

Regional

Scientists hopeful for romance

SEATTLE (AP) — Firecrackers didn't work, neither did rubber bullets. Now scientists hope a little romance might make sea lions forget about the easy-to-catch fish at the Ballard Locks.

For years, sea lions migrating north from California have parked just outside the locks and adjacent fish ladder, through which salmon and steelhead trout migrate on their way to spawning beds in streams and rivers that feed Lake Washington.

The sea lions have devastated steelhead runs. Last year only 700 of the fish made it past the sea lions, wildlife officials say.

Fisheries experts, noting that only male sea lions make the winter trek to Washington, want to carry the sea lions back to the Channel Islands off Southern California where female sea lions linger.

"Maybe these transplanted males will develop other interests aside from returning to the Puget Sound area to eat steelhead," said Joe Scordino of the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Even if romance doesn't bloom, it would take

the sea lions more than a month to swim back to Washington, meaning they would miss the peak steelhead run of mid-February to mid-March, Scordino said.

Fisheries officials are waiting to see if Congress approves the \$150,000 to \$175,000 the program will require. If money is approved, they also must convince California officials the sea lions will do no harm there.

"First we have to get the money and then we will worry about an agreement with California," Scordino said.

The marine mammals have caused problems for the fisheries of both states since their numbers began to multiply after passage of the Marine Mammals Protection Act of 1972. Scientists say there now are more than 177,000 sea lions.

Last year, 39 sea lions were captured at the locks, which separate Puget Sound from the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

But a few days later, 13 of the animals, each weighing 500 to 600 pounds, were back at the locks, gorging themselves on steelhead.

Volcano experts unsure about St. Helens

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — Scientists monitoring Mount St. Helens detected little seismic activity Tuesday but said they're not ready to declare that the volcano has returned to its slumber.

Weekend earthquakes at the volcano sent a plume of ash 90 miles to the east, surprising scientists.

"It looks quiet right now but I can't say it's going to stay calm," said Chris Jonientz-Trisler of the University of Washington Geophysics Center in Seattle, 100 miles north of

Mount St. Helens.

"It doesn't look at the present time like any eruption is imminent," she said. "One thing we've learned, though, is anything can change."

Bad weather again prevented flights over the mountain, said Cliff Hall, an operations staffer with the Cascade Volcano Observatory.

"We're unable to look at what's happened because of the rain and wind and clouds," Hall said.

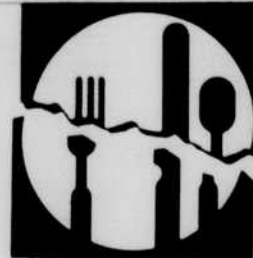
Scientists speculated steam emissions seen coming from

the volcano were caused by groundwater reaching superheated rock beneath the volcano and turning to steam, or from gas released by cooling molten rock.

Ash expelled by the volcano over the weekend was tested and found to be pulverized rock from previous eruptions rather than freshly erupted matter.

The volcano's last major eruption sent a mudflow from the crater six miles to the north fork of the Toutle River on March 19, 1982.

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Page 9