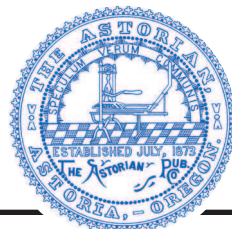


OPINION



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OUR VIEW

Orcas should be allies in salmon efforts

Southern Resident Killer Whales have come to achieve nearly unanimous popularity in the communities surrounding Puget Sound, acquiring folk hero status in the past half century.

Their trials and tribulations are fodder for endless coverage on Seattle TV news; 153,000 people belong to the Orca Network on Facebook, devoted to fan mail and reporting up-to-the-minute sightings.

Their perils are real. Numbering a scant 75, they struggle to produce young. Some suffer from malnutrition. This has sparked concerted efforts by Washington state and federal agencies to understand what ails them and how best to respond.

On April 3, the Center for Biological Diversity and Wild Fish Conservancy sued in federal court, alleging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration — which oversees ocean fisheries — isn't doing what it should to ensure an adequate stock of the orcas' favorite menu item, Chinook salmon.

Keeping different orca groups straight is a matter of frequent public confusion, so it may be useful to remind that those based in Puget Sound only eat fish. Other orcas that roam the North Pacific prefer to dine on smaller marine mammals, including sea lions, seals and sea otters. These red meat-eaters are doing just fine, population-wise. The debate is all about how to help their fish-eating cousins.

Until a satellite-tracking program between 2012 and 2016, it was little realized that Puget Sound's orcas should really be considered residents of the entire Pacific Northwest coast. The satellite found them ranging down the outer coast in the winter and spring on a fast and perpetual quest for salmon.

Although tracking was discontinued after an orca died from a tag-related wound, it's clear that the whales go where the salmon are — or at least where they think they'll be. Earlier this month, about three dozen were observed in Monterey Bay. Based on past behavior, they'll circle back toward the north,



NOAA

Members of the Puget Sound and Columbia estuary's south resident orca population.

focusing much of their hunt on the Columbia River plume, returning to the Strait of Juan de Fuca after all the possibilities are exhausted here.

Since at least the end of the last Ice Age, the mouth of the Columbia was reliably a place of astounding abundance. Although research indicates there were bad years for salmon returns long before dam construction, the worst runs then were undoubtedly better than the best returns today. A much larger coastal orca population would in those times have conducted a movable feast between the Fraser, Columbia, Sacramento and other river systems. Even in these diminished times, they continue their old traditions.

A food shortage certainly isn't the only threat faced by our resident orcas. Probably because they spend approximately two-thirds of their lives in an urban chemical soup from runoff into the Sound, they are among the most contaminated wildlife on the planet. Their habitat vibrates with vessel noise, both coincidental from busy industrial traffic and deliberate from whale-watching excursion boats. But not having enough to eat makes everything more difficult.

While the lawsuit doesn't demand explicit action items (see tinyurl.com/Orca-Salmon-lawsuit), instead calling on the court to rule that NOAA is violating the Endangered Species Act, a favorable rul-

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Many close observers of salmon management foresaw this lawsuit as many as five years ago, when it became apparent that the Columbia played an important part in the Puget Sound orcas' annual plans. Already seriously limited in order to honor treaty obligations and allow upriver passage of endangered wild-spawning fish that intermix with returning hatchery salmon, ensuring there are sufficient spring Chinook for orcas will present managers with a daunting task in designing sport and commercial seasons.

ing could result in a cavalcade of responses. In the immediate term, Chinook fishing seasons might be curtailed when orcas are present or face a long-term hiatus in an effort to rebuild salmon stocks. While Washington state is ramping up production of hatchery salmon to provide more for all user groups including orca, the presence of the Wild Fish Conservancy in the litigation suggests a broader aim. Conceivably, this might include wholesale changes in watershed and fisheries management in hopes of producing

mammoth-size salmon like orcas once relied upon.

In a broad sense, many residents of fishing-dependent communities share the desire for more salmon for everyone. Everyone longs for the good old days. A local gillnetting advocacy group is literally named Salmon For All. Two generations ago, our region fought hard to oppose unfettered dam building, and on behalf of adequate provisions for fish passage, in-stream flows and other mitigation measures once dams were pushed through over our objections. In the years since, habitat conservation and restoration, hatchery reform, management of predatory species and other steps have all gained local support. And they have made an incremental difference.

But this year of dismal spring Chinook returns proves the limitations of all these efforts in the face of disastrous ocean conditions. We, salmon and orcas are all paying the price for warmer waters and resulting disruption of the ocean food web. This isn't to suggest that we shouldn't continue to improve whatever is within our power to influence. But faced with enormous systemic failures, demonizing NOAA and fishermen isn't the answer.

Sea otters almost equal orcas in terms of iconic status, and yet it is both sad and enlightening to see the degree of animosity felt toward them by some California crabbers and abalone divers, who perceive otters as bitter rivals for shellfish. It would be an unfortunate blunder if this new litigation on behalf of orcas turns them into just one more enemy for imperiled Columbia River commercial fishermen.

