



Photos by Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

The Connor Foss is seen next to a bulk carrier in the Columbia River last year.

TWO FEET HIGH AND RISING

Fatigue, fog and bad weather complicate the life of a river pilot

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

Ships passing through or anchoring off Astoria have become a part of the landscape as much as the Astoria Bridge or Saddle Mountain.

Few often think about the people who guide the ships safely to their destinations along the river.

Rick Gill, president of the Columbia River Pilots, an association of professional mariners, recently gave a talk in Astoria describing the life of a river pilot.

River pilots are not to be confused with bar pilots, who assist ships getting over the Columbia River Bar. Once the ships are through the bar, a river pilot is sent to help steer them the rest of their way. River pilots offer navigational instructions and expertise of the river to a ship's captain.

Forty five river pilots are licensed through the state and U.S. Coast Guard to track commercial vessels on the Columbia River.

Gill, who worked as a river pilot for a decade, said a major challenge is maneuvering the ships through the narrow channels.

A commercial ship is 100 feet wide and the channel is often about



ABOVE: Rick Gill, president of the Columbia River Pilots, speaks at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in January. BELOW: The Connor Foss comes in to dock on Monday.

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