

Orca calf, mom spotted in the river

EO Media Group

COLUMBIA RIVER — Commercial fishermen returning from a shrimp trip spotted two orcas about two miles inside the Columbia River earlier this week.

Clint Beasley, who operates the Brookings-based fishing vessel Prolifik, snapped a photo: two dorsal fins, one large and one small, rise above the water.

The crew of the Prolifik said the orcas swam close to the boat before moving on. Beasley said he thought the orcas were a calf and its mom.

NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center has been tracking members of the Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) pods on the outer coast since Feb. 17, when a satellite tag was attached to orca L84, an adult male. Later in February, federal scientists spotted a newborn calf, L121, traveling with its mother, L94, west of Westport, Wash.

NOAA's most recent track-



Photo courtesy of Clint Beasley

This orca mother and calf were photographed two miles inside the Columbia River by a shrimper returning from a trip earlier this week.

ing update on May 11 showed that the tagged orca was off the south entrance to Nootka Sound, midway up the west coast of Vancouver Island, after departing Long Beach Peninsula waters on May 4. Earlier this spring, the tagged orca made

close approaches to Cape Disappointment, but the satellite never showed him within the river itself.

Aside from members of the three SRKW pods that primarily based themselves in Puget Sound, transient orcas also visit

the mouth of the Columbia and its biologically rich plume that extends many miles into the Pacific. At this point, it is unknown whether the mother and calf photographed in the river this week are resident or transient killer whales.

Lewis and Clark Fire District insurance premiums drop

The Daily Astorian

Property owners in the Lewis and Clark Fire District should see a significant reduction in their insurance premiums after the fire district's rating dropped.

Lewis and Clark Fire and Rescue Chief Jeff Golightly said at the monthly Board of Directors meeting that the Insurance Services Office set the rating at 3/5, down from 7/8.

Most insurance carriers base business and homeowner rates on the ISO ratings, Golightly said, so

many property owners in the fire district should see premium reductions.

Golightly said he has worked on the ISO rating process for three years. His work on reducing the rate has included evaluation of the fire department's training and equipment, water supply, the dispatch center and mutual aid agreements with neighboring fire departments.

Golightly advises fire district property owners to check with their insurance agent to assure they receive the proper credit when their policies renew.

Shellfish toxin levels drop in Willapa Bay

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

WILLAPA BAY, Wash. — Commercial shellfish growers in Willapa Bay can breathe a sigh of relief. The threat of closure has passed for now as levels of a harmful marine toxin continue to drop in the bay.

The Washington Department of Health closed all recreational shellfish harvesting in Willapa Bay May 15 after detecting rising levels of domoic acid, a marine toxin produced by a species of marine diatom, a microorganism that has occasionally bloomed in North Pacific waters since 1991. It can cause serious illness and even death in humans.

Commercial shellfish harvesters, meanwhile, were put on standby and advised not to sell manila, or steamer, clams.

At the time, levels of domoic acid in manila clams in the bay were at 10 parts per million and rising quickly, according to Jerry Borchert, marine biotoxin coordinator with WDOH. The department's threshold is higher, at 20 parts per million.

Monday, the health department sampled more clams and saw that the levels were beginning to drop. The highest level was now only 7 parts per million.

"We consider that holding steaming and maybe slightly im-

proving," Borchert said.

The growers were told they could resume normal operations.

Though WDOH and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will continue to monitor the bay, shellfish growers likely don't have to worry.

"At least at this time in the coastal bays, and at Willapa Bay, it looks like situations have improved," Borchert said.

The same could not be said for coastal beaches.

High levels persist

A recent sample at Long Beach, revealed levels of domoic acid were at 57 parts per million. Last week, they had only been in the mid-20s. At Twin Harbors, levels were at 39 parts per million, also an increase over previous samples.

The razor clam season will not be reopening and the bloom could affect future digs.

"Over the years we've learned that razor clams seem to be number one at picking up this toxin and holding onto it," Borchert said.

Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager at WDFW, said he has seen years where razor clams pick up the toxin in the fall and still have signs of it a year later.

On May 13, WDFW announced the closure of recreational and commercial razor clam seasons on all coastal

beaches in Washington.

As of May 18, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Department was beginning a stock assessment of razor clam populations. The early closure of the commercial razor clam season affects some 60 license holders though only about half of these license holders dig seriously and turn a small profit, according to Ayres.

"It's small potatoes compared to coastal crab or pink shrimp," Ayres said. Still, he added, the clams have been fetching high prices in recent years and, depending on the season, the fishery is comparable to salmon gillnet operations on Willapa Bay, bringing in several hundred thousand dollars a year.

Other species

In the days leading up to closure of the razor clam season, levels of domoic acid were rising and both WDFW and Department of Health employees were beginning to look at other species, sampling oysters and other shellfish in Willapa Bay. They even tested Dungeness crab in the ocean, according to Ayres.

"We have had issues with Dungeness crab in the past," he said. "The only closure we've ever had with Dungeness crab occurred in 2002 in Willapa Bay only." The assumption at the time was that the crab were accumulating toxin from feeding on

Columbia Memorial to host car show fundraiser

The Daily Astorian

Columbia Memorial Hospital is hosting its first annual American Cancer Society Relay for Life Car Show fundraiser from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 6 on the west side of the hospital campus.

The event includes participants from area car clubs, including Lower Columbia Classics, Beach Barons and Clatskanie Cruisers, but is also open to other Relay for Life teams.

Prizes will be awarded to the top three participants

in a viewer's choice award, and 94.3 Hits FM will be on site to provide musical entertainment.

Car show registration forms are available at Lum's, Ocean Crest and O'Reilly's Auto Parts in Warrenton, and Napa Auto Parts in Astoria. The entrance fee is \$30 per vehicle or Relay for Life team participant, and checks should be made payable to the American Cancer Society/Relay for Life.

For information about the event, contact Ivan Sultan at 503-338-4005.

For online updates:
www.dailyastorian.com

Seaside High showcases Pacifica Projects

The Daily Astorian

Seaside High School hosts its annual Pacifica Project presentations 5 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center. The public is invited to attend to support the graduating class of 2015.

A keynote session kicks

off the event, with the presentations to follow.

Pacifica Project, celebrating its 23rd year, is "a service-learning program required of all graduating seniors," according to a release.

Students can work individually or in small groups and are required to volun-

teer approximately 50 hours of service for a community need, project or organization.

The presentations give seniors a chance to share testimonials about their projects with the community. Seaside High School instructors and community judges score the presentations.

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Follow the Old Soldiers Trail and learn the story of Fort Stevens the Defender at the River of the West.

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