

Sports

Oregon whale watching week begins



A gray whale breaches off the Oregon Coast near Depoe Bay. OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Want to spot nature's largest animal in the wild? Late December is a great time to make it happen. An estimated 25,000 gray whales are expected to swim past Oregon's shores over the next several weeks as part of their annual migration south to the warm calving lagoons near Baja, Mexico. The end of December is the peak time for migration with roughly 30 whales passing by per hour.

But picking the perfect place to spot whales isn't simple. Luckily, Oregon's state parks department offers Winter Whale Watch Week from Dec. 27 to 31. For those five days, trained volunteers will be stationed at 20 ideal whale-spotting locations from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day, ready to help visitors view whales and answer questions about the animals. Each of those 24 spots offers a different experience. Some allow watching from a cozy and warm indoor spot, while others require a miles-long hike to wind-swept point or even a mountain-top.

Ideas for picking the right spot

During the winter migrations, the whales are a bit farther out from shore. "The whales stay farther out in winter because it's a little easier for them to navigate in the deeper water," said Luke Parsons, park ranger at the Depoe Bay Whale Watching Center. "They're in a hurry. They're headed down to Baja to either breed or give birth, and don't want to miss the party."

"There are 30 whales per hour swimming down the shore, but they're moving fast."

That means spotting spouts in the vast ocean can be a challenge.

While much of the success in whale watching is patience — the willingness to keep your binoculars focused on the ocean — there are a few places and tips that can help improve odds, Parsons said.

"In the afternoon, when the sun is right over the ocean, it's sparkling and pretty, but there's so much glare that it's very difficult to see them," Parsons said. "In the morning, the ocean tends to be more calm and of course the sun is behind you, so it's a lot better."

Highest success rates

The whale watching spots with the highest success rates tend to be a little higher in elevation for the wintertime.

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How to fish, clam and crab on the cheap in 2020



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

Whenever the calendar rolls over to an even-numbered year, as it will in a couple of days to 2020, I'm reminded of Al.

Al was something of a curmudgeon; maybe still is. We lost touch when he departed Oregon about the same time I retired in 2015.

His main gripe was the biennial increases in state fishing and hunting license and tag fees approved mid-decade by the Oregon Legislature were bankrupting him, turning his golden years into brass.

It didn't seem to dampen his fuming when I pointed out that every time he turned the key on the heavy-duty, crew-cab toy-hauler hooked up to his gargantuan fifth-wheel, more money went out the tailpipe than it cost him for any increases in his annual fishing and hunting licenses.

Al comes to mind because, as it has in two-year increments since 2016, the cost of licenses and tags is going up in the new year.

Rather than the rote recitation about how much more you're going to have to shell out, though, I thought it might be more appropriate to talk about what you get for what you pay when it comes to fishing.

Sort of a tiers of joy (sorry, couldn't help it).

Let's start with free, a very good number indeed.



For just \$10, Oregonians can play in the mud all year in 2020, with an order of clams as a side dish HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

You don't need any license or permit to pursue crayfish or bullfrogs in Oregon.

Crawdads are relatively ubiquitous throughout the Beaver State in ponds, lakes, rivers and streams, and equipment is de minimis.

A length of twine with a strip of bacon tied on, patience and quick hands are all that is required, although a crayfish trap, bait and a bucket for your catch are more productive.

Bullfrogs are a predatory non-native invasive species that will eat anything that fits in its mouth.

Catching them with rod and reel poses a potato/po-tot-toe dilemma, though, because they will snap at anything within striking range, including a strip of red flannel (no kidding), rubber jigs and my personal favorite, a frog-imitation bass lure.

Fishin' or froggin'?

Are you sure you want to try and convince the game-enforcement officer that you're froggin', not bassin' if you

don't have a license?

If you're really that cheap..., er, cost-conscious, maybe you should try an alternative legally approved method: Hands, bow and arrow, spear, gig (spear with a couple of tines, like a mini-trident), spear gun or dip net.

Another word to the wise: Dispatching croakers and cleaning them is not for the squeamish, so we'll save that for another time.

Although in the interests of full disclosure, I have gone bullfrog fishing (with fishing license, rod and reel) on several occasions, and the French are right about the epicurean appeal.

I digress.

So you say that you want more no-fare fishing opportunities?

Paging Al, wherever you are.

There are eight Free Fishing Days during which no licenses or tags are required in Oregon during 2020.

Those are Feb. 15 and 16, June 6 and 7 (the annual "biggie" during which a wealth of family events and beginner



Guide Kelly Short and angler Dick Wasson, holding up a bright Chinook salmon, illustrate when it comes to pay to play, more is, well, more. HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

clinics at which free bait, tackle and assistance are provided), Aug. 15 and 16 and Nov. 27 and 28 (Black Friday and the Saturday after Thanksgiving).

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