



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Tiffany Boothe, the administrative assistant at the Seaside Aquarium, left, and research assistant Dalin D'Alessandro, right, perform a necropsy on a sea lion corpse that washed ashore on a Seaside beach in August.

OFF THE MAP

County agencies work to challenge FEMA flood maps

By ERICK BENDEL
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — Five Clatsop County agencies looking to challenge the Federal Emergency Management Agency's preliminary flood maps of the Columbia River believe that more work is needed to correct FEMA's data and draw more accurate maps.

As part of an intergovernmental agreement, the cities of Warrenton and Astoria, Clatsop County, the Port of Astoria and Diking District No. 9 have agreed to share the costs of an in-depth analysis and technical review of FEMA's draft flood maps for the North Coast.

The five parties are acting with some urgency: If FEMA's preliminary flood maps are allowed to stand and become the official flood maps of the North Coast, riverfront property owners may be forced to pay thousands of dollars in flood insurance that they do not need and, historically, have not needed — all because FEMA miscalculated the flood risk along the river.

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GMO debate a 'wicked' problem

By ERIC MORTENSON
EO Media Group

ST. LOUIS — The national debate over labeling food that contains genetically modified organisms is a "wicked" problem that cannot be solved or arbitrated by science, an Iowa State University sociology professor said.

Carmen Bain, speaking in July to 20 journalists attending the National Press Foundation's "Food, From Farm to Table" fellowship in St. Louis, said GMO labeling is inherently a political and social issue. Science is either ignored or embraced in the debate, depending on which side it appears to substantiate.

Bain has an unusual vantage point in the argument. Although not a crop scientist or biologist, she is part of an interdisciplinary team at Iowa State that is developing new transgenic soybean cultivars. Her role is to study the issues surrounding consumer, business and social acceptance of GMOs.

The work has led her to conclude GMOs and GMO labeling are "proxy" issues for broader political, economic and ethical concerns such as pesticides, sustainability and corporate control of agriculture. And for some GMO opponents, labeling is a matter of political opportunism, she said.

"Many of them had other issues, but GMOs resonates with a broader public, and they want to take advantage of it," Bain said.

Anti-GMO activists frame the issue in "rights-based language" such as choice and transparency, which "resonates with key American values, cultural norms and trends," Bain said.

They are having some success because consumers want their purchases to align with their values, she said, and consumption becomes political practice as a result.

Bain's remarks came as the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that prohibits state and local governments from enacting their own mandatory GMO labeling laws but allows creation of a USDA-certified voluntary national standard. The bill, H.R. 1599, passed with bi-partisan support, 275-150, but faces an uncertain reception in the Senate.

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SEALS.I. MARINE SCENE INVESTIGATION

Strandings bring out experts, volunteers

By MCKINLEY SMITH
The Daily Astorian

When they received the call for a sea lion trapped in a net, Keith Chandler and Tiffany Boothe scrambled to brainstorm how to safely free a trapped animal weighing upward of a hundred pounds. During the car ride to the scene, they strategized.

"We geared up everything we could think of to help us corral this thing," Chandler said.

But their patient wasn't at all what they expected. The animal at the beach was a fur seal, not a sea lion, and it was no colossus — it was a baby. They cut away the netting and the fur seal swam away.

"We get up there, it's about the size of a dachshund, maybe a little bigger — it's just a little guy! So it was really easy to deal with it," Chandler said. "That was gratifying to know that, right then, he wouldn't have lived if we hadn't have done that."

Between 2001 and 2009, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries recorded 588 cetacean strandings in the Northwest. Cetaceans are whales, dolphins and porpoises. In that region during the same period, 5,193 pinnipeds — seals, sea lions and walruses — were also stranded.

Chandler, manager of the Seaside Aquarium, is the eyes and ears of the Oregon Marine Mammal Stranding Network on the North Coast. He works in conjunction with Deborah Duffield, a professor of biology at Portland State University who heads up the network in their territory, which stretches from



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Portland State University research assistant Dalin D'Alessandro packs up samples after performing a necropsy on a sea lion corpse.

Tillamook to the Long Beach, Wash., Peninsula and along the Columbia River to just upriver from Portland. Boothe, administrative assistant at the Seaside Aquarium, volunteers for the network as well. Most often, they deal with pinnipeds.

A collaboration

The stranding network is a collaboration between volunteers who study marine mammal stranding events, report relevant findings to a national database, protect stranded marine mammals from harassment, assist live animals caught in debris or fishing gear and conduct educational outreach about marine mammals.

Marine mammals are federally protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, so individuals must be certified to handle live or dead animals.

Most of the time, they aren't directly involved in rescues like the young fur seal's liberation. The bread and butter of their work involves necropsies to gather data and public outreach to protect stranded animals.

One of the smelliest jobs Chandler has come up against was a dead fin whale that wound up in Portland.

"Dr. Duffield called me and asked me how I got things done because no one up there was cooperating, so I foolishly told her that if it was here, I could deal with it because I know all these people here that can help me," Chandler said. "She got an ocean-going tugboat and towed it down here. Then I had to deal with it."

How does a 40-foot fin whale wind up so far upriver?

"It had been caught on the bow of a car hauler," Chandler said. "The ship hit this whale out in the ocean — and the whale had been dead a long time before that, it just got wedged under there — so it went all the way up the Columbia, pushing this whale, and as soon as the ship stopped the forward momentum stopped and the whale popped up."

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Why are North Coast beach birds dying?

Warmer waters, toxic algae may be among factors

By DANI PALMER
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — Judi Grucella and her friend Jane Santarsiere visit Cannon Beach every year. Dead birds spread out on the beach were an unexpected sight.

Wendy McLaughlin of Astoria also "noticed there were a lot of dead birds," at least 20 around Haystack Rock, as she and her husband, Tracy, walked along the beach. "I thought it was weird," she said.



Wendy McLaughlin/Submitted Photo

Cannon Beach visitors Judy Grucella, Jane Santarsiere and Linda Petchell worked together to save a seabird by making a platform out of tennis shoes and dog waste bags to carry it to a lifeguard station on Thursday.

Grucella, a Bend resident, noted they saw five dead birds in their short walk Thursday and encountered one so weak it could

barely lift its head. "We went to the lifeguard station and said, 'Hey, there's a bird alive and still struggling.'"

Grucella, Santarsiere and fellow beachgoers came to the aid of the dying bird, constructing a platform made of tennis shoes and plastic dog waste bags for the injured animal. A lifeguard provided a blanket and box for transport before Cannon Beach police delivered the bird to wildlife rehabilitators for care.

Not the norm

Julia Parish, executive director of the University of Washington's Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team, said reports of dead common murrelets spiked about a month ago.

