

OREGON PALEO LANDS CENTER

October 2020

Our Mission Statement

The Oregon Paleo Lands Center (OPLI) works with the Gateway Communities of the mid-John Day Basin (Condon, Antelope, Fossil, Service Creek, Spray, Mitchell, Kimberly, Dayville and Monument) to build social and economic vitality through efforts:

To conserve, interpret, and promote the natural and cultural history of the John Day Basin/Blue Mountains through time.

To develop and connect, with partners, the John Day Basin/Blue Mountains' visitor services, recreational services, natural and cultural history education opportunities.

To welcome, educate, and connect visitors, schools, area residents and businesses at the Oregon Paleo Lands Center (OPLC), and through other media.

Contact OPLI at:

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Presidents Message Sept 23, 2020

Hello again supporters of the Paleo Lands Center. Thank you again for your continued contributions. Please consider becoming a park host, board member, regular donor or an annual sponsor. You can donate online by going to our home page and clicking the donate button.

www.oregonpaleolandscenter.com

We are pleased that we could open with caution this summer. The Board used the Governors guidelines, consulted with local leaders, rearranged the Center, added safety features and protocols for visitors, volunteers and staff. Our partnership with Oregon State Parks Host program continues to support a common goal, sharing the wonders of the John Day Basin. Host Sepha Nisbet of Mc Minnville staffed the Center from June- through August, applied our new protocols and regularly cleaned the Center, in return for an RV spot at the Wheeler County RV park. In addition to guiding visitors she provided the Board with dozens of ideas to improve services. Her leadership is much appreciated.



Visitors at the Oregon Paleo Lands Center, 2020

I am also pleased to report that our Treasurer, Richard Ross has helped us soften this year's financial shocks from reduced grants and donations. Several months of expenses are covered by a small loan under the federal Paycheck Protection Program. The Center has just been awarded an Oregon Cultural Trust Relief grant through the local Wheeler County Cultural Coalition. This will also help meet some of our basic operations costs this year.

We mourn the August loss of past Board President, Lee Bouchard of Fossil. Lee was a valuable member of the community and his work and life will forever be a part of us. Lee's Advice to explorers of Oregon's Outback was "See the world, go new places, get off the beaten path. Walk someplace where there is no trail." You can find two of Lee's great John Day stories on our website:



Paleo Lands Center, Summer 2020

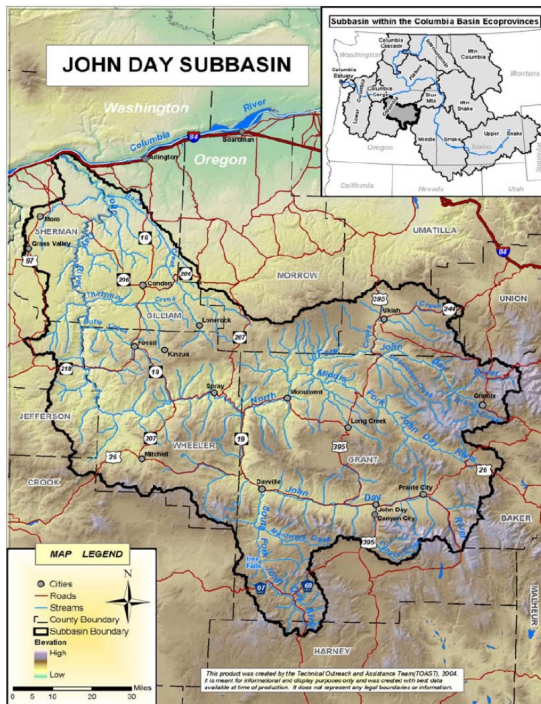
[Why the John Day Has No Dams](#) August 2018 Newsletter

[Uncharted Waters](#), Lee's wild 1958 John Day Float Trip. May 2017 Newsletter

See: <https://www.oregonpaleolandscenter.com/newsletters>

Jeffrey Kee,
Board President
Oregon Paleo Lands Center
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John Day Steelhead Continue to Survive



John Day Sub Basin

Those of us fortunate enough to have spent a good deal of time in the John Day Basin know it harbors one of the strongest surviving populations of native steelhead in the Columbia Basin.

