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Basin water study on tap

Governor signs funding bill to investigate potential fixes for area's declining groundwater

By the CUJ

HERMISTON - Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski joined Umatilla Basin residents March 5 to sign the Agriculture and Community Water Act of 2008, which addresses water shortages across Oregon, particularly in the Umatilla Basin where a huge critical groundwater area affects dozens of farms.

Kulongoski called passage of the bill a "shining example of diverse interests coming together to find common ground and committing to finding a solution that benefits all of us."

The Act, which passed unanimously in the Senate and the House as Senate Bill 1069, provides a comprehensive plan for water shortages in Oregon. The first piece establishes a matching grants program for Oregon communities to fund feasibility studies for water conservation, reuse and storage projects. The second piece of the legislation specifically addresses the decades-long crisis in declining groundwater in the Umatilla Basin. ACWA will fund a feasibility study for the regional project, which would direct water from the Columbia and Umatilla rivers during winter months into the Umatilla Basin to recharge and inject depleted aquifers.

Kulongoski said ACWA is the "first step" in addressing a "legacy of excessive demands on limited resources" that

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Salmon is cooked traditionally in this undated photo at Celilo Village.

By the CUJ

MISSION - The seemingly simple act of setting the traditional Longhouse table is now guiding the way natural resources are protected, restored and managed on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The Confederated Tribes' Department of Natural Resources, which has more than 100 employees, adopted the First Foods mission a year ago. It was the brainchild of DNR Director Eric Quaempts, who identified First Foods links so that the Department's efforts could be better connected to the Tribal community's cultural values.

Quaempts describes First Foods as a "powerful and elegant system" that incorporates the Tribe's Creation belief, promotes cultural continuity, is a reminder of the rights negotiated by treaty signers 150 years ago, and groups ecologically related resources - water, aquatic species, big game, roots and fruit.

Further, Quaempts said, "First Foods is an aboriginal system that actually incorporates people into ecology."

As a management theme, the First Foods approach uses the order of foods served in a tribal meal to bring attention to species and ecological processes that are often unrecognized or devalued outside of the Tribal community. It also provides a culturally appropriate means to report restoration progress to the Tribal community, and it provides direct links to the Treaty of 1855.

Most importantly perhaps, the First Foods concept supports the continuity of the Tribes' unique culture.

Historically, DNR efforts have been focused nearly exclusively on water and fish, but the Department intends to "extend the table" and address the remaining foods.

Water is central to the concept of First Foods, which also include the men's foods: salmon and other fish, deer with other big game; and the women's foods: cous and other roots, and berries.

Quaempts noted support for the First Foods approach from the CTUIR Board of Trustees and Executive Director Don Sampson, but he said it's been people like Marie "Butch" Dick who have emphasized the day-to-day sig-

Putting FIRST FOODS First



In this undated photo, a girl in a wing dress picks huckleberries near her family's camp at Mount Adams.

nificance of First Foods.

"I remember when Butch said to Louie (her husband) in the late 1980s, 'You're always talking about the men's foods. Who's going to take care of the women's foods?'"

Les Minthorn, longtime tribal leader, said First Foods offers a "plain" explanation in a time when rapidly changing science and technology "make it difficult for anyone, let alone our tribal membership to make sense of or whom to believe because it happens so fast."

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INSIDE



Nixyaawii freshman sharp-shooter Kristi Miller, who gained notoriety for her three-point shooting during the season and at the Class 1A State Tournament, looks to pass against a Joseph defender at Baker City Feb. 27. For more on the girls, turn to Page 38.

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Minthorn has offered similar words at Tribal celebrations, including the Celery Feast in the Longhouse on Feb. 24.

"My approach as a tribal leader is to connect all of what I see, hear and believe, to our past ... In accordance with the teachings of our original teachers, our ancestors, everything we do should relate back to this most important and basic cultural tradition of gathering and sharing the first foods."

Quaempts said the approach of using the order of foods served in the Longhouse to guide DNR work is unique and sets the next chapter in the Department's mission. "Having reviewed the approach with a variety of audiences, including international science panels, other tribes, federal and state agencies, I find the approach makes the indivisible nature of the tribes' cultural and natural resource values clear to people outside the community," he said.

Kat Brigham, a tribal leader whose family fishes in the Columbia River, said tribal culture is at risk without protecting first foods. "When I started with the Fish and Wildlife Commission I knew salmon, but it wasn't until I joined the Longhouse in the mid-90s that I began to understand how important the first foods were. They are part of our culture and tradition, and it's our duty to protect those resources for the next seven generations," Brigham said. "Nobody can go without water or air, neither can we go without our first foods."

Each of the First Foods has explicit links to the Treaty of 1855, which guaranteed to the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla Indians water rights as well as rights to fish, hunt, gather roots and berries, and graze livestock.

"First Foods predate the treaty by thousands of years and their sustainability and the continued right to access them were important goals in treaty negotiations," Quaempts said.

Still today, the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people express cultural values through First Foods, such as community feasts that celebrate the season's first salmon, first roots and first huckleberries of the season. Families recognize young people with celebrations for a first kill, a first salmon, a first digging and first picking. Community celebrations have sometimes required a first kill ceremony before a young man can



Huckleberries gathered in a woven basket.

