



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Kratom is now on sale at several dispensaries in the area. The product, according to information supplied by one local dispensary, has been used for centuries in countries such as Thailand and Malaysia in ways similar to coffee to boost energy and enhance productivity.

Kratom: Sales of the plant are booming

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Drive and sometimes consumes kratom himself. “There was, at first, a lot of skepticism about it, but there was no actual research done proving anything.”

Poison control

Along with kratom’s rise in public consciousness came a jump in calls to poison control centers in relation to the drug, from 26 in 2010 to 263 in 2015, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Florance said first-time kratom users sometimes consume the pills in higher doses than what is typically recommended, which may explain the rise in CDC calls.

In 2014, Portland resident Susan Ash founded the American Kratom Association to promote and lobby on behalf of those who consume the drug. The organization jumped into its first major battle last year when the DEA announced it would list kratom as a Schedule I drug. The DEA cited 15 deaths linked to kratom, though only one instance likely was a direct result of consumption.

The DEA argued in a posting to the Federal Register that the classification was “necessary to avoid an imminent hazard to the public safety.” But public backlash was swift and widespread.

A petition to stop the scheduling attracted hundreds of thousands of signatures. A group of scientists wrote a letter in opposition to

the ban, as did nine U.S. senators — including U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon — and 51 U.S. representatives — including U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Oregon.

Help for illnesses

Anita Baldwin, who works at the Clatskanie Smoke Shop, was told by doctors in May 2016 she had a neuroendocrine tumor. Most commonly located in the intestines, the cancer can lead to symptoms such as diarrhea, wheezing and abdominal cramping.

Baldwin said she would regularly wake up in the middle of the night and need to use the restroom for three to four hours at a time. The constant pain and lack of sleep caused high anxiety, leading her to take five to six decreasingly effective Vicodin pills a day.

“I can’t explain what I was going through,” Baldwin said.

Baldwin started working at the smoke shop in October. Shortly after, a customer walked into the store and told her about kratom.

Willing to try any remedy, she sampled the drug but was unimpressed. She did not feel any of the effects she had heard about because she mixed it with the Vicodin she had already ingested.

But after continued use without the Vicodin, Baldwin said she became much more perky and the pain subsided dramatically. An oncologist even told her after a test to keep doing whatever she was recently doing to relieve pain.

“It’s completely changed my life,” Baldwin said.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
According to information supplied by one local dispensary, the leaves of the kratom tree were chewed or steeped as tea in countries like Malaysia and Thailand. In Clatsop County, the product is sold in pill form.

At Baldwin’s urging, the smoke shop began selling kratom three months ago. Since then, daily sales at the shop have more than doubled, Baldwin said.

“As soon as people heard we were selling this product, they came flocking to the store,” she said. “I was completely blown away.”

Baldwin said she soon will switch jobs to work for a kratom distributor in the Portland metro area.

Legal to sell

Warrenton Police Chief Mathew Workman said he was concerned about the abuse of kratom, but he acknowledged that stores have the legal ability to sell the product.

“The problem is people are also using it as a recreational drug and not in proper amounts,” he said. “People get a false sense of security by thinking, ‘If it’s natural, how

can it hurt you?’”

Earlier this year, the police chief sent an officer to a local convenience store that sells kratom to ensure the owner was aware of the department’s concerns. The owner had a surprising response.

“He told us he’d go out of business if he stopped selling it,” Workman said. “There’s a lot of things I’d rather convenience stores not sell.”

Clatsop County District Attorney Josh Marquis said the plant is considered a drug by law enforcement. Like being under the influence of Benadryl or a high-caffeine drink, drivers can be charged with driving under the influence of intoxicants if it is determined that kratom affected their abilities to operate a vehicle.

Marquis noted at least one ongoing case in Clatsop County in which someone has been charged with a DUI after consuming kratom.

Earlier this year, the state Legislature began a process that could place Oregon alongside a handful of states that have banned possession or consumption of the plant.

A state Senate bill would direct the state Board of Pharmacy to study whether or not kratom should be scheduled as a controlled substance. The bill was still being examined by the Senate Committee on Judiciary when the Legislature adjourned earlier this month.

For the time being, though, kratom sales are booming.

“I’ll be surprised if it stays that way,” Marquis said. “There will probably be some pushback on it.”

Hospital: 1,800 radiation therapy visits expected

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Michael Przibilla, one of three engineers with FES Medical Australia contracted to help put together the Versa HD at the hospital, said the accelerator can use up to 18 million volts of electricity during treatment, putting out a radiation beam at nearly the speed of light.

The Versa HD includes 160 metal leaves that move to conform the shape of the beam to the contours of a patient’s tumor, while a specialized, moving couch lifts and turns patients for treatment. The machine specializes in high dosages, which means less time a patient has to remain motionless, and less potential for damage to surrounding health tissues.

James Tanyi, a clinical associate professor in OHSU’s Radiation Medicine Department overseeing testing of the Versa HD, said patients are scanned in advance, after which a customized radiation treatment plan is created to maximize treatment and minimize the impact on healthy tissues surrounding a tumor.



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Michael Przibilla explains how the linear particle accelerator at the new cancer center at Columbia Memorial Hospital will work to treat cancer patients when the center opens. Przibilla was one of three engineers contracted by the company that built the \$3 million machine to install it at the cancer center.

Kyle Gallagher, a medical physicist and dosimetrist employed by OHSU, will program the linear accelerator to create a targeted radiation therapy based on the treatment plan from a radiation oncologist.

