

OUTDOORS

State ponders its next move after fish kill

State fisheries officials say they are considering seeking financial compensation for the fish killed when Bohemia Inc. drained Hult Reservoir, a former millpond located near the community of Horton in the Coast Range west of Junction City.

Nobody knows exactly how many fish died when the 60-acre reservoir was drained into Lake Creek 10 days ago.

But Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists collected a "sampling" of dead fish and came up with 691 bluegill, 209 largemouth bass, 91 cutthroat trout, 63 black crappie and a handful of other miscellaneous species, including six steelhead.

Some of the bass were "in the five- to six-pound range," said Will Beidler, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife fish biologist in the Florence district who help collect dead fish from the muck left behind.

"The thing that got me so upset is that I didn't even know it was happening — I didn't have an opportunity for input on how it was to be drained," Beidler said.

Bud Stewart, an executive of Bohemia Inc., whose crews drained the pond, said he, too, was "disappointed" at the way things transpired.

"We were a little deficient in getting the word out," Stewart said.

Bohemia owns the dam itself, but the water and the fish in it are public resources, said Dave Anderson, assistant regional supervisor. Stewart said Bohemia crews drained the pond in order to make repairs on the dam and the headgate in order to have things "ship shape" before they were turned over to public ownership.

Bohemia and the Bureau of Land Management six weeks ago announced a tentative agreement to do that by the end of the year. Bohemia had said it was unwilling to continue being liable for the earthen dam and would drain the reservoir and tear out the dam if no public agency was willing to take it over.

Meanwhile, Stewart said the reservoir won't be refilled until repairs are completed, which would not be until "late winter or early spring."

"Such a delay in refilling the reservoir could be "disasterous," said Wayne Elliott, BLM Coast Range District manager.

Elliott said two extremely rare plants — including one not known to exist anywhere else outside of Maine — are threatened by the lack of water. In addition, he said, vast amounts of silt that had settled to the bottom of the reservoir could be washed into Lake Creek if the headgate is left open all winter.