

OPINION

## Kitzhaber can protect Oregon's rivers

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By Tim Palmer

Oregonians love their rivers.

This fact has been clear to me ever since I began writing about our rivers 30 years ago. It's no secret; just look: Fishing, rafting, hiking along streams and enjoying riverfront parks along the Willamette in Salem or Portland are all popular pastimes and passions.

Fortunately, we have a fishing-and-rafting governor to match our scenery. Reflecting on a lifetime of outdoor experiences in the foreword to "The Rogue: Portrait of a River," John Kitzhaber wrote, "Rivers have always held a special place in my heart."

Long-attached to the Rogue River, he recognized that we "can find the wisdom and the courage to honor it and to preserve it for all those who will follow."

The governor has presided over Oregon's Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, which has invested \$240 million in restoration of our most iconic fish. Among other measures, he championed removal of Savage Rapids Dam, bringing salmon back to the middle Rogue.

Today, stewardship of our rivers is needed more than ever.

Foreign-owned corporations propose strip mines at the sources of the Rogue, Illinois, Pistol and Smith rivers. Protections for riverfront habitat under the Northwest Forest Plan are on the chopping block just when we're beginning to see invigorated fisheries stemming from mega-millions in public investment. Meanwhile, our state program to regulate logging in the 20 percent of Oregon's forests that are owned by the timber industry fails to prevent landslides, to avoid herbicide poisoning of fish and people and to reverse the warming of public waterways where the required stream-side buffers are inadequate, as shown by the Department of Forestry's own recent RipStream study.

Climate change promises to worsen these problems. Now we must work harder and faster to protect the rivers we cherish.

Opportunities abound. The governor can lead the way toward reform of our Oregon Forest Practices Act. He can support continued safeguarding of riparian habitat in national forests. He can champion legislation to minimize suction dredge mining. He can back permanent protection for Siskiyou Mountain streams threatened by the 1872 Mining Law. He can designate more of our finest rivers in the State Scenic Waterways system.

Of course, all reforms require cooperation extending far beyond the governor's office. That's what leadership is all about.

Gov. Kitzhaber has given us three terms of service with investment in the care of our rivers. Their lasting fate now lies with his willingness to go the final big mile, in his last term, to see that past gains are not lost and to quicken the pace toward a brighter future. This is still within our grasp. The chance will not come again. Could anyone wish for a better legacy?

We Oregonians love our rivers. Now, more than ever, we need the "wisdom and the courage" to honor them and preserve them for all those who will follow.

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