

NOAA wants more cameras on fishing boats

By KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL

Oregon Public Broadcasting

John Hankins owns the boat "Courageous," which he sails out of Warrenton. He had a smile after returning from 25 days fishing for albacore.

"I'm full," he said. "Both tanks!"

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration didn't assign a fisheries observer to his boat this trip. But he said, it happens fairly regularly.

"They're usually not a problem for us. They're measuring fish, they're getting stats on the fish," Hankins said.

Fisheries observers are biologists tasked with monitoring commercial fisheries to collect data for conservation and stock management. They also make sure boats are in compliance with certain rules, such as having required safety equipment on board.

"We had one on the boat one time that was a real pain, because they didn't like us talking negatively about whales," Hankins said. "And he got all bent out of shape for it. Other than that, we never have a problem with the observers."

But, he said, most of the time, the observer is just another person on board, with a job to do.

"They stay out of the way. Usually they don't do much on the boat. But occasionally you'll get one that'll want to help us come in and handle fish or short fish, cook a meal for us, or clean up the galley," Hankins said. "They're usually pretty



Kristian Foden-Vencil/Oregon Public Broadcasting

John Hankins captains his fishing vessel 'Courageous.' He thinks having cameras on board instead of fisheries observers might stop some cheating, especially in the crabbing season.

'THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH YOU CAN SEE FROM A BIRD'S EYE VIEW. EVEN IF YOU HAVE SOME AMAZING HIGH-QUALITY CAMERAS, THEY'RE GOING TO GET SPLATTERED WITH FISH SLIME AND BLOOD.'

Briita Pajunas | former observer

decent people to be around."

Traditionally, the fisheries observer job — part marine stock steward, part boat safety police officer — is low-paying, done by idealistic young scientists. They have to learn quickly to do their observing without getting in the way of the commercial fishing crew.

"I was really romanticizing the fishing industry going into it," former observer Briita Pajunas recalled. "I thought it would be kind of like the Wild West. Gritty. Dirty. Maybe

even the danger of it was enticing. I certainly went into it very naive."

When she started, Pajunas was fresh off an undergraduate degree in environmental studies. Her job focused on collecting data — counting what species are caught and what's thrown back — in an effort to keep commercial fisheries healthy long-term.

The observers' numbers can be used to set fishing quotas, which can, in turn, dictate how much money fishing professionals make.

Pajunas said she worked well on most boats, but there were times she felt intimidated. She said she once found a boat's safety equipment wasn't certified, so she had to delay a trip. Pajunas was so uncomfortable she put the captain on the phone with her supervisor.

But Pajunas said she usually figured out how to work around problems — like when she found someone poaching salmon.

"In a big garbage bin thing I found, there was a coho or two in there. And we

kind of said: 'Oh, I saw that. That happened,'" she said. "I record it in my log-book, but to avoid confrontation, I don't dump that salmon overboard."

She said there was also the time her boat was using long fishing lines with multiple hooks, and sea birds were diving into the water for the bait and getting snared.

"A rare short-tailed albatross did come up on a hook when I was on a long-liner my last year of fishing. ... That particular boat was catching quite a few sea birds," she said.

She said it was tense, but she didn't talk to the crew. She just took the bird back to her supervisor.

"A year later U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ... did want to interview to me and talk about that particular bird, because it was protected and it did have the potential of really having repercussions for that particular, fixed gear, long-line fishery," she said.

Cameras might be able to document birds caught on long lines, or poached fish, just as Pajunas did as an observer.

Pajunas agrees that cameras may identify problems and cost captains less than an observer. But she's worried they might also miss things.

"There's only so much you can see from a bird's eye view," she said. "Even if you have some amazing high-quality cameras, they're going to get splattered with fish slime and blood."

Pajunas said cameras also can't thoroughly exam-

ine a fish to determine its age. And that's important because older, larger fish procreate better and keep populations healthier.

Melissa Hooper, the monitoring branch chief for NOAA's West Coast region, thinks cameras will make fish data collection more efficient and probably cheaper. And while she agrees there are aspects of an observer's job that a camera can't do, such as determining a fish's age, she said some of that can be done onshore.

"So they bring them to the dock, where the species can be verified in person, at the dock," Hooper said.

Fishing captain John Hankins worries cameras will be expensive. But he also thinks they have a benefit for fishing captains like him: They might catch cheaters, especially in the crab fishery.

"So when somebody else runs our crab gear. They're taking the crabs out of our traps and so they're taking money out of our pocket," he explained.

Each vessel's crab buoys are painted in colors that are registered with the state — so cameras could tell if someone was pulling up somebody else's crab pots.

NOAA's new camera program was scheduled to start in January 2020. But it's now been delayed until 2021 to give fishermen, the government and technology companies time to prepare.

The job also isn't likely to be eradicated all together: There's just likely to be a lot more cameras and a lot fewer boat-bound observers in the years to come.

Marine heat wave that resembled 'Blob' shrinks

By EVAN BUSH

Seattle Times

The marine heat wave roiling the Pacific Ocean off the West Coast has weakened in intensity, shrunk in size and pulled away from shore, said scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"The coastal waters have cooled," said Andrew Leising, a research scientist at NOAA Fisheries' Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, California. "The recent heat wave, it's still there and it's very strong, but it's quite a ways offshore."

