

To keep water safe, task force is vigilant

Surfrider helps monitor water quality

By **DANI PALMER**
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — Clean water is crucial to ecological health. It's why Jesse Jones with the Surfrider Foundation's Blue Water Task Force talked about the Ecola Creek Watershed's health during a Haystack Rock Awareness Program lecture last week at the Cannon Beach Library.

Jones has worked in many aspects of water, both scientific and artistic. She grew up on the Nehalem River.

"The quality of water depends upon who needs it to live," she said. "Salmon need cold water to reproduce, so testing is done to determine the temperature. That is done here in Ecola. Humans need clean water to drink and bathe, so testing is done to determine bacteria levels. Plants, people and animals

need clean water to grow, so testing is done to determine all sorts of things." Scientists look at factors like oxygen, algae, metals and sediments.

Monitoring limited

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality only monitors four sites in Clatsop County and the Beach Action Value used to determine whether water is safe to swim in or ingest will be lowered in 2017, adding more strain. Jones said the state just doesn't have the money to do more — that communities need to do more work.

Jones said she thinks Timothy Morton's book "Ecology Without Nature" makes a good point: humans need to focus on doing more. But she disagreed with him on data being a waste of time.

"If we aren't looking in the water to see what's there, then we aren't going to know

what's in the water, so we have to continue to do it," she said. "But I think we can do it a lot more efficiently."

She added there should be conversations about how to do so and who should do it.

Volunteers needed

Surfrider needs more volunteers to assist in water testing. The Blue Water Task Force has four regular volunteers and 12 total, Jones said.

Many are retirees. She said coordinators like their knowledge, but also need youth to carry on the tasks.

"I think education is a big part of it," she said.

Some in the audience suggested partnering with local schools. If they had more volunteers, Jones said, they could do additional testing.

Some want the stormwater running into drains and rivers tested, but it takes many resources.



Jesse Jones



Submitted Photo

Salmon swimming in Ecola Creek. Many streams are too warm for salmon spawning, but Ecola Creek appears to be healthy.

Bob Lundy samples for enterococcus bacteria in Ecola Creek and both the Blue Water Task Force and Ore-

gon Beach Monitoring Program test at the outfalls and in shorewater.

Lundy said water farther

back in Ecola Creek looks different from the outfall water. Outfall water has animal feces, trash deposits and more that's run into it. Pesticides are also a water quality concern.

Creek pretty cold

The Ecola Creek Watershed Council does the monitoring of water temperature. Many streams are too warm for salmon spawning, but Ecola Creek appears to be healthy, Jones said.

"Ecola Creek is pretty cold, which is great," she added.

There are some spots above 70 degrees, but testers aren't sure of the causes.

They are working on correlation studies.

Jones said there are multiple steps the public can take to assist. In addition to volunteering for the Blue Water Task Force or joining the watershed council, she said residents could help protect the creek by paying attention to physical characteristics and buying reusable water containers.

Gillnetters: Managers hopeful for next year

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Fishermen earlier this year called the new policy a "nail in the coffin," anticipating that it would soon make little economic sense for them to continue fishing Willapa Bay under the policy, which is supposed to become more restrictive in coming years.

Season curtailed

Of the 27 commercial fishing days scheduled on Willapa Bay's river systems this fall, gillnetters ended up only fishing 10. Landings of Chinook salmon were also higher than anticipated, contributing to this reduction of fishing days.

Under the new policy, fishermen were given a 20 percent harvest rate on natural origin Chinook — salmon that have not had their adipose fins clipped by hatchery employees and could be wild fish or the descendants of former hatchery fish that have "strayed" and no longer return to the hatchery, according to state fishery managers.

Once this percentage is neared, fishery managers typically re-evaluate how and when gillnetters fish, often shifting the focus of the fishery to another salmon species.

On Willapa Bay, and especially under the new policy, the focus would normally shift to coho, but the problem was that this year coho came back at only 42 percent of what was forecast. And, with the already

high impacts to natural-origin Chinook, fishery managers did not want to risk further accidental catch of Chinook by shifting fishermen to another species. So commercial gillnetting closed in November in the Willapa Bay area. Fishery managers also closed the marine recreational fishery and restricted a freshwater fishery to hatchery streams.

According to preliminary data released by the state, gillnetters caught a season total of 4,858 Chinook, 1,935 coho and 2,803 chum in the Willapa Bay Non-Indian Commercial Gillnet Salmon Fishery from Sept. 6 through Oct. 10.

Gillnetters blast policies

Willapa Bay Gillnetters Association President Bob Lake fished only a handful of days this season, with poor results. He believes the policy is wrong, both in its scope and for the area.

The new policy's stated goals are to reduce impacts to natural-origin Chinook and shift commercial fishery impacts to coho while minimizing chum mortalities. In future years, this will also mean further reducing the percentage of natural-origin Chinook gillnetters can catch while also reducing the number of fish produced by the Naselle Hatchery.

While the policy was out for public comment this spring, Department of Fish

and Wildlife Commissioner Miranda Wecker and other state fishery managers said these steps were critical to rebuild wild runs of salmon in Willapa Bay. But fishermen and processors protested, saying the salmon fishing in the bay is dependent on high hatchery production and that no true wild runs exist.

Lake recalls past efforts to restore wild runs in these systems — and how they failed.

"We're at the mercy of people who don't know anything about Willapa Bay," he said.

A lawsuit filed against the Department of Fish and Wildlife by the gillnetters association claiming the policy is misguided and adversely affects fishermen is still moving forward after being refiled in Thurston County.

Better luck next year

Meanwhile, state fishery managers are hopeful for next year's seasons on Willapa Bay.

In an average year they expect to see around 1,000 — maybe less — dead fish below the Naselle Hatchery. The number of fish noticed by passers-by led to the department doing a detailed count

to try to record the scope of the die-off. Elsewhere, in southern Oregon and eastern Washington, hatcheries experienced massive die-offs, well beyond the fall run die-

offs recorded near the Naselle Hatchery.

This year's count of 10,000 was highly unusual, indicative of unusual conditions, Thiesfeld said. It does

not significantly change how coastal hatcheries will operate in coming years, he said.

"Ideally," he added, "we won't be looking at a record drought next year."

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Salmon return to the Nemah Hatchery on Willapa Bay.

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