Photo by Cheryl Shippentower.

participate in a round bustle dance, or a first digging or picking ceremony before a young woman can participate with buckskin dress in a round dance. And First Foods are still recognized and respected every Sunday in the community longhouse.

"The fact the community's respect and recognition of the order has endured, and is expressed at so many levels is impressive. The continued recognition of First Foods is a testament to the Tribe's cultural convictions," said Quaempts. "We need to be responsive to that conviction."

Quaempts also noted that even as First Food harvest and preservation methods have changed - Indians changed from dip nets to gill nets when the free-flowing river, like at Celilo Falls, became a series of lakes behind dams, and root diggers now used welded, steel diggers instead of hand-carved wooden ones - the First Foods order has remained a constant. Likewise, the community has had the option of replacing First Foods in the serving order, but has chosen to keep alive the First Food serving order and therefore the cultural continuum.

"Our ancestors believed in the 'first foods' and our life cycle revolved around gathering, preparing, and sharing them as well as praying to the Creator for their

abundance and survival," said Les Minthorn. "These ancestors practiced and taught this since time before memory. By securing these gathering rights our existence today on our ancestral lands will allow this concept to live. That right allows us to continue to gather, fish, dig roots, harvest berries, hunt, and to pasture our horses."

The First Foods approach is so logical it almost seems too simple.

"First Foods is not a menu," Quaempts said. "In Creation stories and belief, it's the order in which the foods promised to take care of Indian people. When the Creator asked, 'Who will take care of the people?' Salmon said 'I will' and the other fish lined up behind him, then the deer made a promise, and so on. Ecology always requires some reciprocity. In the case of the First Foods, that reciprocity is manifest in respect for the 'Creator's law,' which requires recognition of the First Foods through respectful celebration, then to go out and harvest, take care of, and share the foods after their respective feasts. In fact, when people serve at traditional meals, they are often told: 'Be careful, you're carrying a law.'"

Water quality problems and endangered species act listings have led the CTUIR and most other natural resource management agencies to focus efforts on water and salmon, but, the rest of the First Foods need attention, too Quaempts said.

"We don't want to see cou or huckleberries on the threatened or endangered list before anyone does something about them. That's what happened with salmon," Quaempts said.

The First Foods order can't be fulfilled within the boundaries of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, said Quaempts.

"That's why I think the treaty signers negotiated for a large ceded land base and maintained the right to access and harvest the foods. People today still go on Forest Service land and clear to Mount Adams for berries and they fish all the way to Willamette Falls for eels (lamprey)."

Through First Foods, natural resource management will consider a variety of other potential impacts to the landscape, Quaempts explained.

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Root diggers photographed in April last year included, front row from left, Lynn Sue Jones, Linda Jones, Lonnie Alexander, Ranita Jones; middle row, Trinette Minthorn, Jan Jones, Alvina Huesties, Enid Miller, Salissa Jim; and back row, Shawna Gavin, Michelle Burke, Janine Bearchum, Leigh Pinkham, Cyrene Red Elk, Leann Alexander, Kaitlin Treloar, Kathy Fegan, Dee Minthorn and Diane Looney.

"What is culture? Culture is the law (Tamanwit)."

Steve Sohappy, CTUIR member

"We need cold, clear, pure water and salmon."

Louie Dick, CTUIR member

"You're always talking about the men's foods. Who is going to take care of the women's foods?"

Marie "Butch" Dick, CTUIR member and wife of Louie Dick

FIRST FOODS: A new mission for DNR

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Fish habitat management for example, will look not only at the instream flow and riparian habitat, but at the full flood-plain habitat and interactions of surface water and ground water when contemplating temperature and flows that sustain salmon.

DNR's wildlife program has increased its information gathering efforts on big game populations, is participating in multi-agency efforts to understand Eastern Oregon's growing moose population, and is also an active partner in regional co-management of big horn sheep.

The Tribes have recently taken over range management from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and intends to place a greater emphasis on protection and management of women's foods. Impact to roots and berries for example be considered when determining how many livestock are grazed, when, and for how long.

An example of how the First Foods approach can be used occurred last year at the Horizon Wind Project at Telecasah in Union County. When Horizon applied for a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit, it triggered the Tribes' involvement. Ultimately, Horizon hired CTUIR to monitor project construction. When bitterroot – a First Food – was found, Horizon agreed in a mitigation plan to avoid areas where bitterroot was abundant and to create a trust fund to be used to protect and restore First Foods. Additionally, Horizon obtained easements from private property owners that will provide access for Tribal members to an otherwise land-locked Bureau of Land Management parcel. The agreement was the first of its kind to specifically address women's foods and to allow the CTUIR to use the trust funds for First Foods management as the Tribe's see fit. Horizon's project diversified regional energy sources and provided mitigation in the Tribes cultural context." said Quaempts, who credited CRPP Program Manager Teara Farrow and her staff for being responsive to the DNR mission and collaborating with the CTUIR's tax consultant Bruce Zimmerman and Attorney Dan Hester to develop the agreement with Horizon.

