

FISH BOUNTY FEEDS THE COUNTY



Photo by MRE CHLON

Coho salmon caught at the Waterhouse Falls fish trap will be processed and then distributed to needy individuals in Tillamook County.

THE NORTH COUNTY FOOD BANK LANDS HUNDREDS OF FREE HATCHERY-RAISED COHO

BY LOHI TOBIAS
THE OREGONIAN

Folks in Tillamook have a heck of a fish story — make that 700 plus and counting fish stories.

And no, it's not about the ones that got away.

It starts with the offer of free fish — and the unfortunate, albeit unavoidable, refusal of those fish.

About two years ago, staff with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife offered Imie Camelli, president of the North County Food Bank, hatchery-raised coho salmon from the Waterhouse Falls fish trap on the North Fork of the Nehalem River.

Now, the last thing you want to do when trying to feed the hungry is turn away food. But that was exactly the predicament Camelli, 67, found herself in. She simply didn't have the facility, the staff or the time to be cleaning fish when she needed to be feeding people.

And so the salmon were killed and thrown back in the Nehalem as nutrients. The fish trap is part of the Life Cycle Monitoring program operated by Fish and Wild-



Some of the salmon caught at the Waterhouse Falls fish trap are canned before being distributed to assisted-living centers and a food bank in Tillamook County.

life and the Corvallis Research Lab. The project team counts the fish at the trap, which is about 13½ miles east of the town of Nehalem on the North Fork of the Nehalem River. The wild ones are allowed to pass while the hatchery fish are counted, measured and killed so they do not mix with the wild fish.

All those fish going to waste didn't sit well with Bill Campbell, the retired director of the Tillamook County Department of Community Development.

"It's high-value protein, some of the best protein you can get on the plate," said

Campbell. "To have it not be available because of these obstacles. ... It would be a waste. If we couldn't get the fish, the fish would go back in the stream for nourishment. How many fish do you need to nourish a stream?"

So last year, Campbell came up with a solution. He drafted local processor Darius Peake, owner of the Tillamook Bay Boathouse, to process the fish, which Peake agreed to do at cost. The state granted him access

Please see **FREE FISH**, Page B2

Free fish: Organizers of program short on cash

Continued from Page B1

to the fish trap, and volunteers signed on to transport the fish, kept fresh in totes of ice.

Last year, they harvested and processed 157 fish.

This year, they're already at 726 (200 are from the hatchery upstream from the trap) salmon and counting. That comes to, give or take a few, 4,293 7½-ounce cans of salmon and 2,200-plus pounds of frozen filets in the freezer. They've delivered some to the food bank and some to assisted-living facilities in the county, and are looking at other ways of getting them out into the community where they

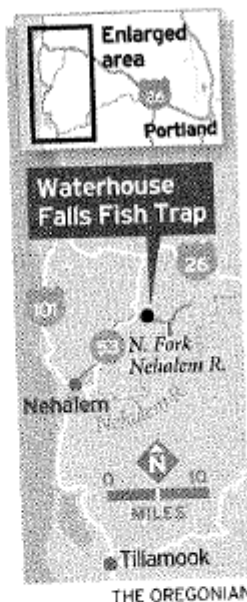
are needed.

"We just got another 45 fish today," said Mike Ehlen, one of the volunteers on Wednesday. "It's off the Richter scale. The trap is full again today after we left with 45 fish. It's crazy."

Add in the fact that the project is providing jobs for eight cannery workers who probably would not have much to do this time of year and that the Neah-Kah-Nie High School art class is designing the labels for the cans, and you have a success story nearly beyond belief, said Ehlen.

There is just one downside to the story. The project has been so successful, organizers are short on finances.

"We thought we'd get about 250 fish," said Campbell, "We thought that would be success-



ful. We are so far beyond that it isn't even funny."

So instead of needing \$2,000 to cover the costs, they'll need nearly \$9,500. So far, they've raised a little more than a third of that and are appealing to the community for help.

The response so far has been encouraging, Campbell said.

Upon hearing the story, people say, "Wow, that's awesome," Campbell said.

"I ran into a guy who runs a north coast security company. He said, 'I've got the checkbook in the pickup truck,' and he cut us a check on the spot. That describes the willingness of people to make donations to us."

Lori Tobias 541-265-9394;
loritobias@aol.com