It may well be true that federal managers have not acted quickly enough to incorporate outer coastal salmon into orca-recovery plans. Judicial action may expedite a response. After that, however, pragmatism and cooperation will achieve a lot more than heavy-handed micromanagement.

We all must work together to ensure there are enough salmon for all, including orcas and future eons of salmon. Angry battles over who gets the last fish will sink us all.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Release unredacted report

President Richard Nixon had his "enemies list." That didn't end well.

President Ronald Reagan declared the Soviet Union the "evil empire." OK, think Cuban Missile Crisis, and 2016 election interference.

President George Bush (43rd president) called North Korea part of the "axis of evil." OK, they did threaten to launch a missile at America.

Regarding the Mueller report: President Donald Trump said, on television, there are "evil people" out there who should be "investigated" so no president would have this happen to him again. Hmmm.

Special Counsel Robert Mueller and his team seem to have carried out their assignment in an objective manner. Others, of the possible investigatees, might include members of the House Intelligence Committee, whose chairman, Democrat Adam Schiff, has been called on by the White House to resign, apparently for discharging his legally required duties. Go figure.

This is the same committee whose members must, according to the Constitution, be American citizens for at least seven years. Criticizing Americans for performing legitimate government assignments is not OK.

In my opinion, investigating, if done for the wrong reasons, runs the dangerous risk of elevating any president above the law. Knock, knock. Who's there? What's the difference between a president above the law and a dictator? Uh-hh? What do you think?

Call your Congress person (202-224-3121) and ask them to demand the full, unredacted release of the Mueller report to Congress, and "we the people" immedi-

ately. After all, we paid for it, and this product was made in America. Buy American.

CARL DOMINEY
Astoria

Schools need support

Dear Astoria: Thank you for passing the school bond in November. We are so pleased to be able to update and improve our physical facilities for our community's kids. We appreciate your support 100 percent.

We need to talk education funding on a larger scale. Since 1990, Oregon schools have been underfunded. Since then, schools statewide have been squeezed and squeezed. We have cut teachers (I was partially rified in 2010), librarians, support staff, days — the list goes on. This spring Astoria High School expects to run out of paper.

Districts across the state are demanding better in Salem. We need your support. We need you to understand that local bond money is vital and appreciated for our buildings, but that a reliable funding structure statewide is desperately needed for all our kids, including our Astoria kids.

We need more teachers and smaller classes. We need more counselors and nurses. We need more support staff. We need long-enough school years. We need updated textbooks. We need paper, pencils, paper clips and so much more.

Again, we are so appreciative for the local support, and the bond will do amazing things for our kids. Please continue to support us as we ask the state to do for education across Oregon, including Astoria, what

you have done for us here. All our kids deserve adequately funded and supported education.

REBECCA PIERCE
Teacher, Astoria High School
Astoria

Drones will outlast us

Thank you for running the front-page story about the role that drones play in 21st-century logging ("Drones help carry the load for loggers," The Daily Astorian, April 4).

When I worked in the woods, drones drove around the stump ranch in pickup trucks. They had soft hands, and they smelled nice. They came from the office, and they carried brand-new White Ox work gloves in their hip pockets, and the rigging men considered them a nuisance. A drone seldom got off the log landing, and when he did, we brush apes felt honored to be in the presence of such a distinguished visitor.

Times change. The Owl Wars are over. Spotty lost. Spotty took the blame for disappearing logging jobs, but mechanization was the real culprit. And now, a flying machine to string synthetic haywire from the landing to the tail tree. It does the work of two, maybe three men in the twinkling of an eye. Even now, labor costs are the simplest expense to eliminate. Boots on the ground are a thing of the past.

Mechanical harvesters are the here and now. Self-driving cars are now being developed, so self-driving harvesters are sure to follow. We have the necessary facial and spacial recognition technology, and thus the next generation of logging machines will

be programmable and self-actuated. The drones will outlast us all. Ask any farmer.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside

Support HB 2020

I am in favor of House Bill 2020, the Clean Energy Jobs Bill currently in the Oregon legislature. I thank state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell for supporting it, and I urge state Sen. Betsy Johnson to do the same.

We must reduce our use of fossil fuels, and we must stop large industries from emitting greenhouse gases. The Clean Energy Jobs Bill raises money by making the largest polluters in the state buy permits to emit greenhouse gases.

The money raised will be invested in jobs and technologies that reduce fossil fuel usage, reduce greenhouse gas pollution, and increase energy efficiency. This will provide jobs for Oregonians and grow our economy.

This type of law to reduce pollution is already working in other states where economies are growing and jobs are being created.

Many small businesses are part of the clean energy economy: family-owned construction companies, machine shops, engineering firms, design businesses, solar installers, hardware suppliers, heating and cooling contractors, architects, biofuel refiners and more.

Investments from this program will help them grow and thrive. Now is the time for Oregonians to combat climate change and build the economy of the future.

JOYCE HUNT
Seaside