

Crab: 'There's no new toxin in the water, we know that'

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and the total value of Oregon's catch came to just \$33.7 million.

The price per pound in Washington, particularly at the start of a season, is identical to that set in Oregon. Prices can change rapidly, often rising or falling within days of the opener.

Tri-state planning

The Dungeness crab fishery remains closed in California. If and when it does open, Washington and Oregon fishermen who also hold California crabbing licenses will operate under a delay and will have to wait a certain number of days after the California crabbers begin fishing before they can fish those waters, too.

The three states, which run the Dungeness crab fishery under a tri-state agreement, plan to meet later this year to develop a more streamlined set of protocols for dealing with future domoic acid related closures.

"All the states agree that's needed," Ayres said. "We just need to let the smoke settle for the current season opener."

Toxin details

On Monday, Fish and Wildlife also announced a tentative schedule for recreational razor clam digs. The first dig is scheduled for Thursday in Long Beach. The



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

A crab-laden boat arrived in the Port of Ilwaco around 10 p.m. Monday.

'It could end up being a little bumpy at the start.'

Dan Ayres

coastal shellfish manager with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

digs, popular in both Oregon and Washington, were shut down last spring after levels of domoic acid in the clams skyrocketed well above health department thresholds of 20 parts per million. Levels remained high during the fall and early December. But currently, only one clam tested by the state has come back with levels at 19 parts per million, according to Ayres.

Clams are a key dietary item for Dungeness crab.

"There's no new toxin in the water, we know that," Ayres said, later adding, "We're pretty confident it's

not going to jet up to 110 parts per million like it did last spring."

But Fish and Wildlife will still continue regular testing as required by the state. Ayres said that though it is unlikely that domoic levels will jump up again, it's possible fishery managers could still run into a batch of clams that are holding onto the toxin at unsafe levels. If that happens, the department will have to cancel any digs and hope for another round of clean tests.

"It could end up being a little bumpy at the start," Ayres said.

Sea lions: Estimates have the California sea lion population at more than 300,000

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increasing numbers of mostly California sea lion males migrating into the Columbia to feed on fish runs, while their traditional food network along the California coastline collapses under warm El Niño conditions. Encapsulating the migration into the Columbia River was a single-day count in March by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife of more than 2,300 sea lions lounging in the Port's East End Mooring Basin.



Daily Astorian/File Photo

Seals and California sea lions are seen on the docks of the East End Mooring Basin in Astoria in June.

Let's be first

Hunsinger started the sea lion discussion in front of an expansive whiteboard where he wrote notes and drew graphs detailing sea lion population growth, predation and the animals' effects on commercial fisheries and the Port.

Oregon and Washington state biologists have no clue what to do about sea lions or how many more will come this year, he said. "They don't know what's coming next. They know it's going to be bigger."

Port staff claim more than \$100,000 in maintenance costs because of sea lion damage at the east basin, which remains largely empty of boats, except for two piers running along a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers breakwater lined with larger vessels. Meanwhile, the Port's West End Mooring Basin has a waiting list of more than 100 boaters trying to get a slip.

Hunsinger said Astoria has lost many of its commercial fishermen to nearby ports in Warrenton and Ilwaco, Washington.

"Are we going to let predators destroy our commercial fishery?" he asked, renewing his calls for the Port to take some sort of action against the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

NOAA, through the National Marine Fisheries Service, oversees the protection of sea lions under the Marine Mammals Protection Act of 1972, passed when the sea lion population dwindled to fewer than 10,000. Current estimates have the California sea lion population at more than 300,000, with no established limit on their protected status.

"Somebody has to be first," Hunsinger said, adding the federal government is protecting animals to the detri-

ment of the local community. "Why can't it be us?"

Love 'em or hate 'em

A full range of emotions regarding sea lions was on display during the public comment period of Tuesday's meeting. Fishermen lamented over the revenue they have lost from sea lions in the river ripping through their nets at taking their catch.

"We have a species overpopulating," guide fisherman Jody Mather said. "All you have to do is manage the population. Get the numbers down. Kill them."

After Mather's comment came Veronica Montoya of the Sea Lion Defense Brigade, who said she wants to make sure the group has representation on any sea lion committee.

"Hunsinger has a personal vendetta against the animals," she said, adding he is beholden as an elected public servant not just to fishermen, but to the tourists who come to see the animals.

Tensions rose while Montoya spoke about keeping watch over the east basin from her house. Mather made a vague threat from the back of the room, telling Montoya to get a life and adding that he had taken down her address and those of other sea lion supporter as they introduced themselves for public comment. Mather was then quieted by Port Commission Chairman Robert Mushen.

"Suing the federal government is a huge, costly endeavor," said Jim Wells, president of commercial fishing advocacy group Salmon for All, cautioning the Port. "We sued the state (of Oregon) and didn't get much out of it."

Take a breath

Executive Director Jim

Knight, silent through Hunsinger's presentation and public comment about sea lions, said there seems to be two separate issues: protecting the Port's property against damage by sea lions, and what the Port's role should be in forming a permanent solution regarding sea lions in the Columbia River.

"Give me a little bit of time to check with our attorney on what we can do," Knight said, adding staff can look at how to get grant money to install barriers for sea lions on the Port's property.

