



NOAA Fisheries
The commercial catch of Pacific hake or whiting plunged last fall, but is expected to rebound in 2016. The species is an important part of the Lower Columbia’s economy.

Whiting: Last fall’s population decline may have been a fluke

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NOAA’s first-ever winter hake survey aboard the research ship Bell M. Shimada from January until early February coincidentally came after a disastrous drop in hake abundance in late 2015.

The almost complete absence of hake in what had been the most productive areas off Washington and Oregon corresponded with increases in typical water temperatures.

Water temperatures that had hovered around 58 to 62 degrees F in previous seasons came close to 64 degrees this fall. Fishing vessels searched up to 190 miles offshore, far beyond the typical area where they find hake, but found none,” NOAA Fisheries reported in February.

Some vessels harvested only around 60 tons over the course of 10 or more days, when they had previously produced close to 1,500 tons in the same period, the agency said. “The whiting fishery did not come close to catching its full quota and left tens of thousands of tons of the available quota in the water. The poor fishing had ripple effects throughout the industry as customers that expected a big whiting catch suddenly had to look elsewhere,” NOAA’s Parker-Stetter said in her blog.

The peak coastwide harvest of hake was about 363,000 metric tons in 2005 — over 800 million pounds. But in 2015, the catch was just over 154,000 metric tons, according to federal reports.

“A lot of product that a lot of people were waiting for turned out not to be there,” said Roger Mjeltevik of American Seafood Co. in Seattle. “It was the year we’d like to forget.”

This year’s findings

The winter hake survey started in January out from Newport, to map the distribution of hake and collect biological data in the winter, when the species spawns. The spawning distribution and behavior of hake has

been poorly understood, in large part because of a lack of winter data, Parker-Stetter said.

The winter survey located the fish far to the west of where commercial fishing vessels typically encounter them, Parker-Stetter said.

NOAA research biologist Allan Hicks suggested that hake may have been very widely distributed last fall and not present in the dense schools the fishing fleet typically pursues. He noted that fishing vessels did catch hake, but not in the high volumes the vessels had become used to in recent seasons. Hake do tend to move north in winter, and Canadian fishing vessels also caught low volumes, the agency scientist said.

NOAA researchers were as surprised as anyone by the low catches, Hicks said. NOAA survey data from 2015 showed that West Coast hake are doing well, and remain present in large volumes, said Hicks, who serves on the Joint Technical Committee that analyzes hake data.

Brighter forecast for 2016

In late-February, the Joint U.S.-Canada Scientific Review Group, a peer review collaboration of scientists and seafood industry representatives, provided a glowing report on 2016 Pacific hake numbers and rejected a claim that hake landings have been underreported for years, according to SeafoodNews.com.

Based on modeling, last fall’s population decline may have been a fluke, according to the review group’s findings.

Seafood News reported the median female spawning biomass at the beginning of 2016 was 1.828 million metric tons, according to the base model of the stock assessment. That would represent a 10 percent increase from 2015, due to the model estimates showing strong recruitment in 2014 and 2012. It would be an increase of 300,000 mt over 2015 and the highest figure seen since 1990.

Airport: Project replaced older tide gate

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Fish-friendly tide gates

The airport sits on a former alluvial plain, bordered to the north by Youngs Bay and to the east by the Lewis and Clark River.

A dike system, under the jurisdiction of the city of Warrenton, protects the reclaimed land from tidally influenced marshes outside. At four points along the dike are tide gates, designed to drain the inland areas when the water outside is lower, and to seal shut when the tide reaches the gate.

The 2005 Vera Slough project replaced an older tide gate at the northwestern corner of the airport with a newer model — dubbed “fish-friendly” by some — using a float to help regulate at what water levels the gate closes. The change protects against flooding but allows more movement for aquatic life between tidelands and drained areas.

If it is determined the newer tide gate has had a detrimental affect on the infrastructure at the airport, Kobes said the Port would have to talk to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other involved agencies to see about modifying the tide gate.

Tarmac needs care

The airport was built through a federal grant in the mid-1930s on land deeded to the Port from Clatsop County. In 1942, the U.S. Navy leased the airport from the Port and used it as an auxiliary naval air station until it was returned to the Port in 1948.

While the runways and taxiways have been repaved at times, Kobes said the tarmac stretching along the Port’s buildings at the airport has not been redone since the Navy days. He added that part of the tarmac is scheduled for refurbishment in 2019, as funds become available through the Federal Aviation Administration.

Five to six years ago, he



Photos by Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
The Port of Astoria is facing cracks, depressions and uneven concrete slabs at the Astoria Regional Airport, which some have said might be caused by nearby wetlands.



A MH-60 Jayhawk from the U.S. Coast Guard taxis out on the ramp onto the runway at the Astoria Regional Airport. Airport Manager Gary Kobes said the Coast Guard had to rehab the tarmac in front of its hangars five or six years ago, and is looking at more rehab work this summer.

said, the U.S. Coast Guard rehabbed the slabs leading up to its helicopter hangar, injecting materials underneath to level them out and caulking in between to prevent debris from flying around when the rotor blades of MH-60 Jayhawks are whirling. He added that the Coast Guard, which still faces issues with the ramp, is planning further work on the ramps this summer.

Kobes said the issues with the tarmac have so far shown no indication of affecting the rehab of Runway 1331 this summer. The Port secured \$480,000 from a state Department of Transportation grant, used as a local match on a \$4.5 million grant from the Federal Aviation Administration funding the rehab of the northwest-southeast runway.

Kobes said he has seen

no indication that the runways have been compromised by Vera Slough. “And at this point, I would say it’s a stretch to say that it’s impacted the ramps,” he said.

Löfman said the tide gates have been functioning properly for 10 years. “Right now, there’s just a lot of water out there,” she said, adding there have been higher tides all over the region.

Barnett: Spent 32 years in Seaside

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with the Seaside Police. Lt. Barnett served as the department’s lead criminal detective investigator for 17 years before returning to a patrol sergeant position.

The lieutenant position is the patrol division commander and

serves as acting police chief in the absence of the chief.

A former candidate for Clatsop County sheriff, Barnett wrote a guest column for The Daily Astorian during his 2012 campaign that spurned the idea of expanding the Clatsop County Jail and questioned District Attorney Josh Marquis’ past work.

Barnett lost his election bid and claimed Marquis retaliated against him by never using him as an essential witness when trying cases.

Barnett alleged the District Attorney’s Office violated his right to free speech.

A U.S. District judge dismissed the lawsuit in 2014. Judge

Marco Hernandez ruled Marquis and Chief Deputy District Attorney Ron Brown had discretion as prosecutors to decide whether Barnett should be used as an essential witness when trying cases.

Riddell said Barnett has appealed to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.



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5. This will open another small window of **Balance**. Here you may adjust the balance between the left and right speakers.



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