

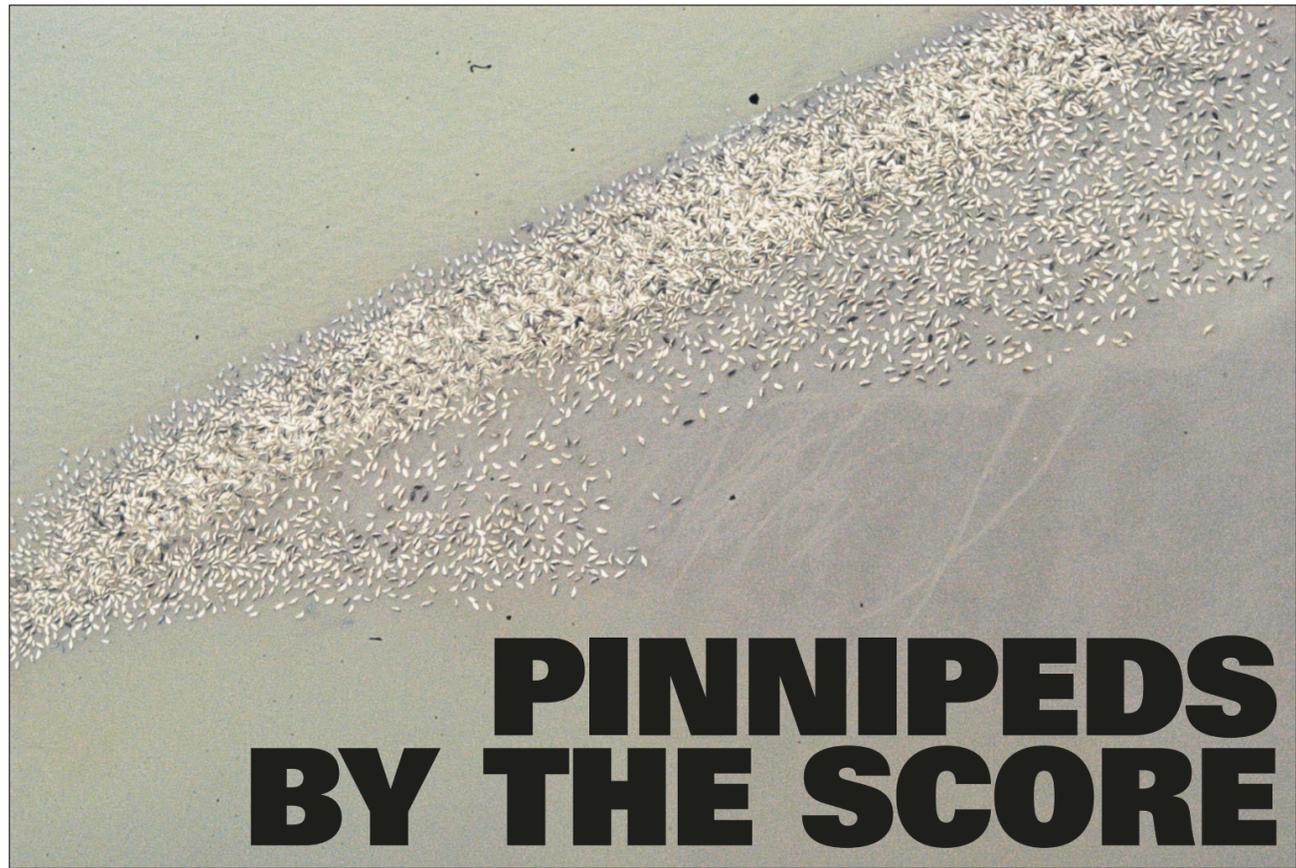


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ONE DOLLAR



PINNIPEDS BY THE SCORE

Photo courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Washington state biologist Steve Jeffries estimated more than 6,400 harbor seals hauled out on the Desdemona Sands during an aerial pinniped survey Feb. 11. Jeffries estimated them to mostly be from between Netarts to Grays River, Wash.

Sea lions abound seeking smelt in local places

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Flying over the Desdemona Sands during a telemetry survey, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife caught a photo of what looked like fish washed up at low tide. But it was actually more than 6,400 regionally based harbor seals.

It's not unusual, WDFW biologist Steve Jeffries said, to see 4,000 to 5,000 of them hauled out on Desdemona, between the Astoria Bridge and Hammond in the Columbia River, a fraction of the 15,000 regional population from Netarts north to Grays River, Wash. "They've been moving seasonally into the Columbia River in response to smelt runs forever."

