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Whychus Creek surrounded by snow and ice

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: The Mighty Lamprey

By John DeVoe



What has three “eyes” (the third being a spot on the top of the head that can sense light and dark), has no

bones, has been on earth for about 450 million years and migrates up and down many of Oregon’s rivers and streams?

The mighty lamprey. Most lamprey are anadromous, like salmon, spending parts of their lives in fresh water and migrating to the ocean for a portion of their adult life. (But see the fascinating and little known Goose Lake Lamprey, which is endemic to the closed Goose Lake Basin; and the Miller

Lake Lamprey from the Klamath Basin. Both species migrate up and down tributaries to freshwater lakes rather than to and from the ocean.)

Lamprey spawn in stream habitat similar to salmon. Once the eggs hatch (hatching is apparently triggered by water temperature), the embryos move or drift to areas of low water velocity where they burrow into the substrate and live for several years as filter feeders. These “ammocoetes” then metamorphose and the juvenile lamprey enter the water column, beginning their migration to the ocean where they become adults and from which they migrate back to streams to spawn and die. During

upstream migration, lamprey are believed to follow or cue in on pheromone releases associated with upstream concentrations of ammocoetes. Lamprey also migrate primarily at night. Their life cycle can take more than a decade to complete. Clearly, there is a lot of fascinating activity going on in the dark out on our streams and rivers!

Lamprey—sometimes known as the “Lost Fish”—have wrongfully been treated as “trash fish” by many. Some rivers were even actively poisoned to eliminate lamprey. But lamprey have always been very important to Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest as a food source and for religious and

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*WaterWatch's mission
is to protect and restore
streamflows in
Oregon's rivers for fish,
wildlife, and the people
who depend on
healthy rivers.*



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WaterWatch of Oregon publishes
Instream three times annually.
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Pacific Lamprey

ceremonial purposes. Lamprey are also very important to the ecology of our rivers and streams for the food source they provide for many other species and, like the salmon and steelhead they coevolved with, for transporting critical nutrients from the ocean to inland environments.

Though lamprey successfully survived and adapted to changing conditions for almost half a billion years on earth, industrialized society has threatened their future existence in a little over a century. Threats to lamprey include dams and culverts that lack suitable fish passage, dewatering of stream habitat, toxics that accumulate in the sediments where ammocoetes live, poor water quality, mining and dredging and lack of appreciation of their importance to people and to the ecology of streams.

Tribal lamprey conservation efforts have been underway for many years. The Columbia River

Intertribal Fish Commission has, for quite some time, emphasized lamprey conservation and taken important steps to conserve and support lamprey. But lamprey are also receiving increased attention from other quarters. Large partnerships have formed to support lamprey conservation. There is a new (and quite interesting) Pacific Lamprey exhibit at the Oregon Zoo. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife recently added Pacific Brook Lamprey to the four other lamprey species (Pacific Lamprey, Miller Lake Lamprey, Western Brook Lamprey and Western River Lamprey) already designated as "Sensitive Species" in Oregon. While more needs to be done to reverse declines in lamprey populations, an expanded focus and understanding of the needs of the "Lost Fish" is good for lamprey and good for the health of streams and rivers across the Pacific Northwest.

For our part, we at WaterWatch intend to pay increased attention to how our work can benefit lamprey. Much of the work you already support at WaterWatch helps lamprey. For example, removal of obsolete dams provides huge benefits to lamprey. Protecting and restoring streamflows can also be critical to several life stages of lamprey. Suction dredge mining can destroy lamprey populations. Alteration and scouring of streams, the loss of riffle and side channel habitat can also threaten lamprey, just like salmon and steelhead.

Lamprey are significant to people and are an important part of the web of life on healthy, connected streams in much of the Pacific Northwest. Lamprey deserve our best conservation efforts and we at WaterWatch intend to give them just that. Thank you for supporting this important work. ■

17th Annual Celebration of Oregon's Rivers Recap



Thank you to everyone who came out to support WaterWatch at our fall banquet and auction and to our generous event sponsors
(check out the back cover)!

We are truly grateful for our passionate and enthusiastic members who make this work for Oregon's rivers possible. We're already looking forward to hosting the 18th Annual "Celebration of Rivers" this fall.

Save The Date:
October 24th, 2020 at the Leftbank Annex.

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Battle to Stop a Dam on Drift Creek Continues



Thanks in part to WaterWatch of Oregon—and the supporters who help make our work possible—efforts to build a new dam on a tributary to the Pudding River near Silverton hit a major roadblock.

On Nov. 22, an application by the East Valley Water District (EVWD) to build a new 70-foot dam with an accompanying 12,000-acre-foot reservoir on Drift Creek was denied by Oregon Water Resources Commission. The unanimous vote, which safeguards habitat for several fish species, including threatened steelhead, sensitive Pacific lamprey, coho salmon, and native coastal cutthroat trout, reversed a decision by the Water Resources Department (WRD) in response to a challenge filed by WaterWatch.

Still, the roughly five-year battle, which included a two-week trial before an administrative law judge, isn't over. In late January, EVWD appealed the decision to the Oregon Court of Appeals. WaterWatch now joins the State of Oregon in defending the November decision. WaterWatch also filed its own appeal to present additional grounds for denying the permit if needed.



Pictured above is staff attorney Brian Posewitz with Janet Neuman, who represented farmers in the effort to oppose EVWD's dam proposal.

"We were happy to see the Water Resources Commission make the right decision on this," says WaterWatch staff attorney Brian Posewitz, who represented WaterWatch in the administrative trial and before the Commission. "We know it wasn't easy given the Department's previous decision and the powerful interests behind the proposal. We look forward to helping defend the Commission's decision on appeal."

