

Starbird, Ethel. "A River Restored: Oregon's Willamette." *National Geographic*. 141 (1972): 816-835. (Reviewed by Niko Hoskins)

This article retells the story of the Willamette's clean-up and also explains how it is being maintained. The author first tells of the pollution that nearly suffocated the river and everything in it, citing industrial, agricultural and residential sources. The author travels to the Willamette basin and spends time being guided around and personally witnesses the magnitude of civilian reinforcement that goes on to prevent polluting, even reporting an infraction herself.

Part of the reason the clean-up was so successful was that the legislature refused to permit loopholes in the laws and made sure the laws were carried out. In addition, the gubernatorial candidates at the time were all calling for river clean-up. Another positive element to the clean-up was the charging of deposits on every beverage can and bottle.

Of the numerous perks that resulted from the river clean-up, the author singles out the return of migratory salmon and the large number of uses for waste water that were discovered. After learning they couldn't dump their waste water, plants discovered that their waste could be used to make plant fertilizer, food pellets for fish and also help insulate fruit crops in the winter.

The prospects for the Willamette, according to the author, hinge upon the Greenway Project, a plan to purchase all the land lining the Willamette and turn it parkland for recreational use, and the diligence of citizens in not polluting and enforcing an anti-pollution mindset on others.

Critique

This article provides a picture of the culture and climate surrounding the Willamette at a certain point in time. The optimism with which the author speaks reflects the quotes from residents, one of whom talks about his lazy afternoons spent outside his floating home on an inner tube. To think that this Willamette somehow turned into the one we know today seems odd, especially given that companies along the river were so compliant to the new, stringent laws. Of the all the plants along the river, only one chose to close down and one company even built its plant three miles away from the river because it deemed the Greenway Project more important.

In retrospect, I also have to wonder how clean the river really is after reading former-DEQ deputy director Steve Greenwood's article where he says that a lot of the pollution problems we have today are just a consequence of better science. In fact, the first page of the article has a picture of a plant spouting what the author calls "harmless steam." Not to say that it isn't just steam, but there seems to be a feeling in this article that as long as you can't see it, it isn't pollution (discounting oxygen deprivation).

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