How did we get so lucky? It wasn't luck. In my opinion it was the result of two things. One was the fact that no fish passage blocking large dams are on the John Day River and the second was due to the sustained support of an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) employee, Errol Claire.

Mr. Claire was a regional biologist that started his work in the 1950's in the basin. His primary accomplishment; keeping fish in the river. He and his supporters installed scores of irrigation diversion fish screens on hundreds of tributary and mainstem river locations.

Even though I have heard one John Day Basin irrigators claim they are responsible for the survival of this hardy fish, because they conditioned them to survive without water, keeping fish in the river was the key.

This diverse John Day River Basin continues to support small populations of Westslope Cutthroat and Bull Trout despite past human actions that threatened their existence. Bull trout once had a bounty on them in Oregon, and many fish not found in the basin were introduced in numerous occasions in the past.

A bit of internet research revealed an interesting report on the Basin submitted to the Bureau of Reclamation in 2004. There have been hatchery fish released into the John Day River system from 19 different sources, including coho salmon and brook trout.

ODFW research determined that Small mouth bass would probably not interfere with steelhead populations in the early 1970's. This appears to be a correct assumption based on some recent studies evaluating the stomach contents of bass. Bass are big on eating crawdads in the river not so much on the salmonids. Today, the John Day River is considered one of the best small mouth bass fishing rivers in the world.



John Day River

Channel catfish were planted in 1970 and 1972.

Brook trout and coho salmon were also released into this 7800 sq mile (20,300 sq kilometer) drainage basin.

In 1966, over 325,000 coho salmon were released into the river and over 200,000 brook trout were introduced into the system between 1925 and 1940

Native steelhead have found a niche in the Basin.

Steelhead are my favorite. The ability to transform from freshwater to saltwater and back again is fascinating. Our family is fortunate to have a steelhead spawning stream on our ranch near Kimberly. I see hundreds to thousands of small redbands in our creek depending on the year and the water available. In 2007 while conducting my regular fish walk I did find the carcass of a mature steelhead over 28 inches long, still propped upright in debris, submerged in the water like a frozen crème colored ghost.

Fishermen have been allowed to catch and release native steelhead in the river. Hatchery strays, mostly from the Irrigon Hatchery can account for up to 47% of the caught population. Hatchery fish should be kept and eaten.

Millions of dollars have been spent managing, protecting and restoring impaired waters in the Columbia Basin and the John Day Basin. Millions more will be spent.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts, watershed councils, local tribes and government groups in the John Day River were recently recognized by one of the largest restoration funding organizations in Oregon. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board has earmarked over 4 million additional dollars to be invested in the JD basin through its Focused Investment Partnership program. Much of this investment will be focused on 30 mile and Butte Creeks.



Steelhead Fish

These amazing animals have survived for thousands of years in this unique river. With continued work maybe we can keep them around for another few thousand.

Contact your local watershed council or soil and water conservation group to find out how you can help keep the native John Day River Steelhead running strong into the future.

Jeffrey Kee.

Ranch Manager Bologna Creek Ranch & Oregon Paleo Land Center President

Author's note: The Oregon Water Resources Department is leading a regional water use and need analysis currently. Contact your local watermaster to participate.

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*Thank you for your
ongoing support!*

Oregon Paleo Lands Center Needs You!

You can support the Oregon Paleo Lands Center in a variety of ways. Your financial support now in 2020 is vital to continue our mission of exploring, teaching about, and protecting Oregon's paleo lands. Donor benefits include a 10% discount on retail merchandise at the Oregon Paleo Lands Center in Fossil, a regular newsletter with information about scientific discoveries, history, and news of the Paleo Lands, and advance notice of upcoming OPLI and partner organization events. All donations are tax deductible.

Interested in volunteering at the Center or serving on the Board?
Contact us at paleolands@gmail.com or www.paleolands.org or at PO
Box 104, Fossil, Oregon 97830 (541) 763-4480.