WaterWatch was joined in opposition to EVWD's proposal by a group of farmers, represented by attorney Janet Neuman, who stood to lose parts of their property through condemnation by EVWD to make way for the reservoir.

Formed in 2000, EVWD is an irrigation district made up of farmers in and around the Mt. Angel area. Although the farmers have existing water rights to irrigate crops, they claim to need another source of water based primarily on speculative fear of future government regulation. They turned to Drift Creek, which was not identified as a practical source of irrigation water in earlier studies, only after another plan fell through. Even assuming EVWD

could use more water, WaterWatch believes it has better alternatives that are less harmful for fish and cheaper over time than building this dam.

In 2013, EVWD formally applied to the Water Resources Department for the right to store water on Drift Creek. The next several years witnessed a flurry of activity involving WaterWatch: The Department issued a proposed final order that recommended approval of the dam. WaterWatch and the farmers filed protests. The Department referred the case to the Office of Administrative Hearings and the parties conducted extensive investigation and preparation for their cases. After the two-week trial in June 2018, the administrative judge issued a proposed order recommending approval of EVWD's proposal with modifications. WaterWatch filed arguments against the proposed order (called "exceptions") but the Department nevertheless adopted most of the hearings officer's recommendations.

Building the dam thus seemed a "done deal"—until a subcommittee of the Commission, which reviewed exceptions filed by WaterWatch and the farmers to the Department's order, announced in November a recommendation to deny the application based primarily on the impacts the dam and reservoir would have on an instream water right for the benefit of cutthroat trout. WaterWatch and the farmers buttressed their arguments at a hearing before the Commission in late November and the entire Commission then voted to support the subcommittee's recommendation.

WaterWatch is now preparing for the next round on appeals. Stay tuned.■

River Defenders of WaterWatch: Craig Lacy



Since the late 1980s, Bend resident Craig Lacy has been supporting WaterWatch of Oregon. Through ups and downs, internal changes, office moves and more, Lacy has helped make WaterWatch's dynamic work possible.

Now, in a new feature, we at Instream are reversing roles with supporters like Lacy and learning more about them. It's a way to see how WaterWatch's mission and policy work intersects in a personal way with the great folks who make the work possible.

Q: Craig, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

A: Well, I've been living here in Bend for 35 years. But I'm originally from Northern California. My family had property on the headwaters of the John Day. My great uncle worked for the Oregon Land Company. My grandfather got property before The Great Depression. I used to visit (in Oregon) for family reunions, and I caught my first fish as a kid back in 1953 right there. So I kept visiting a lot over time. As I got older, I developed a passion for fly fishing. I started fishing along the Deschutes River up on the way up to the John Day. Then, in 1983, we sold the family

business in California—a bowling center—and I moved up to Bend and started a fly fishing outfitting business. I was an outfitter here for 12 or 13 years and was also active in the local conservation community. I served on the board of Oregon Trout and was chairman for the Coalition of the Deschutes, among other things.

I'm officially and formally retired now—I got out of the guide business in 1996. I was about 50 years-old when I decided to get my Bachelors of Science in fisheries science from Oregon State University.

Q: Why did you start supporting WaterWatch?

A: I was just very impressed with work that (founders) Tom (Simmons) and Audrey (Jackson) were doing, especially with work in the legislature. WaterWatch over the years has been great on groundwater mitigation—the stuff Kimberley (Priestley) has accomplished, for instance, keeping on top of the Oregon Legislature. So much fabulous work has been done over the years.

Q: You've been supporting WaterWatch since the late 1980s. What's kept that connection going?

A: You are always active and doing things that I support. I've seen so many hours from the staff at work on the Deschutes Habitat Conservation Plan. Then there are all the things you do in Salem and in the Rogue and Klamath Basins.

Q: You've been involved in the water conservation movement for decades. What changes have you witnessed over this period of time?

A: That's a tricky question. I'm jaded now. I've been helping to try to get more water in the Upper Deschutes for some 30 years. But there was no movement on this until WaterWatch. It's a tragedy that irrigation districts can drag their heels on areas so critical to our environment.

On the John Day River, like a lot of people, I've seen fish kills and salmon dying because of warming temperatures. We have horrible summer conditions on the John Day because of climate change. It's criminal.

But, that said, I have also seen improvements in other areas, some positive things. There's always hope for the future. I've watched this stuff go on long enough to know change happens slowly.

Q: What's one thing you'd change, then?

A: A change in the law to require basic ecological flows on all streams so they can function—so fish can migrate and spawn. We also need adequate flows during the winter so a stream can function properly. Then we need changes in the way water is distributed—water rights. We have some people watering rocks—they aren't growing anything. They're just wasting water.

Q: Any final words of encouragement for WaterWatch and its supporters?

A: We all know WaterWatch has been a strong voice in the state capitol and elsewhere. People seek it out for advice, from legislators to lobbyists and others. WaterWatch is an important player for everyone. Just keep it up..■

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Estate Planning You can help secure a legacy of healthy rivers in Oregon by including WaterWatch in your estate plans. We can help you find a plan that meets your needs and benefits Oregon's rivers long into the future.

Workplace Giving Many employers make it easy to support by offering matching payroll contribution programs. Ask your employer if your workplace is able to help you support WaterWatch.

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Thank you to our amazing 2019 auction sponsors!

We once again had extraordinary participation by our generous sponsors at this year's annual auction at the LeftBank Annex. It was one of the most successful fundraisers we've put on yet. We're already looking forward to this year's event, also to be held at the LeftBank Annex, on October 24, 2020!



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