture, timber and gravel), watershed councils and education. Two members represent the public-at-large and four represent the scientific community.

The committee meets quarterly, with 2012 meetings scheduled for March 12, June 11, September 17, and December 10.

The OHRC is a cooperative research project between ODFW and OSU. The center's mission is to develop an understanding of the mechanisms that may create differences between hatchery and wild fish, and devise ways to reduce and manage the differences so that hatcheries can be used responsibly in the conservation and management of Oregon's native fish.

For more information about the Advisory Committee or how to submit a letter of interest, please contact Margaret Cleveland at margaret.l.cleveland@state.or.us or 503-947-6230. For more information about the OHRC, visit OHRC's Web site at www.dfw.state.or.us/OHRC.

FEMA suggests spring is a good time to update emergency plans

Daylight saving time is here! The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) encourages all Americans to use the change to daylight saving time to update emergency preparedness plans. For years, firefighters and safety professionals have asked the public to change smoke alarm batteries throughout their homes, as they move their clocks ahead. According to FEMA Regional Administrator Ken Murphy, the March ritual of making homes safer from fire is also a great opportunity to review disaster preparedness plans and restock disaster kits.

"Here in the Pacific Northwest, spring signals increased risks for flash flooding, thunderstorms and wildfires. Daylight saving time is a great time to inventory and restock emergency kits and rehearse disaster plans," said Murphy. "No matter how busy or hectic our daily routines, we all need to take the time to think about what to do in the event of severe weather, earthquake – or any other major disaster."

Visit www.Ready.gov for information on such topics as preparing a disaster kit, taking care of your pets in a disaster, and involving your children in disaster planning.

This is also a good time to consider buying flood insurance. As spring approaches, so does the threat of unexpected flooding. You don't need to live on a mapped flood plain or near water to need flood insurance. Flooding can be caused by storms, melting snow, water backup from inadequate or overloaded drainage systems, and dam or levee failure.

All too often, homeowners learn after the fact that protection against flood or water damage is not part of their normal insurance protection package. Flood insurance is affordable and widely available through insurance agents. The average flood insurance policy costs a little less than $400 a year for about $100,000 of coverage.

There is a 30-day waiting period before the coverage goes into effect, so plan ahead to avoid unpleasant surprises. To find an agent near you and learn more about flood insurance, visit www.FloodSmart.gov or call the toll-free hotline at 1-888-379-9531.

Power of the People

By W. Marc Farmer, General Manager, West Oregon Electric Cooperative

Why Not Underground?

Obviously Mother Nature is still reminding us it is winter, not spring yet, and the winds, snow, and heavy rains keep coming. With these storms come the inevitable outages from trees and tree limbs into our power lines. As I have mentioned in previous articles, we serve over 2 million trees with 4,300 meters sprinkled in among them. While the trees are beautiful, they and power lines don't mix well at all.

It is during the storm and outage times that I have several members asking, and in several cases demanding, that we underground the entire system to avoid future outages. On the outside this seems to be a simple and logical solution to the problem. It is when you begin looking into the costs to install and the costs to repair underground lines that reality enters into the equation.

Wherever you put power lines, they are susceptible to something, maybe even multiple things. Above ground, lines are brought down by falling trees and tree limbs, heavy snow, winds, the errant driver who runs into one of our poles, people falling trees for timber or firewood, and miscellaneous other events. Underground lines are not free from outages, as they are vulnerable to water seepage, varmints, mud slides, tree roots, and the occasional backhoe (watch where you dig). Trees still pose a threat to underground lines when they topple, as the root balls rip the wire out of the ground.

The biggest reason we don't underground all of our lines, though, remains the same: it is the cost. Estimates show that it costs from 4 to 10 times as much to bury electric lines as to string them on poles. These costs would easily double your current electric bills, while, as I described in the above paragraph, outages still occur on underground lines. You might, therefore, gain only a 50% improvement in reliability. The savings in reliability could be quickly eaten up by the increased costs to find and repair underground lines.

When we experience an outage on overhead lines, most of the time the problem is easily and quickly seen with the naked eye and can be readily accessed by the crew. A two man crew can repair most minor problems in a couple of hours. Major problems would, of course, require more manpower and more time. In the case of underground lines, we have to bring out specialized equipment, called a Thumper, to locate the underground fault. Then several crews are required to bring in and operate the backhoe, flaggers along the road for safety as needed, and for repairs to the line. This takes much more manpower, equipment, and time, which all result in increased costs and length of the outage.

When opportunities present themselves, we do try to underground as much as possible, while considering the financial constraints we operate within. For example, we were able to take advantage of FEMA Mitigation Funds to help pay most of the costs for undergrounding the Timber to Elsie transmission line, which saved the Co-op and its members millions in costs, and thousands of dollars annually to maintain and repair the line. Where it makes good sense economically, we do and will continue to underground more lines each year. We keep track of the lines that are repeatedly damaged by trees and have a four year revolving work plan to address these problem lines. We definitely are striving to increase the reliability of our system, and we have significantly increased our system reliability for non-storm related events. Even for minor events we show significant improvement. Major storm events are just that, major storm events, and there is nothing we can do when Mother Nature wields her forces and power.