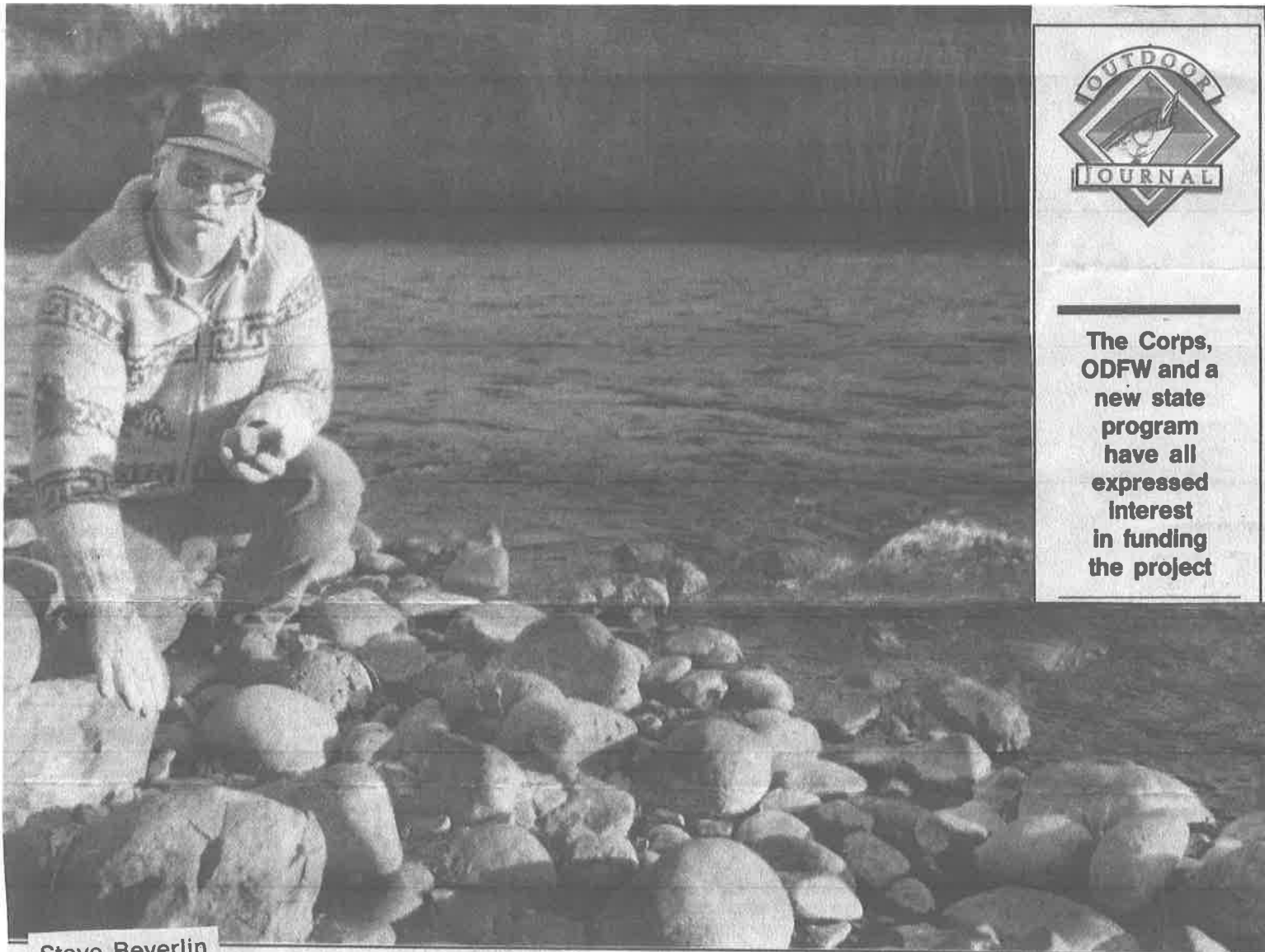


The Corps, ODFW and a new state program have all expressed interest in funding the project



Steve Beyerlin

Mail Tribune / Jim Crav

wants to replace the large cobblestone rocks with more salmon-friendly gravel in the upper Rogue River.

# ROCK BOTTOM / Gravel would improve salmon spawning area

By MARK FREEMAN  
of the Mail Tribune

Steve Beyerlin wants to turn a cobblestone stretch of the upper Rogue River into a spawning field of dreams for wild spring chinook salmon.