Scientists feared this summer's heat wave was a second coming of "The Blob," which formed in 2014, peaked a year later with waters at close to 7 degrees above average and upended the West Coast's marine ecosystem and food webs. Seabirds, sea lions and salmon died in huge numbers as marine temperatures soared.

This year's heat wave may be shrinking and moving offshore, but it's unclear whether it will persist, what effects the high surface temperatures have had on animals or how this will affect seasons to come. A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife official said the agency was seeing odd creatures more typically found in warmer water and coho

salmon runs were lower than forecast.

"We are not concluding it's over yet," said Chris Harvey, a Northwest Fisheries Science Center research biologist of the heat wave, adding that scientists will watch for the water-churning winter storms that could halt the unusual pattern. "We really need to see some good mixing events to stir the water up and let some of that heat dissipate into the atmosphere so the water this winter is as cold as it is during a normal winter."

At its peak, this year's event was the second-largest marine heat wave recorded, ranking below the now infamous "Blob," Leising said.

Areas of warmer-than-usual water this year stretched from roughly Alaska to California.

Even now, somewhat diminished, the heat wave remains among the largest and most intense Leising has seen in nearly 40 years of data from satellite measures of sea surface temperatures in the Pacific.

The heat wave's biological effects are being studied now.

"Counting the fish and seeing what species are out there takes weeks and months," Leising said.

During "The Blob," scientists documented strange happenings in Northwest waters.

Researchers caught tens of thousands of tubular, jellylike pyrosomes, which are usually found in the subtropics. Jellyfish populations shifted. Scientists hauled into their nets tropical fish, like the Pacific pompano.

This summer, fishers and researchers saw plenty of unusual happenings, said Larry Phillips, WDFW's South Puget Sound and Coast Region Director.

A longtime Northwest fisherman called WDFW this summer and reported catching a species he'd never seen. He brought two to WDFW.

"They were called white croaker. They're a species typically associated with California," Phillips said. "They're very uncommon in cooler water."

The fisherman only kept two, but reported catching white croaker one after another.

Phillips said other species appeared in abundances "we hadn't seen before," listing yellowfin tuna, mahi mahi and bluefin tuna among the surprises.

"What does it mean? We don't know what it means," Phillips said. "I don't know what normal is anymore. I don't know if there will be such a thing as normal."

Phillips said the agency had predicted a strong return of coho salmon this year.

Researchers "documented one of the highest densities of juvenile salmon off the coast we'd ever seen" in spring 2018, Phillips said. "Lo and behold, we didn't see the return anticipated" this year when those juveniles were supposed to migrate back to Washington waters as adults in late summer.

The agency has had to close several coho fisheries earlier than expected because of poor returns. Phillips said WDFW also found undersized migrating coho in Puget Sound.

Phillips said the relationship between spring juvenile salmon counts and returning adults a year later has typically been a strong correla-

tion. Not this time.

"Somehow that relationship fell apart. We ended up over-forecasting. That suggests marine survival affected those fish," he said.

He suspects the marine heat wave, which peaked in August, might have played a role.

Scientists will be watching for Pacific storms this winter.

"Normally, we'd have these storms come in and churn everything up and reset the system," Harvey said.

Leising said atmospheric models forecast a normal winter, which could dissolve the heat wave. But "those same models were completely wrong in 2013 and

2014," Leising cautioned.

In 2013, the year before "The Blob" began to form, marine temperatures rose, before backing off as winter arrived.

Leising said the timing of this event appears to be similar to that of 2013.

"If that's the case, we could be in for a really big event next year," he said.

Leising said average ocean surface temperatures are rising and scientists may have to redefine what they consider a heat wave as the world warms.

But, he said, "the animals don't care how we define it. The temperature is warmer than they've ever been. They're still getting cooked."

WANTED

Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber

Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA

Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

CODA™

health - recovery - community

New Clinic

Coming to Seaside Soon!

Bringing 50 years of service this state of the art outpatient clinic provides medication-assisted treatment for adults with opiate use disorders. We are building a high energy team of professionals dedicated to treating the individual, wiping away stigma and helping to rebuild the health and life of the people they serve. Competitive wages and exceptionally strong benefits package for employees working at least 20 hours per week. Contact us today and you can make a difference in one of the following positions:

Site Medical Director
MD or DO with experience managing medication assisted treatments for substance use disorders and board certification by a member board of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)

Medical Operations Manager
RN with strong leadership experience and supervision skills

Senior Clinical Manager
Masters Degree from nationally accredited school in human services. Requires licensure and/or CADC, or in process of obtaining either.

Nurse Practitioner
Experience treating patients with substance use disorders. Data Waivered.

We are very excited to bring these excellent opportunities to members of the community.

Contract Recruiter Patrice Cavins PatriceCavins@codainc.org

The Astoria City Council wishes everyone a

JOYOUS HOLIDAY SEASON!

Enjoy the lights and holiday festivities while shopping Downtown Astoria!
www.astoriadowntown.com

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29th. WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1st
Customers can park downtown longer than the posted time limit, except in metered spaces.

TIPPING POINT RESILIENCE

Friday, November 22
Liberty Theater (Astoria)
Evening Session
6 - 8:00pm

Saturday, November 23
Seaside Convention Center
Morning Session
10:00 - noon

Real talk about earthquakes, preparedness and culture with TEDx speaker Steve Eberlein.

An earthquake story

Preparedness

Planning

Science

Practice

Mitigation

NO COST FOR ADMISSION For Information contact ClatsopEMD@co.clatsop.or.us