Port Commissioner James Campbell said the Port will need the help of its top political representation. Commissioner John Raichl added that the Port should have only a support role regarding sea lion predation on fish.

Last year, the Port staged creative — if sometimes comical — potential deterrents to sea lions at the East End Mooring Basin, including beach balls and a fake orca that capsized.

Butch Smith, a Port of Ilwaco commissioner invited by Hunsinger to Astoria to talk about sea lions, said his port has been heralded by NOAA for its control of sea lions.

Smith said Ilwaco joined a hazing program sponsored by NOAA, in which certain people are licensed to shoot sea lions with rubber bullets, hit them with a pole or use other nonlethal, nonpenetrative measures to keep them off docks. He said much of the effort around preventing sea lions is in not allowing anglers, commercial fishermen and processors to drop fish parts in the marina.

"If the same thing that happened to the east end basin (in Astoria) happened in Ilwaco, we would go broke," Smith said.

Afrika: Several dispensaries are using his startup software

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it to launch a startup that offers a point-of-sales software system Afrika built for Oregon medical marijuana dispensaries.

'I'm a Goonie'

Newly married and descending into poverty, they shared a doob and discussed their future.

"I looked at my wife and asked her: I was like, 'So, babe, we've been married for a month and a half. We're about to be homeless. Let's talk about it. What kind of life would you like to lead?'"

Rather than remain in the big city, they came to the North Coast, and Afrika freely admits that "The Goonies" — a film he saw 12 times in the theater and put Astoria on the map for him — had a lot to do with that decision.

"I feel like a super-Portland hipster nerd right now, but there is it," he said. "I was like, 'F--- it, I'm a Goonie.'"

'In survival'

But the Afrikas were homeless. They stayed in local motels and lived out of their car one night.

"We figured out pretty rapidly that we weren't going to survive that way," he said. "Scary characters abound."

They visited the employment department and turned to Clatsop Community Action, which gave them resources and information.

"I had never been destitute with a wife and child before. I'd been a backpacking bum before; that's different ... When you're abroad on a walkabout, you're not a bum; then you're a traveler," he said. "It was a really stressful time. Because when you're homeless, you're not vacationing — you're in survival. We didn't know how it was going to turn out."

Afrika was preparing to work at a fish-packing plant for \$10 an hour. The job, which he saw advertised on a laundry-mat wall, would've been quite a comedown from the years he

made around \$100,000 knocking out corporate reports, he said.

Given their situation, however, working with fish began to seem pretty compelling.

'Life-saving break'

Then Kevin McAdams, the owner of Hi, hired Afrika to be a budtender, one who could also help boost the business' online presence.

"It was a lifesaving break. I don't know how else to put it. It was literally a lifesaving opportunity," Afrika said. "I don't know where we would be."

Relieved though he was, Afrika found an irony in this unplanned career move.

"You want to know what's really funny about all of this?" said Afrika, a black man raised in the white, affluent town of Brookline in Greater Boston, Massachusetts: "My whole life, people were convinced that I was a drug dealer."

He and his family may have landed on their feet — and Afrika may have fulfilled a long-held dream of living on the coast — but he knows it could have easily turned out otherwise.

"What I learned through this experience is that there are a lot of homeless people. This town has a huge transient population of people passing through who are not half as fortunate as we were," he said. "We were almost one of them, and it was a really near miss."

'Third eye'

Afrika's forehead bears a blue, intricately patterned "third eye" (or "inner eye") — the center of creativity and intuition in Eastern spirituality that he wanted to "open up."

The tattoo — which also symbolizes his respect for all life — is a memento from his 2001 trip to Montreal, Quebec. During that summer, he hung out with a Reggae band, smoked a lot of high-quality pot for the first time and took a "marvelous journey of self-awakening."

A man averse to rigid structures, Afrika had dropped out

of Morehouse College, a historic black college in Georgia, and got an office job doing tech support as a temporary assistant.

"I could, like, breeze in, save the day, step out," which he called doing his "Batman impression." On his ample off-time, Afrika read self-help books at Barnes & Noble. "It was a good time, my college dropout years."

'Buffet spiritualist'

Professionally, he was very successful, but the traditional path of the "genius computer kid" meant less and less to him.

"At the end of the day, I was desperately afraid that I was going to wind up in an IBM dungeon somewhere banging out code, code-monkey-style, for the next 20 to 30 years," he said. "That's my personal version of hell."

Eventually, Afrika became a certified yoga and meditation instructor. Though a practicing Buddhist, Afrika considers himself a "buffet spiritualist," someone who finds guidance across the faith and wisdom traditions.

"I kind of take what works for me and leave what doesn't, and I'm very happy that way," he said.

'Pot sells itself'

At Hi, Afrika does for money what he once did for free: Tell folks how much he enjoys marijuana.

"Pot sells itself. I'm mostly just here to chat the people up who come in and help them pick pot," he said. "But, if I wasn't here, if we had a vending machine, people would still come in and buy pot."

Meanwhile, his startup software — designed to keep pace with the rapid changes in Oregon's marijuana regulations — is making money and in use at a Cottage Grove dispensary. Several other dispensaries are testing it out, including Hi.

"I feel like we're sitting on something really big," the yogi-vegan-entrepreneur said. "I don't think I've grasped myself what we've done."

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