



In this issue

- 2 **President's Message**
- 3 **Update on reducing sea lion predation**
- 4 **Wild & Scenic River lawmakers honored**
- 5 **Molalla Log House gets a new home**
- 5 **New recreation area proposed for Molalla**
- 6 **Forestry pact would enhance stewardship**

On hold for now

In keeping with Gov. Kate Brown's order to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the MRA is postponing its annual membership meeting until further notice.

It's the 1st anniversary for Wild and Scenic Molalla

Just over a year ago, a remarkable event occurred in Congress with overwhelming approval by the Senate and House of an omnibus conservation bill that set aside for permanent protection thousands of acres of unspoiled lands and rivers across the nation.

MRA members can be justly proud that one of those newly protected sanctuaries is a 21-mile stretch of the upper Molalla River—now officially the newest member of America's Wild and Scenic River system.

This federal designation means that our beloved river and its forested riparian slopes are now off limits to logging, mining or other adverse activities and that the scenic upper river will be managed in perpetuity by the Bureau of Land Management to protect its scenic, environmental and recreational values.

The Northwest Oregon District of the BLM is responsible for seeing to it that the Molalla is managed in accordance with federal requirements—including public access for traditional recreation activities including camping, hiking, swimming, fishing and much more. The BLM is developing a detailed management plan for the river to carry out its mission.

As an insistent advocate for Wild and Scenic protection for the Molalla, MRA members can take great satisfaction in achieving a monumental goal.

A goal achieved, a future to secure

By John Atkins
MRA President



Having achieved a major goal in gaining federal Wild and Scenic River protection for the upper Molalla River, MRA members can take a good deal of satisfaction from our persistent efforts over the past 10 years.

There were many near-misses and setbacks in that span of time, but ultimately victory!

And now that it's finally happened, what next?

Continued care and vigilance by all of us interested in keeping the Molalla running clean and cold is the obvious candidate.

Our newly minted Wild and Scenic river merits our ongoing attention to keep it an inviting sanctuary for outdoor recreation, steelhead recovery and scenic preservation.

In this endeavor, we are gratified to be allied with the Bureau of Land Management, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and numerous nonprofit conservation organizations, including Molalla River Watch Watershed Council, and the Native Fish Society.

In keeping with the MRA'S interest in explaining geological and historical facets of the Molalla River Watershed, plans are afoot to design and install interpretive signs at key locations within the scenic corridor. The first, to be emplaced at the iconic basalt rosette, is awaiting completion of a Wild and Scenic Molalla River Management Plan by the BLM's Northwest Oregon District.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, we bring you news of positive developments affecting the Molalla and its indigenous creatures—wild winter steelhead in particular. Efforts are paying off to minimize the lethal predation

of returning steelhead by ravenous sea lions waiting at the foot of Willamette Falls.

In another report you'll be pleased to learn of renewed efforts in Congress by Sen Ron Wyden to establish a national recreation area in the Molalla Basin.

There is even more good news to pass along: the Oregon Department of Forestry and an environmentally progressive timber company, Port Blakely, have signed a comprehensive agreement to enhance forest stewardship in the Molalla River watershed.

Here in this column at this moment would be a suitable spot to plug our annual MRA members' get-together. Regrettably, the coronavirus outbreak and Gov. Kate's executive order for all of us to stay home has superseded plans for gatherings of that kind.

It's my hope that sometime sooner rather than later we'll all be out of quarantine and back to normal life. I'll let you know as soon as the coast is clear for a well-deserved celebration

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stir crazy? Cabin fever?

By order of the governor, you're cooped up at home and not allowed to go out to a movie, or a restaurant, or a baseball game, or even a knitting bee. The walls are closing in. You're so antsy. Where can you get some relief?

The remedy is right here! Just pop open your checkbook and send a nice heartfelt donation to the Molalla River Alliance--one of the leading boredom relief organizations in the entire Molalla River Basin! You'll feel immediate relief and satisfaction. Some supporters have reported starting to feel a little Wild and Scenic themselves! Just try it! Your target: Molalla River Alliance, PO Box 727, Molalla, OR 97038.

Progress on efforts to save steelhead from sea lions

A year after Oregon fisheries agents made a last-ditch effort to save endangered steelhead from extinction by ravenous sea lions waiting at the foot of Willamette Falls, things are starting to get better.

With authorization from the federal government, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department began trapping and euthanizing some of the predators identified as the most active.

Previous non-lethal measures to discourage, trap, haze, and relocate the sea lions by carting them to the coast and releasing them had failed. They came right back, swimming up the coast to the Columbia River, then 128 miles up the Columbia and Willamette rivers to the falls—often in less than a week!

Annual runs of steelhead returning to spawn in the Molalla and other tributaries of the Upper Willamette, once numbering in the thousands, had dwindled to a little over 500 fish in the winter of 2017.

At that time 40 sea lions were congregating around the fish ladder at the foot of the falls.

After developing and gaining approval of a detailed plan for humanely capturing the predators, fisheries agents began removing them, using cages with trap doors set up on floating docks downstream, where the sea lions haul out to snooze.

If an approved zoo or aquarium facility were available to receive candidate sea lions for permanent holding, then captured animals would be given a health screening by field staff

and veterinarians before being transferred to their new home.

Over several months of observation, 47 sea lions were captured. Of those, 14 were marked and released for not meeting removal criteria. The remainder were put to sleep.

