

Wetlands: 'I didn't think the project would go this long'

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Sarah Lertora knew about the wetland from her older sister Rachel Lertora, doing it as a freshman, and their mother, Ashley Lertora, volunteering to lead students. She said it was a chance to see classroom specimens in the wild, such as the northern red-legged frogs she said she saw leaping off of banks into the inlets.

Her mother Ashley Lertora, with the Oregon Department of Forestry, worked with groups of students monitoring water quality, including temperature, oxygen content and turbidity.

"I've run tests in the lab before, but never in nature," said Claire Albright, one of Lertora's students. "This is the first field trip I've gone on this year."

This week, the students found themselves back in class, preparing reflection essays on their time in the wetlands, and preparing for their final project presentations to peers on what they observed.

A continuing experiment

In an era of school austerity for field trips, Cain said he



EDWARD STRATTON — The Daily Astorian

Astoria High School science instructor Lee Cain said the presence of tree swallows, four of their eggs found in a nesting box, indicates the wetlands at the Astoria Mitigation Bank are doing well.

saw an opportunity with the mitigation bank across Youngs Bay at the airport, monitored for the past 18 years.

"I came along in 1998 and was looking for something to do with kids," Cain said. "So we look at whether this is functioning as a proper wetland. I didn't think the project would go this long."

Lee has gathered volun-



Map courtesy of Lee Cain
The Astoria Mitigation Bank, just southeast of the Astoria Regional Airport and west of the Lewis and Clark Bridge, was created to offset development by the Port of Astoria.

teers from a menagerie of environmental and natural resource groups to lead the students around, even getting sponsorship and T-shirts for the last four years from nonprofit lending group Craft3.

"It fits with our mission," Andrew Mattingly said. He's a commercial portfolio administrator with the group, who led students around the wetlands checking nesting boxes for bird eggs.

Julie Tennis, an independent volunteer who works for the Pacific Education Institute in Olympia, Wash., that encourages teachers to get their kids outside, said Cain's project is an example of how teachers on strapped budgets can find new learning opportunities. She studies bees on her own time, and is helping students assess the abundance of them at the mitigation bank.

"It's accessible," she said of the bank, less than two miles as the crow flies from the high school. "It's relevant, because it's the local environment."

Students looked rather hesitant when first arriving at the wetlands, Tennis said. "But then that sense of exploration and curiosity takes over," she said. By the end of their time, kids were enthusiastically slogging through the brush, nets waving, trying to catch as many bees as possible.

Emerging trends

In the 17 years his students have been monitoring the wetlands, Cain said he's seen some trends emerging, both positive and negative.

"Everything is early this year," he said about the mild

winter, which has led to an early blooming and arrival of many animals, including the tree swallow, a migratory species that winters as far south as Central America before traveling to North America in the spring. Cain beamed at the larger-than-usual numbers of the birds students were finding in the nest boxes around the wetlands.

"If they're here in decent numbers, it means the wetlands are in good condition," Cain said.

The property has also seen a spread of the invasive, noxious weed yellow iris, which Cain added volunteers over the years have started to cut down on, with the help of targeted herbicide spraying.

He's noticed native marsh wrens declining, but Cain's upbeat about other arrivals at the mitigation bank.

"After 18 years, we're finally seeing a native mussel colonizing it," he said of the native clams that have started appearing.

His students will present their reports as a class project, before their research joins the volumes of observations stretching back beyond their birth.



HILLARY BORRUD — Capital Bureau

Rep. Bill Kenemer, R-Oregon City, spoke to a group of about 70 recreational anglers and members of the sportfishing industry in front of the state Capitol building Tuesday. Sportfishers were in Salem to oppose the appointment of Astoria resident Bruce Buckmaster to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. Sportfishers said they want Gov. Kate Brown to appoint a commissioner from their industry.

Buckmaster: Sportfishers want Gov. Kate Brown to appoint a commissioner from their industry

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In a surprise move, the committee held back the governor's two reappointments — Holly Akenson of Enterprise, and Michael Finley of Medford — because senators said they want new commissioners who will take a more active role in helping the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to fix its long-term budget problems.

The agency has a \$345 million proposed budget for 2015 through 2017 but as committee member Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, said Tuesday, it is also \$32 million short of the revenue necessary to balance that budget.

"In short, the agency's upside down," Boquist said. "It's in serious financial problems."

Atkinson said he would bring his experience working on corporate turnarounds to the commission, and he would push for the state to more effectively market fishing and hunting opportunities in Oregon. Buckmaster said he would also apply his business experience to improve the agency's financial health and would like the state to rank the agency's programs in terms of their importance to its mission.

Atkinson said he initially considered what it could mean to his professional reputation if he takes a position overseeing an agency that is in financial trouble. Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, said this was a valid concern.

"It's doing everything it can to alienate its customer base," Ferrioli said of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, which receives much of its revenue from hunting and fishing fees. "You want the job, you got it. I'm going to vote for both of you. But I'm going to tell you something, I'm not sure you're going to like me

a year from now because I voted to confirm you. You're worried about your credibility senator? You should be."