"It's kind of like, 'If you build it, they will come,'" the Gold Beach river guide says.

What Beyerlin wants to build is a more salmon-friendly river bottom on a mile-long stretch of the Rogue. The area lacks good gravel because it lies in the shadows of Lost Creek Dam.

The dam's presence has stopped the natural creeping of gravel downstream to this area over the past 20 years, leaving mostly larger, heavier rocks less useful to spawning chinook, he says.

Less gravel means less spawning room, which means a weaker wild chinook run and fewer fish for anglers to catch.

"Every year there's less and less spawning gravel up here. By re-introducing the gravel, it'll increase the run, without a doubt."

— Steve Beyerlin,  
River guide

So Beyerlin hopes to use backhoes and dump trucks to do what nature hasn't — replenish this critical chinook spawning ground with the right kind of river rock.

"We're trying to restore what Mother Nature lost over the past decade here," Beyerlin says. "Every year there's less and less spawning gravel up here. By re-introducing the gravel, it'll increase the (chinook) run, without a doubt."

Beyerlin's pitch has so far found few

doubters among biologist and government agencies.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the state's new Watershed Health Program have all expressed interest in funding the project.

Since 1987, Corps biologists have considered doing just what Beyerlin has suggested for the river stretch between Cole Rivers Fish Hatchery and Casey State Park, where Highway 62 crosses the Rogue, near Trail.

Still in the conceptual stage, the project has no price tag, no money and no green light.

But interest is strong enough that the Corps might come through with most of the money to do it — maybe in time for next fall's spawning season.

"The feeling is, we don't want to see that area go to where the chinook no

# Gravel

from Page 1C

longer use it," says Rock Peters, a Corps biologist working on the Rogue. "So, from our standpoint, we're behind it."

Eroding spawning grounds for wild spring chinook have been an issue in the upper Rogue since the early days of planning for Lost Creek Dam.

Free-flowing rivers constantly push rocks, debris and other materials downstream and replenish spawning habitat by replacing river gravel.

But Lost Creek Dam shut off the gravel surge, leaving downstream spots to replenish only from gravel pushed into the river from the river bottom or tributaries downstream of the dam.

That leaves a void from the hatchery to Big Butte Creek, whose mouth near Casey State Park is the first major tributary downstream of the dam.

Water still pushes that area's gravel downstream. With no source for new gravel, the only rocks left tend to be larger cobbles in which chinook cannot effectively build their egg nests, or redds.

Limited gravel means poor spawning success which, in turn, reduces the numbers of wild spring chinook prized by anglers.

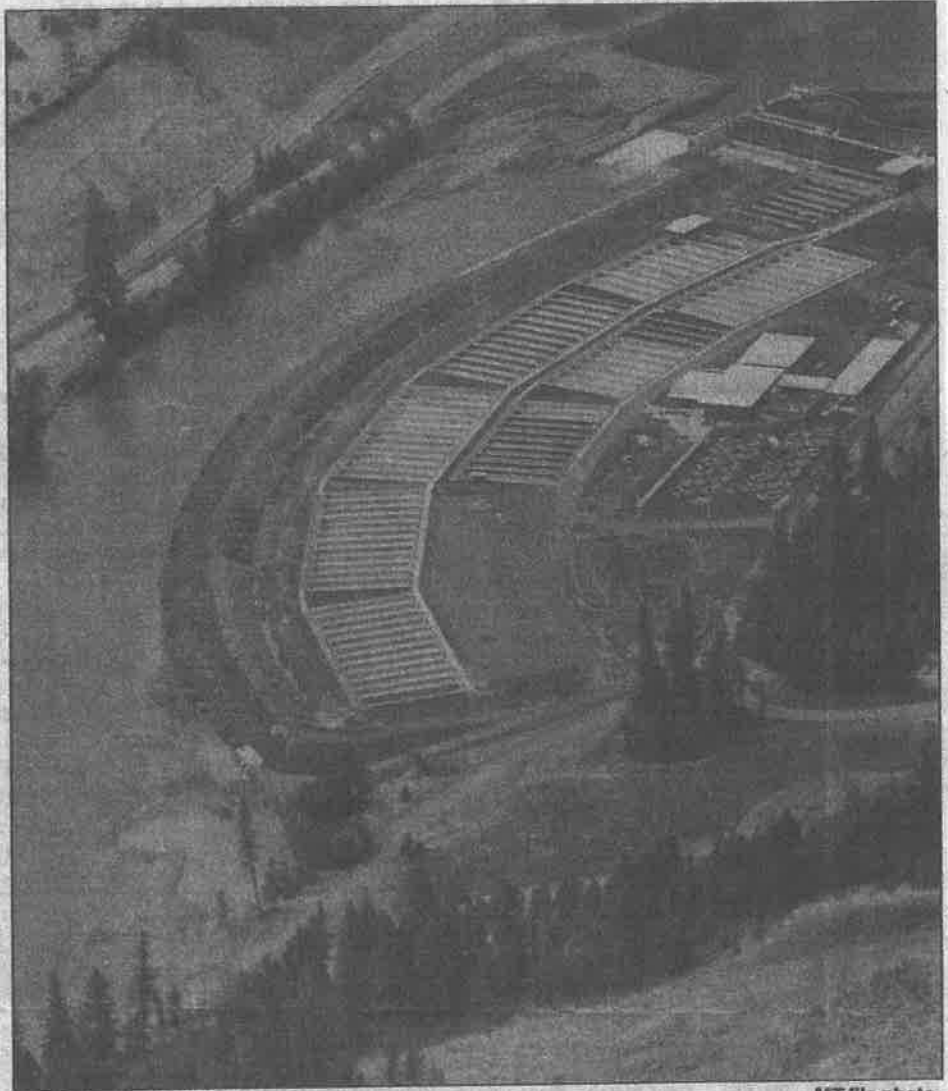
Improving the wild chinook population also means reducing the likelihood it will come under the Endangered Species Act.