During a Feb. 11 aerial survey, WDFW also counted more than 1,200 California sea lions at the East End Mooring Basin, along with nearly 600 Steller and California sea lions on the South Jetty. On Friday, spokeswoman Jessica Sall of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said, her agency counted 2,340 California sea lions at the East End Mooring Basin.

Increasing numbers of pinnipeds, driven by starvation in California to the healthy smelt and salmon runs in the Columbia River, have put a strain on the Port of Astoria's infrastructure and created enmity between fishers, conservationists and fishery agencies.

Here for smelt

In 2010, Pacific smelt, known as eulachon, were marked threatened



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Sea lions and seals rest on the docks of the East Mooring Basin Tuesday. During a survey Feb. 11, it was estimated that more than 1,200 California sea lions were in the East Mooring Basin. By March 20, the count was more than 2,300.

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Read about how sea lions are adapting to the changing climate on Page 4A.

under the federal Endangered Species Act. The past two years have marked the first time since the designation that they've been allowed for commercial and recreational harvest. Fisheries managers estimated 200 million smelt returning to the Columbia in 2014 and a similarly strong run this year.

And sea lions reserved their spot at the dinner table.

Their seats are largely at the Port's East End Mooring Basin, which has two docks for boats, and two unofficially for sea lions, that also cover the rock breakwaters surrounding the marina. Fisheries agencies counted 1,256 California

sea lions there Feb. 11; 1,649 Feb. 20; 1,211 March 2; and 2,340 on Friday, which Sall said was an all-time high.

"I think that will be telling once the smelt run is done, how many sea lions leave," Sall said. "They're already tapering off."

But even when the smelt are gone, an estimated 312,600 adult spring chinook salmon are expected to provide a continuing food source. A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration report

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Damian Mulinix — EO Media Group
A double-crested cormorant rests atop of nest of eggs in the colony on East Sand Island.

Corps moves to cull birds

Plans move ahead to cut size of cormorant colony on island

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

CHINOOK, Wash. — Despite objections from bird advocates, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is moving forward with a plan to kill thousands of double-crested cormorants on a small island at the mouth of the Columbia River near Chinook.

A record of decision was signed March 19, approving the Corps' management plan. Now the agency must apply for a depredation permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services allowing contractors to kill a specific number of birds this year.

It is a move the Corps says is necessary to protect threatened and endangered young salmon, but critics, including the Oregon State University researchers who were hired by the Corps to study the bird populations on the island, say the Corps is not using the best available science. Also, they say, East Sand Island is one of the few places where these cormorants are thriving. Elsewhere, populations are not as robust.

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coast weekend



THURSDAY

Meet Jane Barnes

Checkmate! Chess groups come back into play

School clubs hope to spark a 'renaissance'

By KATHERINE LACAZE
EO Media Group

SEASIDE — It's deathly quiet in the Broadway Middle School library for a few moments. An engaging competition is underway but the flurry of activity is taking place entirely in the competitors' minds.

Every so often, they make hand movements, but even those are subtle and muted.

At last, the silence is broken when sixth-grader Sage



KATHERINE LACAZE — EO Media Group

Gearhart Elementary School students Olivia Mayhugh, front left, and Cara Foust, front right, play a game of chess during a chess club in its second year during the guidance of Dan King, who has years of experience leading a chess club at Seaside Heights Elementary School.

Park finally announces, "Checkmate." The game is over, but the excitement to play is

not. Park's opponent, fellow sixth-grader Crystal Rouse, immediately asks if Park wants to strike up another match, and the process starts over.

That is one of the girls' favorite things about the game of chess: Even if you lose a match, you can play again, and there's always something new to learn.

"You're just getting smarter every time you play," Rouse said.

The two students, along with others at the middle school, now have ample opportunity to play and learn, thanks to the school's new chess club, one of very few in the county.

Until recently, the offering of scholastic chess oppor-

tunities in the area has been sparse, but that may change as several fledgling groups at local schools work to spark a renaissance.

David Rouse, Crystal Rouse's grandfather and the former Seaside Lady Gulls soccer team coach, started the middle school club. Although he led a club at the former Cannon Beach Elementary School for a time, he still is learning the ropes at Broadway Middle School when it comes to student interest level and club objectives.

"I've seen some kids in here who might want to play; we'll see how that develops," he said.

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