

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM
Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
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CARL EARL
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OUR VIEW

Be mindful of the balance between predator, prey

A local editorial cartoon from more than a century ago recorded the adversarial relationship between fishermen and all the species that enjoy eating salmon. Specifically about outward-bound young salmon, the cartoon singled out alleged culprits including kingfishers, osprey, cormorants, river otters and an array of predatory fish, from carp to dogfish.

Decades later here on the Columbia River estuary, it remains a challenge trying to balance the scales between predators and expensive-to-produce and highly coveted salmon. A story last week described ongoing efforts to limit the population of cormorants nesting on East Sand Island, a campaign that has proven controversial but which may help salmon returns by allowing more young salmon to survive the perilous passage through the estuary to the ocean.

This is predicted to be a poor year for some salmon returns. Predation on young salmon in past years is an

unquantifiable aspect of this year's problems. More important has been the now-dissipating "Blob" of too-warm water off the Northwest coast. By lowering the amount of nutritious plankton and other sea life at the base of the food chain, this phenomenon thoroughly rattled the delicate balance on which salmon and other higher orders of life depend.

Some other key factors in salmon prosperity include habitat in the Columbia-Snake watershed, harvests by humans and marine mammal predation. These last two are likely to be again in the news as this year moves on, with efforts to save endangered southern resident killer whales starting to take on massive importance.

Some orcas eat the seals and sea lions that prey in turn on adult salmon. Greater awareness in recent years that orcas spend considerable time in local waters has brought uninformed cheering that they might bring sea lion numbers back into something closer to balance

with the quantity of salmon we're willing to let them consume. Some orcas belonging to transient ocean-roaming pods do indeed eat other marine mammals. However, the orcas of the southern resident killer whale pods based in Puget Sound specialize in eating Chinook salmon, or other kinds of fish if Chinook aren't available. In the winter and spring, the Columbia River plume is where many Puget Sound orcas come in search of their favorite menu item.

An executive order by Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee earlier this month to significantly increase efforts to save the Puget Sound orcas is nearly certain to have direct impacts on fishing seasons here, especially as Oregon and Idaho have been asked to join in formulating a response to the crisis facing these orcas. Amendments to fishing rules could come as early as next month. In an ordinary season, this might not be especially noticeable. In a year like this one, it's impossible to predict what a salmon set-aside for orcas may

mean to the harvest equation.

It's probably safe to say that most fishermen — nowadays almost all recreational, along with the charter boats that serve them — bear no ill will toward orcas, which are certainly an iconic and majestic native species of this region. But the same could probably once have been said of efforts to recover sea otters, which on some areas of the West Coast have returned in sufficient numbers to seriously aggrrieve commercial crabbers. It will be interesting to see how orca preservation plays out within the context of the Lower Columbia's culturally and economically important salmon seasons.

For now, we should continue paying attention to these efforts and make every effort to participate in them. It is always better to have a place at the negotiating table than to grouse about decisions from the outside. Restoring balance between all the species of the Pacific Northwest is going to remain expensive and complex.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

The Good Friday quake

On March 27, 1964, a magnitude 9.2 earthquake struck Alaska — the second most powerful in recorded history, behind Chile's 1960 magnitude 9.5 quake.

In Cannon Beach, described by author Henry Fountain in his new book "The Great Quake: How the Biggest Earthquake in North America Changed Our Understanding of the Planet," as "a sleepy town in Oregon," participants in a late-night poker game ignored one telephone call warning them of the possibility of a wave.

"A second call a short time later relayed that a wave had just hit the shoreline," Fountain writes. "Some houses floated away and a bridge into the town was destroyed, but everyone, including the poker players, survived."



R.J. MARX

Cannon Beach author Peter Lindsey recalls in his memoir, "Comin' In Over the Rock," that after the wave, Elk Creek Bridge washed away and pipelines swept away with the bridge. The town was without water for a week. One home drifted off its pinnings and stumbled up Elk Creek.

Elaine Murdy-Trucke, executive director of the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum, described the 1964 tsunami as hitting the north end of town hardest. "Tsunami debris was distributed throughout the town," she wrote in the Cannon Beach Gazette. "Though Cannon Beach did not experience the fatalities or devastation of other coastal communities, it was a shocking occurrence that changed how those who live at the coast react to a tsunami."

Trail of destruction

"The Great Quake" paints a picture of the people and the landscape, which fell on a Good Friday at 5:36 p.m. "The day had been an ordinary one, overcast but not too dark and not too cold," Fountain writes.