The average weight of euthanized animals was 630 pounds with an average length of 7.6 feet, nose to tail.

The results? Monitoring data showed substantial decreases in salmon and steelhead predation and sea lion abundance. Estimated sea lion predation on salmonids decreased by



67% compared with the previous year and the maximum single-day sea lion count dropped by 57%.

It also appears that sea lions are quick learners.

So far this season, there have been no confirmed sea lion sightings have occurred below Willamette Falls.

It is estimated that in the initial year of this

management program, predator removals prevented the loss of 4,402 salmonids, the majority of which would have been winter steelhead listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Steelhead survivability has risen from a few hundred fish going up the ladder at Willamette Falls three years ago to more than 3,000 at last count.

This update on sea lion predation was condensed from management reports published by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, available online at www.dfw.state.or.us.

Photo credit: ODF&W.





The Ryan Morgan service award is presented to Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley at a town hall meeting in Portland by John Atkins, MRA President.

MRA honors sponsors of Molalla protection

It took 10 years of trying, but our champions in Congress got it done! Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, together with U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, kept their eyes of the prize through five sessions of Congress before obtaining federal Wild and Scenic River protection for the upper Molalla River!

In recognition of their leadership, persistence and success they were presented with the MRA's Ryan Morgan Service Award.

It is given in memory of the late Ryan Morgan, a Molalla youth leader and founding MRA member who lost his life in a kayaking accident in 2009 on the Little White Salmon River.

The award recognizes outstanding efforts by an individual or organization to advance the goals and values of the Molalla River Alliance. The award was presented to Congressman Schrader at a separate community event in Molalla.



So Far On Our Watch

1. Recovery of the chub minnow in the Molalla River and removing it from the endangered species list.
2. Development and adoption of the Molalla River and Table Rock Wilderness Management Plan.
3. Development of new congregate campgrounds along the Molalla.
4. Curtailed lawless behavior in the Molalla River Recreation Corridor.
5. Education and outreach programs about the Molalla Watershed: its ecology, history, geology, habitat, wildlife and heritage.
6. Anadromous fish monitoring and headwaters research.
7. Participation in habitat restoration and river cleanups.
8. Development of smart phone reporting app for volunteers patrolling the Upper Molalla.
9. Listing in the National Geographic Magazine's online Geotourism Inventory.
10. Ongoing cooperation and advocacy with ODF&W, BLM and others on behalf of the Molalla.
11. Securing official Oregon Scenic Waterway status for the Upper Molalla River.
12. Securing National Wild and Scenic River protection for the Upper Molalla River.

Molalla Log House finds a new home

In a small clearing amid Douglas Firs in the Hopkins Demonstration Forest a few miles south of Oregon City, the historic Molalla Log House is being painstakingly reassembled by skilled craftsmen.

Its new, permanent location is the work of Forests Forever, a project of the Oregon Sustainable Resources Alliance that includes the Oregon Forest and Industries Council and private woodlot owners.

The square-logged structure, hand-hewn in Oregon's pre-pioneer days and found moldering in a field south of Molalla by architectural historian Pam Hayden, was carefully disassembled by volunteers, placed in storage, and lovingly repaired before being moved to its new location and reassembled.

The Molalla Log House is considered to be one of the oldest buildings in Oregon. It is thought to be an artifact of the Canadian fur-trading era when Iroquois, French Canadians and Metis fur trappers crossed the Rocky Mountains in the late 1790s in search of new fur resources in the verdant Willamette Valley.



MRA Vice President Jack Hammond at the new site of the Molalla Log House



Next amenity: a roof

Senators seek Molalla River recreation area

Proposed federal legislation sponsored by Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden would establish a new national recreation area in the Molalla River basin.

The proposal would establish a 30,000-acre recreation area in the upper Molalla River watershed next to the Table Rock Wilderness Area—headwaters of the river.

This would substantially expand protection for the forested hillsides outside the quarter-mile Molalla River Wild and Scenic River boundaries. It ensures that forest management work would continue

in the proposed recreation area with a focus on creating recreational opportunities. Existing wildfire prevention strategies would also continue.

In a joint statement, the senators said that establishing the Molalla Recreation Area would provide added protection against fires and other destructive activities, while helping to generate jobs for Oregonians in our state's growing recreation economy.

Committee action on the proposal is pending.

State and Port Blakely company sign pact on enhanced forestry stewardship

Port Blakely, a leading forest products company in the Pacific Northwest and owner of 30,000 acres of forestlands in Clackamas County—much of it in the Molalla River watershed —has entered into an agreement with the Oregon Department of Forestry that will result in enhanced stewardship for its forest holdings.

Under the agreement, Port Blakely will exceed requirements designed to protect natural resources, such as water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, in exchange for long-term regulatory certainty under Forest Practices Act rules.

The company would follow an ODF-approved forest management plan which would permit forestry operations under that plan for 50 years, regardless of future regulatory changes.

Port Blakely is known for its environmentally progressive forestry management practices. It is also working with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service on a complementary Habitat Conservation Plan.

The stewardship agreement contains

enhanced protection for fish-bearing streams and aquatic bodies.

The agreement also aims to create and sustain diverse habitats for many land-based wildlife species, including breeding, foraging and dispersing habitats.

The agreement can be viewed at:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ODF/Working/Pages/FPA.aspx>.

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