

Oregon can kill sea lions at Willamette Falls

Feds approve plan to try to save salmon

By KALE WILLIAMS
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Officials from the National Marine Fisheries Service have approved an application from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to kill California sea lions at Willamette Falls in an effort to try to save the state's beleaguered winter steelhead and spring Chinook.

Protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the state needed federal approval to take lethal action against the pinnipeds, which have been observed gorging themselves on endangered fish at the foot of the iconic waterfall.

"This is good news for the native runs of salmon and steelhead in the Willamette River," said Shaun Clements, a policy analyst for the state on the sea lion issue. "Before this decision, the state's hands were tied as far as limiting sea lion predation on the Willamette River."

The agency said that sea lions were responsible for consuming roughly 25 percent of the steelhead run in 2017. The state applied to kill the sea lions "because their analyses showed that the high levels of predation by sea lions meant there was an almost 90 percent probability that one of the upper Willamette steelhead runs would go extinct," the wildlife agency said in a statement.

Predation was lower for spring Chinook, between 7 and 9 percent, but the predators still increased the species' chances of extinction by 10 to 15 percent, the agency said.

Clements said lethal removal was only looked at as a last resort.

"We did put several years' effort into nonlethal deterrence, none of which worked," he said in a statement. "The



A California sea lion that was trapped at Willamette Falls waits to be released into the Pacific Ocean near Newport. The sea lions swam back to the falls.

AP Photo/Don Ryan

unfortunate reality is that, if we want to prevent extinction of the steelhead and Chinook, we will have to lethally remove sea lions at this location."

After decades of hunting, the estimated number of California sea lions dipped as low as 10,000 in the 1950s, a sparse population inhabiting the waters stretching from Mexico to Alaska. In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which barred the killing of sea lions, among other pinnipeds and cetaceans, except under very specific circumstances.

Fast forward to 2018 and California sea lions have seen a resounding recovery throughout their range. Some 300,000 of the animals now swim in the waters of the Pacific and haul out on beaches, outcroppings and public docks from the Channel Islands in Southern California to Pier 39 in San Francisco to the fish processing plants in Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River, often numbering in the thousands.

Shea Steingass, marine

mammal program lead for the state, said that, at their peak, there are between 50 and 100 sea lions that congregate at Willamette Falls.

"Removal of these sub-adult and adult males will have no impact on viability of the sea lion population but will greatly improve the outlook for threatened upper Willamette winter steelhead runs," she said.

Steingass said there are roughly a dozen sea lions that have become habituated to the falls and return every year.

Critics of the plan have long said that salmon runs have been declining on the Willamette and Columbia rivers for a variety of reasons including degrading water quality, sea lions and numerous dams that impede the natural migration of salmon.

Sharon Young, marine issues field director for the Humane Society of the United States, said killing more sea lions fixes nothing and is a "draconian solution."

"It's a complete distraction from dealing with the actual problems facing the fish,"

Young, who has participated in marine mammal protections work groups since 1992, told The Oregonian last year.

To kill a sea lion, the state must meet one of two criteria mandated by the federal government. The animals must be observed between the falls and the mouth of the Clackamas River or be seen preying on salmonids.

When either of those criteria are met, "will be transported to a secure facility and humanely euthanized by a veterinary staff," the state said in a news release. The agency "requested and was granted authority to remove up to 1 percent of the population's 'potential biological removal' level, a metric that translates to a maximum of 93 animals a year on the lower Willamette."

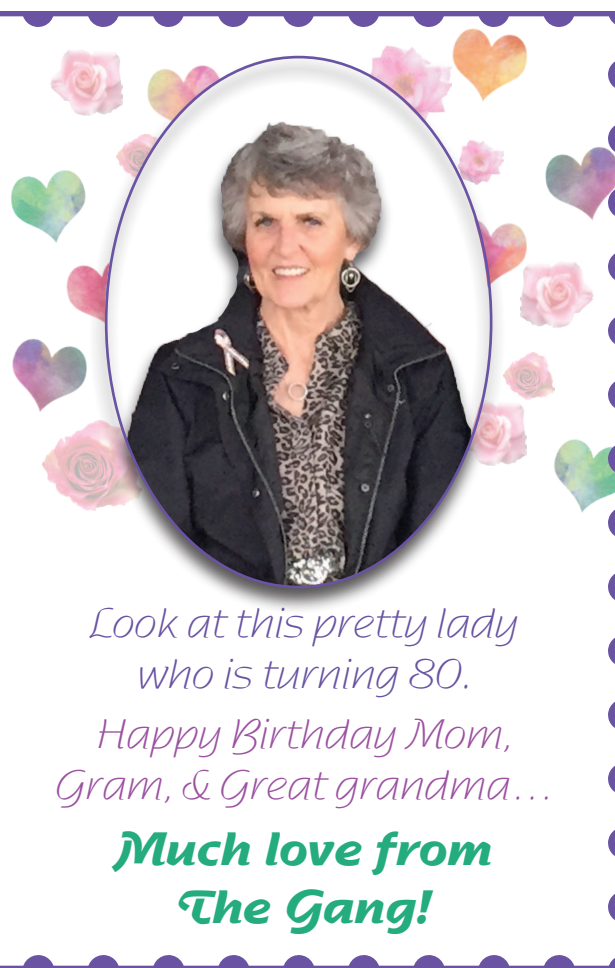


Follow us on Facebook!

90th
Birthday Celebration

Viola Leonhardt is turning 90!

Saturday • Nov 17th
1pm-4pm
Suomi Hall
244 W Marine Drive
Astoria



Look at this pretty lady who is turning 80.

Happy Birthday Mom, Gram, & Great grandma...

Much love from
The Gang!

Yes For Astoria Kids

Would like to thank everyone who contributed to the successful passage of the Astoria School Bond.

We'd list your names, but there are just too many. So collectively we want to thank all those who:

Served on the Facilities Planning Committee

Worked with the Political Action Committee

Contributed funds or helped with fund raising

Made in-kind contributions

Signed postcards sent to voters

Participated in phone banks

Endorsed the bond in the Voters Pamphlet and on our website

Went door-to-door delivering the message and getting out the vote

Allowed pictures on their children to appear in campaign mailings

Wrote letters of support to the Editor

Carried "Did You Vote?" signs outside our schools

Made presentations to local organizations large & small

Displayed yard signs and posters

Volunteered time, effort, and talents

We especially want to thank the teachers, classified staff and administrative staff of the Astoria School District. Your hard work, integrity and dedication over many years created the trust without which the bond effort could not have succeeded.

And finally, on behalf of all our children, we thank YOU, the voters of the District, for your willingness to tax yourselves for the safety, necessary renovations and educational improvements to our schools. WE WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN.

Skip Hauke & David Oser
Co-chairs of Yes for Astoria Kids

Celebrating 30 years
of community service & motorcycles

North Coast ABATE Spaghetti Feed and Auction

All-you-can-eat spaghetti, bread,
salad and dessert goodies

5 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 17

Astoria Moose Lodge
420 17th St.

\$10 Adults • \$3 Kids 12 & under

Proceeds
support
area
food
banks



North Coast ABATE has donated more than \$30,000 to Clatsop Community Action Regional Food Bank and other area good works, in addition to cleaning up roads and providing trade scholarships for area high school students.

For more information, email info@northcoastabate.com

COMING DEC. 1: ANNUAL HOLIDAY RUN/CHILI FEED

ABATE of Oregon INC. promotes motorcycle awareness, education, safety and liberty through community involvement and legislative action. Contributions or gifts to ABATE of Oregon Inc. are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purpose.