To put cous and huckleberry on the same level as other First Foods in the CTUIR's own governance structure, Quaempts is pushing a proposal to create a CTUIR Range and Forest Commission that would consider women's foods issues along with the many grazing and timber issues that are going to accompany the Tribe's assumption of those functions from BIA. Quaempts envisions the commission would function much like the Tribes' Water Resources Commission address water, and the Tribes' Fish and Wildlife Commission and anticipates a great deal of community interest in serving on such a commission were it formed.

Obviously, Quaempts said, the First Foods approach is not an original idea. Rather, it's been part of the Indian way of life since time immemorial. It's ironic now, he said, that the concept is considered innovative.



Inez Spino Reves digs roots and teaches young people how to carry on the traditional harvest.

"It resonates with a variety of Tribal staff as well as state and federal agencies who say they understand better how natural resources and Tribal cultural values are connected," Quaempts said.

Jim Waddell, National Training Coordinator for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was introduced to First Foods concept during a training at Indian Lake.

"As I listened I realized it was a very good way to express the holistic idea of first foods. I think it was a very good way of helping non-Indian students walk through the human-natural connection not only as individuals, but as decision-makers in the Corps."

Waddell said that, since the training in October, the Corps has integrated the Tribes' First Foods concept into the federal agency's environmental operations principles.

Later this month, Waddell said, the First Foods approach will be used as a teaching tool when the Corps meets with the Seminole Indians.

"We will use graphics of water, salmon, deer, roots and berries in our next training. We'll talk about how the foods relate to our need to take care of the environment and the cultures associated with them," Waddell said.

The 21st century approach, though, was born in part out of frustration with the terms and accounting used by the Bonneville Power Administration to mitigate for losses caused by hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River. BPA determined the number of mitigation "habitat units" based on an evaluation process that was not in sync with cultural values of tribal members.

"What do habitat units mean to the community we work for?" said Quaempts, who began to think about the words of elders like Steve Sohapp, Louie and Marie Dick, and the artwork created by his father, Peter Quaempts, which is rich in First Foods themes.

It all boiled down to the First Foods served at the Longhouse.

Quaempts thought, "If these First Foods are so durable, why not use them as the model for the Department's vision and goals?"

Smowhalla brought deeper meaning to 'First Foods'

By Antone Minthorn, Chair, CTUIR Board of Trustees

In the late 1930's, I was a small boy living in Thornhollow valley on the Umatilla Indian Reservation; I remember the women leaving on horseback very early in the morning. The horses carried large leather root bags along with the rider. They also took pack horses. The root digging party was headed up Kanine Ridge where roots were known to be plentiful. The diggers stayed all day and came back home at night with full root bags to unload and be ready for the next day's harvest run. That root was cous, one of the native First Foods. And the work of digging was very hard.

The First Foods (roots and berries, deer and salmon) have always been a way of life for the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people. However, the significance of the First Foods can have much deeper meaning.

The appearance of the traders, missionaries and settlers following the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805 was destructive to Indian country, or Indian land ownership, through such actions as taking and establishing trading posts and missions. The settlers were protected by soldiers. The power of the white immigrants became so great there seemed to be no hope for the safety and survival of the tribes.

However, around 1815, a prophet was born at Wallula near the confluence of the Snake and Walla Walla rivers. His name was Smowhalla. The Smowhalla belief was to respect your person and people and traditions as Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla, that is, as native Indian people. This spiritual power provides the strength to withstand assaults of white settlement and gives hope to the people that there will be the dawn of a new day and the Indian people would once again become tough and prosperous.

Smowhalla was a Dreamer who created the Washat Indian religion, also called Seven Drums. The Washat teaching proclaimed that "when spring and salmon came that none could be eaten until the first roots had been dug and the women had prepared a feast." This is the custom that respects and honors the power of nature's law (sometimes called Tamunwit). The women diggers on horseback had gathered the First Foods for the annual blessing at the tribal longhouse.

All of the tribal negotiators at the 1855 Treaty Council in the Walla Walla valley, in particular the Young Chief (Cayuse), argued the land could not be sold because it is the mother that keeps us alive and we do not own it; that our children need a place to live; and that the land and people are together one. The Young Chief was able to stay some land for the people and the Smowhalla teachings lead the way.

Today, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), with the leadership of some very young men in the past, reestablished the Seven Drum religion which is housed in the Nixyaawii Longhouse. It is the home for all cultural events.

The final word on the First Food policy is Smowhalla's vision of a new day for the Indian people who stay together and live respecting nature's law. The CTUIR has undergone revolutionary change in rebuilding the Umatilla Nation which is modern but retains a strong cultural spirit. I believe Smowhalla would have an explanation for the kind of accomplishments we have made today.

DNR's First Foods mission statement

To protect, restore, and enhance the First Foods – water, salmon, deer, cous, and huckleberry – for the perpetual cultural, economic, and sovereign benefit of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. We will accomplish this utilizing traditional, ecological and cultural knowledge and science to inform population and habitat management goals and actions, and natural resource policies and regulatory mechanisms.