## SPORTS

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Huit Reservoir was serene when Jim and Nancy Bellingham visited recently but dilemma over dam's liability may force draining of popular fishing, swimming lake.

## Plans dammed up at 'Pond'

By MIKE STAHLBERG

The Register-Guard

HORTON — This is the winter to which Jim Bellingham and several of his students at Triangle Lake High School have been looking forward.

For several years, Bellingham and students in the Salmon Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) have been releasing 120,000 steelhead fry in Lake Creek above Hult Reservoir.

Completion of a new \$600,000 fish passage around

Lake Creek Falls at Triangle Lake last month opened the door for those steelhead to return to the upper reaches of Lake Creek to spawn.

But an unforeseen dilemma over the dam that forms Hult Reservoir has created another dead end for Beilingham's steelhead.

It has also raised the possibility that Hult Reservoir a popular fishing and swimming hole known locally as "the Mill Pond" - might be drained.

At issue is who will be responsible for repair and

maintenance of the 45-year-old earthen dain who will be liable if something should go wrong on the

dam or on the lake behind it.

"If we can't transfer it to the state or to the federal government, we're going to want to remove the dam," says Bud Stewart, spokesman for the Bohemia Inc., a Eugene-based forest products company which owns the dam and about half the land under the reservoir.

"That's a liability we're just not prepared to contin-

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ue to accept," Stewart said.

Discussions about the dam's future are scheduled next month between Bohemia officials and the Bureau of Land Management.

The BLM owns land under the upper portion of the reservoir.

We're trying to see what we can do," said Wayne Elliott, manager of the BLM's Coast Range District.

"We'd like to see the reservoir remain, but the federal government can't take on just any liability there, either.'

Bellingham and most other residents of the area say it would be a shame to drain the reservoir, thus eliminating prime rearing habitat for coho salmon as a popular recreation

"You can't believe the traffic on this road during the summer," said Beilingham, who lives on Horton Road.

Although small, the 80-acre reservoir plays a big role in the life of area residents.

"I'd sure like to see it saved," said Ernie Jacksch of Triangle Lake. "It's just a great place for kids to get out in the summer on an innertube - Triangle Lake gets so crowded a lot of people just take off and go up there."

The reservoir is in a peaceful setting, nestled at the upper end of a small valley in the Coast Range. An osprey nest can be seen in a tall snag north of the lake. Ducks paddle across the surface, and a beaver has left fresh wood chips at the base of a tree in the alder forest just above the reservoir.

Anglers say 6-pound-plus bass have been pulled from among the lily pads and sunken logs around the edge of the lake. Cutthroat trout, crapple, bluegill and kokanee also reside in its waters.

"I caught the biggest crapple I ever caught there," said Robert Day of Eugene, who "ran accross it by accident seven or eight years ago when we got lost deer hunting.

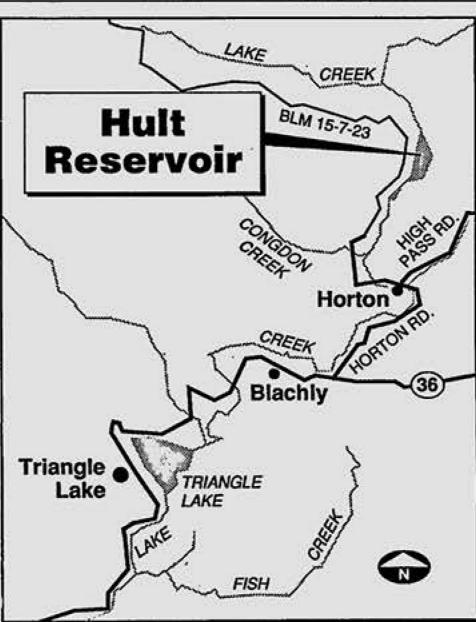
"I think it would be tragic" if the reservoir were to be drained, Day

said, "It's such a beautiful little place." Most area residents were unaware there's a chance that could all be tak-

en away.

So was BLM, until the liability issue arose earlier this year after inspectors from the State Water Resources Department called upon Bohemia to clean up the dam so safety engineers could get a better look at some potential trouble spots.

"The spiliway was partially



Hult Reservoir is 4 miles north of Highway 34, 15 miles west of Junction City.

blocked with debris and the downstream side of the dam itself was covered with trees and brush — that's not a good situation," said Barry Norris, the department's dam safety engineer. Tree roots can loosen compacted soil and allow water to percolate through the dam, he said.

While there is no immediate cause for alarm, Norris said, he is concerned about the discovery of "sand bolls" on the downstream side of the dam. Sand boils are places where water carrying particles of soil emerge from the structure under pressure. It's a sign of ero-

"A dam that size deserves respect," sald Norris.

He said the first thing that needs to be done is to clean off the embankment and drain the swampy area at the base of the dam so engineers can get a better idea of how much water is seeping through the dam, and where.

The problems with the dam - and

the fact Bohemia is considering demolishing it - caught the Bureau of Land Management by surprise, Elliott said.

The agency had taken the lead in creating a salmon and steelhead fishery in the the Lake Creek drainage, putting up money to pay for construction of the fish ladder at Lake Creek Fails. It was something local anglers had talked about for nearly 40 years.

Providing a way for fish to get above Hult Reservoir was part of the same plan.

Elliott said his agency had arranged \$12,000 in contributions to pay for a 40-foot-high "Alaskan steep pass style fish ladder to be installed on one

side of the spillway at Hult Reservoir. "We had the blueprints and the

money and were charging ahead," Elliott said. "Then the stability of the dam question popped up." So construction of that ladder has

been delayed until the dam's future is

resolved. And, without a passage over the dam, nearly 20 miles of spawning stream is still inaccessible to any fish

that might return this winter.

The BLM could assume responsibility for the dam under certain circumstances, Elliott said, but the agency needs to know exactly what it's getting.

"What we'd really like to do is get some kind of engineering analysis done of the dam, to find out what it would take to fix it, if anything, before we take on anything out there," said

Bohemia, meanwhile, isn't eager to spend more money on a facility that Stewart says "is of no use to us - the only possible thing it can do is cause us problems."

Bohemia assumed ownership of the dam when it bought the Horton mill and surrounding forest land from the American Can Co. in 1972. It later removed the mill and now simply operates an 1,800-acre tree farm in the ar-

American Can had acquired the property in the 1960s from the Hult family, which started the logging and lumber company that built the reservoir back in the mid-1930s. The reservoir was used to store logs hauled from the surrounding hills.

"It would be a crying shame to tear this out," says Bellingham's wife, Nancy, who grew up just downstream from the reservoir. Her father, Carrol Hult, was one of the co-founders of the lumber company.

"It's just a beautiful spot."

Nancy Bellingham says the reservoir does serve a useful propose for Bohemia because it provides a ready source of water for company helicopters during forest fire season.

Draining the reservoir is not something Bohemia wants to do, Stewart

"Something like that would just be a last resort if BLM refused to take the liability," he said.

"We hope some kind of a deal can be struck. We don't want to see that community dumped on — we've got a lot of friends out there."

But it would also not be the first time in Oregon that a millpond-turnedlake evaporated because of dam safety and liability issues.

Only last year, over the protest of anglers, the Bolse Cascade Corp. drained Valsetz Lake near the headwaters of the Siletz River, destroying a popular fishery.