"If we end up with an endangered species, I want to know before it happens that I did everything I could to stop it," Beyerlin says.

Beyerlin and the Corps believe improving the spawning area between the hatchery and Casey State Park could be a big help.

Peters has applied for \$2,500 to survey that stretch and actually see whether the spawning habitat has deteriorated as much as Beyerlin believes.

The Corps is also looking at whether such a project can be done with money from a fund designed specifically for environmental improvements. If so, it will put in \$3 for every \$1 that comes in from an outside source other than a federal agency, says Laura Hicks, the Corps' chief of plan formulation for the



MT file photo

**IMPROVEMENT SOUGHT** — If new gravel is added, this section of the upper Rogue near Cole

Rivers Fish Hatchery will have better spawning habitat for wild spring chinook salmon.

Portland District.

That outside money could come from the state's new Watershed Health Program, which has about \$3.5 million to spend on south coast projects in the next 17 months.

Jerry MacLeod, the former ODFW Rogue District biologist and current watershed health team leader, says the upper Rogue gravel project could be funded from this money.

"The major player here, though, is the Corps," MacLeod says.

Since the watershed health money is available for only a short time, Beyerlin hopes the Corps moves quickly to survey, design and fund the project.

"We're in a really unique situation in history," Beyerlin says. "Not only is the federal government excited about restoration projects, but the state is, and the public is, too."



House of Representatives  
Salem, OR  
97301

Reply to address indicated

Salem  Gold Beach

Russ Stauf  
ODFW  
Gold Beach, Oregon 97444

Russ,

I would like to express my support for the Spring Salmon conservation proposal submitted by Curry Sport Fishing Association and the Oregon Guides and Packers.

This proposal would reduce in river harvest and conserve Wild Spring Chinook stocks while easing economic impact of reduced fishing opportunities.

The formation of a Rogue River Task Force to look at and spearhead Spring Chinook Recovery as well as other related Rogue River issues is long over due. I urge the Department to move to see that this Task Force is up and running in the shortest time possible. The Task Force appointees should address the parameters of the Task Forces scope and present to the Commission for approval of mission.

It is not an acceptable practice to allow an important fish species to decline to the point the Department feels the need to close harvest opportunities without proper research or having a recovery plan in place. This needs to be addressed before any harvest closures that would harm our rural economies occur.

For three years I have met with ODFW Director Lindsey Ball and Fisheries Chief Ed Bowels to address habitat issues for Wild Spring Chinook. I am very disappointed with the progress on addressing lack of gravel recruitment below Lost Creek Dam. The Department has moved to slowly on gravel introduction projects, which would address Wild Spring Chinook Salmon on the Upper Rogue. I would like a report on the status of this issue.

It is my hope that the Department recognizes my frustration with the handling of this resource.

Sincerely,

  
Wayne Krieger  
State Representative  
District 1

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