He said the cancer center will start with more basic cases such as brain, prostate and breast cancer and add features and more advanced treatment as time goes on.

The cancer center is planned

to open in the fall, offering radiation and expanded chemotherapy infusions. The hospital expects 1,800 radiation therapy visits after the first year of operation at the cancer center.

Ocean: 614,000 Chinook salmon are expected to return this fall

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The hangover

By all accounts, 2017 should have been a good year for salmon and other fish off the Oregon and Washington state coast. After two years of abnormally warm oceans, the region had a long, cold, rainy winter and the water was finally cooling. Upwelling had brought important nutrients — food — to the surface.

Instead, researchers have seen the opposite.

Early salmon runs came in below predictions; strange gelatinous creatures called pyrosomes appeared in unprecedented numbers, clogging fishing nets; and there are Zamon’s missing birds.

Researchers are still combing through data they collected in June, comparing it with what groups up and down the West Coast are seeing, but they have a theory: The past is still present.

The years of the Blob — a mass of warm water that persisted off the West Coast from 2013 to 2016 — of drought, of the largest El Nino recorded are gone, but the ocean and its creatures might still be reeling.

It’s as if, suggested Elizabeth Daly, a senior faculty research assistant with the Cooperative Institute for Marine Resource Studies, the ocean has been on a bender for the last two years and 2017 is the hangover.

Buoy 10

In the last few years, record or near-record runs of salmon returned to the Columbia River. This fall, a total of 614,000 Chinook are expected to return to the river, slightly less than what came in last year.

The Buoy 10 recreational fishery that opens Tuesday will be the first fishery to encounter these salmon. Beyond the Chinook return, the numbers for other runs are mixed. Low expected returns of summer steelhead will color how the Buoy 10 fishery rolls out as fishery managers try to reduce the take of these fish.

Daly and other researchers from Oregon State University and NOAA predicted that 2015’s historically poor ocean conditions would affect migrating yearling fish, the same fish that comprised the bulk of this year’s returning spring adult Chinook salmon. In 2015, the young salmon entering the ocean for the first time were much smaller and thinner than usual.

“It’s inevitable that returns were going to come down,” said John North, Columbia River fisheries manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The shocking thing was to have had three big salmon years in a row, North said. To get one or two is not unusual. “But to get three in a row is pretty impressive.”

“More than anything,” Weitekamp said, “you don’t understand how a system works if it’s more or less the same every year. If you shake it up hard” — and the past three years have made for some strong convulsions — “you learn a lot. If you’re paying attention.”

Store: Location will have health coach working on-site

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store Payless shuttered hundreds of locations nationwide earlier this year, including one at Youngs Bay Plaza. Clothing store Maurice’s relocated to the North Coast Retail Center. Former tenants Wauna Federal Credit Union and Gannaway Brothers Jewelry also moved to newer buildings.

Started in Colorado, Natural Grocers has more than 140 locations nationwide, including nine others in Oregon. Krystal Covington, a spokeswoman for Natural Grocers, said the store usu-

Strange years

But even as the Columbia River saw huge Chinook returns in past fall runs, people recorded rare sightings and unexpected declines.

Humpbacks breached in the Columbia River estuary in 2015 and have been regular visitors in the years since. That same year there were sightings of the massive, bullet-shaped mola mola, or ocean sunfish — rare this far north. Skinny coho and Chinook foraged for food off the Oregon and Washington state coasts. In Alaska, 3-year-old adult sockeye were extremely small and Oregon and Washington state saw the lowest coho returns since the 1990s.

In 2016, lobster-like pelagic crabs more at home near the equator landed in Oregon. The Fraser River saw the highest return of chum salmon in 20 years but record low returns of sockeye. Then in 2017, just when everyone thought conditions might be returning to normal: pyrosomes, another animal more common in warm water, were everywhere.

Big picture

Zamon finished crunching her numbers recently for the birds: This year the shearwater numbers were the fourth lowest she’s recorded in 13 years and she has never recorded such low numbers of common murrets.

She saw the most birds — 97 percent of the shearwaters she recorded — between Washington’s Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. This is also where the researchers were seeing the most anchovies.

She believes lack of food in the area, as well as some disturbance from bald eagles, could be driving the birds elsewhere.

This type of information and the 2017 salmon runs are just the first reports back, said Laurie Weitekamp, a fisheries biologist with NOAA. She and others expect the coming years will reveal even more about just how bad things were in ocean in the last three years.

Crab off the Oregon and Washington state coasts are usually 4 years old when they are harvested, she said. So the crab that were born during the years of the Blob are about 2 years old now.

“It’s going to be another two years before we really find out what happened,” Weitekamp said.

And the ocean is a big place with many factors at play. Things no one expects to happen occur constantly. This year it’s pyrosomes. In 2009, it was an invasion of Humboldt squid.

“More than anything,” Weitekamp said, “you don’t understand how a system works if it’s more or less the same every year. If you shake it up hard” — and the past three years have made for some strong convulsions — “you learn a lot. If you’re paying attention.”

ally hires around 18 people at each location.

She said the grocer stands out by selling only organic produce, free-range eggs, pasture-raised dairy and naturally raised beef. The store doesn’t carry bags, but donates 5 cents to the local food bank each time a customer brings their own, while also providing used boxes for customers to take groceries home.

Covington said the store will also have a health coach working on-site and in the community organizing nutrition classes and working with people on their health goals.