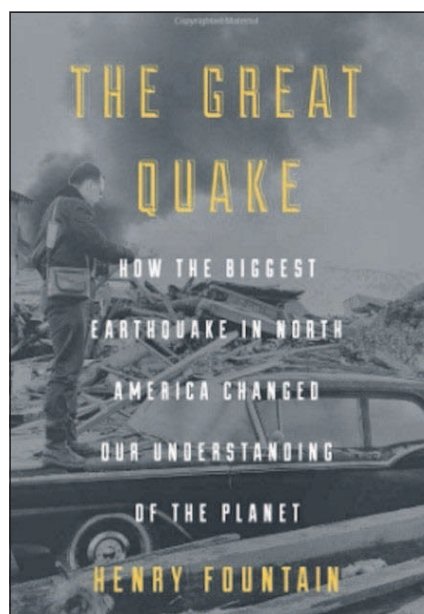
To one eyewitness, "it was as if the earth were swallowing everyone."

A family car disappeared into the water, taking everyone with it. The high school basketball coach and teacher vanished with his two preschool-aged sons. An elementary school was a total loss and a hospital narrowly escaped destruction when land gave way.

Near Sherman Glacier, Alaska, the top 500 feet of a 4,300-foot-high mountain broke away during the quake. The ensuing landslide hurtled 25 million cubic yards of rock at 200 miles per hour.

In the city of Valdez, Alaska, pipes from the city's sewer system spouted into the air, reaching heights of 20 feet or more of water, mud and sewage. The ground rose and fell about 3 to 4 feet with every wave that passed through.

When a tidal wave is out in the deep ocean, Fountain writes, it has little or no effect on the surface. Not so as it



Crown Books



Henry Fountain

nears land. Waves grow taller and can slow to a fraction of their initial speed. Large waves, some more than 20 feet high, left a trail of destruction south-eastward along the North American coast to Oregon, California and into Mexico. Waves spread out across the Pacific, to the Hawaiian Islands five hours after the quake and to Japan a few hours later. Tidal waves spawned by the ground movement along the fault traveled across the Pacific at hundreds of miles an hour, reaching the Antarctic Peninsula 10,000 miles away.

At the southern edge of the Olympic Peninsula, high water washed away a bridge in the town of Copalis Beach, Washington. Boats sunk in Santa Cruz, California, and 10-foot-waves carried off fishing boats near Catalina Island.

Four children were swept away in Newport as waves hit in two surges; only one body was recovered.

In Crescent City, California, 10 miles south of the Oregon border, the waves proved most lethal.

The 1964 Alaska quake killed 139 people; 13 of those as a result of waves in California and five in Oregon.



Henry Fountain/Crown Books

The damage on Fourth Avenue in Anchorage after the March 27, 1964 earthquake.



Cannon Beach History Center and Museum

Effects of the 1964 Alaska earthquake caused extensive damage in Cannon Beach.

Plan ahead

Fifty-four years later, the conversation continues. The Jan. 23 Gulf of Alaska quake measured 7.9, prompting a tsunami watch stretching 3,000 miles from the Aleutian Islands to Canada's border with Washington state.

The magnitude 7.9 earthquake was recorded in the Pacific Ocean at 12:32 a.m. on Jan. 23, about 170 miles south-east of Kodiak, home to one of the nation's largest Coast Guard bases.

Close to home, cities throughout Clatsop County monitored events throughout the late night and early morning. Gearhart City Administrator Chad Sweet and Police Chief Jeff Bowman received overnight alerts and arrived at Gearhart City Hall around 2 a.m.

Management at Camp 18 Restaurant on U.S. Highway 26 reported more than 40 cars of people trying to evacuate in their parking lot at 4 a.m.

In Cannon Beach, Fire Chief Matt Benedict and first responders made the decision to open a joint emergency operation center for Cannon Beach, Arch Cape and Falcon Cove, before

closing after the tsunami watch was called off around 4 a.m.

In the aftermath, Tiffany Brown, the county's emergency management director, told The Daily Astorian's Brenna Visser she hoped to turn January's tsunami scare into an educational moment for the county, cities and people in the community.

Brown wants to launch a public education campaign about how tsunami alerts work to address confusion. She's also encouraging more people to register with the local alert system. The majority of the 18,000 residents registered are on landlines, with only 3,200 registered on cellphones — a factor that could hinder the county's ability to get the word out in an actual emergency.

"This was a great scenario to put us through," Benedict said. "With this occurring near Alaska, it gave us some time. ... I'd rather plan ahead than play catch-up."

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.