Ferrioli and other senators said another reason they did not vote on the two reappointments Tuesday, aside from the desire for commissioners who would take a more active role in overseeing the agency's budget and policies, was they want more balance among interests on the committee.

Buckmaster previously owned a salmon feed company and served on the board of Salmon for All, a group that represents commercial fishermen, processors and other businesses on the Lower Columbia River. Atkinson is a fly-fisherman, former state senator and Republican candidate for governor.

Liz Hamilton, of the Northwest Steelheaders, said the Fish and Wildlife Commission is already imbalanced because it lacks a member from the sportfishing industry.

"This doubles down on that imbalance," Hamilton said of Brown's appointees.

Oregon is implementing a plan to phase out gillnetting on the main stem of the Columbia River by 2017 and increase the portion of fish allocated to sportfishers. The sportfishing industry raised concerns that Buckmaster could undermine implementation of that plan, something that Buckmaster said Tuesday he would not do.

Tom Hester of Poulsen Cascade Tackle in Clackamas asked the senators to vote "no" on Buckmaster's appointment because "it's very plain for all to see that there is no balance at all" on the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. Hester said, if the Senate confirms Buckmaster's appointment to the commission, there will be two commissioners from the

commercial fishing industry and none from the sportfishing industry, despite its contributions to the economy. "That is not a balance, it's a stacked deck," Hester said. "Oppose Buckmaster, put someone from our side in there."

Opponents have described Buckmaster as a lobbyist for Salmon for All, but Buckmaster said Tuesday he was never paid to serve as a lobbyist and only registered with the state as a lobbyist because that is required for anyone who frequently testifies before the Legislature.

Among those who spoke in support of Buckmaster Tuesday was Paul Lumley, executive director for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

"He understands that the only way our region can have successful fisheries is by rebuilding abundance, a view that the tribes have shared for decades" Lumley said.

Atkinson said Buckmaster was among the first people he met in the state Capitol building and although they do not agree on everything, they became good enough friends that Atkinson met up with Buckmaster on a boat trip past Astoria.

"I want strong personal relationships on the commission, even with people you might not 100 percent agree with," Atkinson said. "I don't think anyone's interested in doing a management by consensus that's a slow death."

The Senate Committee on Rules already sent the 92 other candidates in Brown's latest round of appointments to the full Senate last week, after separating out the Fish and Wildlife Commission candidates.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

'Fake Willy': Model emits orca sounds

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the experiment in Puget Sound proved relatively unsuccessful, and the fake orca mostly disappeared from mention after 1996.

Knight said the man volunteered to drive the fake orca down to Astoria and have it pulled around in the water near the East End Mooring Basin, where hundreds to thousands of sea lions congregate, depending on the season and the fish runs. Port staff will tow the model around, while it emits orca sounds.

"I observed two orcas at Buoy 25 yesterday," said Port Commissioner James Campbell, who operates a marine towing company. "Hopefully we can coax them up to the east basin."

Knight said he also heard back from Smith-Root Fisheries

Technology, which had unsuccessfully tested lightly pulsing, electrified pads meant to irritate sea lions off docks. The last experiment failed because the brackish water in Astoria wasn't salty enough for sea lions to notice the small shocks from the pads after getting wet and laying on docks. Knight said he was told the pads had been improved for Astoria's conditions, and that Smith-Root representatives will be in Astoria today to test them out.

Several other significant news items popped up at the Port Commission meeting Tuesday:

• The Port Commission voted unanimously to authorize Knight to sign a license agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other agencies to install a 30-foot meteorological

tower and a Trimble GPS unit at the Astoria Regional Airport, provided it doesn't interfere with the U.S. Coast Guard's operations. It approved a related access agreement for Battelle Memorial Institute from Richland, Wash.

• Knight reported the Riverwalk Inn, owned by Brad Smithart, appears to be in transition of ownership to Ganesh Sonpatki, a Portland budget hotel operator. By February, Financial Manager Jim Grey estimated Smithart owed upward of \$179,000 in delinquent rent, although he's since embarked on a repayment plan. Smithart also owed an unspecified amount in transient room taxes to the city of Astoria, along with more than \$16,000 in IRS tax liens. Smithart is preparing for the expansion of his downtown business, the Arc Arcade.

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3rd Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm
CMH Health & Wellness Pavilion
3rd Floor Conference Room
2165 Exchange Street
Astoria, OR

May 20: Martha Pine, yoga instructor
June 17: Dr. Diana Rinkevich, cardiologist

Join your local chapter of WomenHeart, an organization for women living with or at risk of heart disease. This chapter is sponsored by Columbia Memorial Hospital.

Contact Michele Abrahams for more information at WH-NorthOregonCoast@womenheart.org.

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WomenHeart is the only national organization dedicated to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education and patient support. As the leading voice for the 42 million American women living with or at risk of heart disease, WomenHeart advocates for equal access to quality care and provides information and resources to help women take charge of their heart health.

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