

The Oregonian

Founded Dec. 4, 1850. Established as a daily Feb. 4, 1861. The Sunday Oregonian established Dec. 4, 1881. Published daily and Sunday by the Oregonian Publishing Co., 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, Oregon 97201

FRED A. STICKEL, Publisher

PATRICK F. STICKEL, President

DENNIS L. ATKIN, Advertising Director

PATRICK L. MARLTON, Circulation Director

SANDRA M. ROWE, Editor

PETER K. BHATIA, Managing Editor

ROBERT J. CALDWELL, Editorial Page Editor

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1996

A place for fish to go

Flood wipes out instream projects to restore fish habitat, so next task should concentrate on storm-proofing watersheds

In a perfect world free of man's interventions, natural events, such as floods, can bring restorative powers to nature.

A flood, for instance, can plant woody debris in rivers to provide pools and riffles for fish. Floods also clean out habitats that have been clogged with silt from streambank erosion. They scour deep pools that serve as safe havens and rest stops for migrating fish. They deposit new nutrients from leaves, needles and wood slivers to nourish an aquatic community with food supplies for fish.

But the healing from a major flood takes time.

What can we do right now to make spawning beds in flood-ravaged Northwest rivers more hospitable for returning salmon spawners this spring, summer and fall?

Here are some answers:

- Remove or modify, if possible, any stream-impeding landslides that block fish from gaining access to known, productive spawning beds.

Beyond that, we should stay out of the stream-repair business. The last thing a flood-damaged watershed needs is an over-active bulldozer.

- Leave the downed trees where the flood has deposited them. Man has shaped many of these streams like bowling alleys, constricting their flow into single channels, rather than allowing them to branch out more naturally into multiple channels.

Floods, in some cases, carve a more natural course for streams. History has shown this to be a better avenue for fish. Indeed, fish biologists agree that fisheries throughout the world are known to be most productive in years following major floods. In short, let nature take this course.

- Reforest the areas that have been cleared of timber and begin the tedious job of storm-proofing the forest. That also will require examining unstable slopes for signs of future landslides, stabilizing river banks and perhaps deciding not to rebuild certain forest roads.

- Stop wasting money on small instream restoration projects. The region has spent millions of dollars on piecemeal restoration; the big flood of '96 blew all of that work away.

Christopher Orsinger, president of a Eugene-based organization promoting river restoration, and Stan Gregory, professor of Fisheries and Wildlife at Oregon State University, pointed out on The Oregonian's Opinion & Commentary page that creating a so-called "natural valley storage" is the least-cost solution for controlling a flood and protecting fish habitat (Feb. 9).

"Establishing areas where the river can safely interact with its floodplain would produce flood control and other benefits," they wrote.

This means that state and federal natural resource agencies must do a better job of protecting wetlands, especially in a river basin's upper watersheds, which can absorb flood waters better than urban watersheds can.

Orsinger and Gregory also have suggested that the Northwest follow Massachusetts' lead in which wetland conservation easements were purchased for \$8 million to storm-proof the Charles River basin.

That's a promising idea, but it ought to be viewed now as an experimental supplement to conventional flood-control strategies.

Overall, the strategy now should focus on revitalizing a watershed from the top down, to turn conditions along streams in heavily used forests into what one would expect in a mature forest. To recover fish runs, these streams need shade to keep water cool and large trees to hold banks in place.

Make no mistake, the floods do reduce fish populations. Clearly this one killed thousands of fish, in coastal streams and throughout the range of the Columbia and Willamette basins.

Despite the devastation, though, there will be survivors among returning spawners. And their offspring, because of this flood, should enjoy a refreshed habitat and abundant food resources as long as man doesn't continue to do things to mess it up.



LETTERS

Spoils system in private arms

To the Editor:

As a mid-level experienced job and executive banking industry authority that the well in the private White House.

placement are a ability or corporate

There seems to be the White House. The continuing corporate executive results in a hurry for Hillary Clinton.

She also strips the people of the president's general. We make profession's reputation manipulation of guarding lawyers.

Turn garage in

To the Editor:

Council will hold Goodman garage mer Park Blocks.

Rather than a man family and level underground green park above.

The city could Goodman Square fondly remember.