

OPINION



the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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A critical communal roost

Many people are aware of the use of East Sand Island by double-crested cormorants and Caspian terns and the salmon-related management issues surrounding those birds, thanks partly to news coverage in The Astorian.

Far fewer people are aware of how important this Columbia River estuary island is to California brown pelicans. East Sand Island is a critical communal roost for nonbreeding brown pelicans that migrate north to the Pacific Northwest to fish for anchovy and other coastal pelagic prey species in the summer and fall.



DEBORAH JAQUES

Pelicans gather to roost onshore at night and much of the day when not foraging. Island habitat protects them from predators and human disturbances while they rest, preen their plumage, socialize and keep alert to cues indicating good fishing conditions.

While onshore, they practice stick handling, courtship, dominance displays and other ritualized behaviors. Time to work on these skills and acquire the fat needed for return migration will help them nest successfully down south in the future.

The northern limit of the breeding range is in Southern California and includes the Channel Islands, offshore islands and mangrove forests along the Baja California, Mexico, peninsula and the desert islands in the Gulf of California, Mexico.

This year, Pelican Science, in collaboration with the Columbia River Estuary

FAR FEWER PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF HOW IMPORTANT THIS COLUMBIA RIVER ESTUARY ISLAND IS TO CALIFORNIA BROWN PELICANS. EAST SAND ISLAND IS A CRITICAL COMMUNAL ROOST FOR NONBREEDING BROWN PELICANS THAT MIGRATE NORTH TO THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST TO FISH FOR ANCHOVY AND OTHER COASTAL PELAGIC PREY SPECIES IN THE SUMMER AND FALL.

Study Taskforce, is conducting monthly boat-based surveys of East Sand Island to monitor abundance, age structure and habitat use by brown pelicans. Our count on July 16 was over 1,500 brown pelicans, which was about 10 times higher than the June 2021 count.

Population structure was skewed toward young birds. About 60% of the total included birds that fledged this year or are too young to breed. These birds have come a long way in their short lives to join us here, at anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500 miles from their natal colonies.

During the boat surveys we search for field readable, color-banded pelicans that are sometimes only detected afterward in our photographs. We found several this month and were able to read the codes for two of them. Tracking the movements of individuals provides insight into population level dynamics and can provide some interesting stories about these long-lived birds. For example, we now know that H06 is back in

the region.

H06 is a brown pelican captured by wildlife rehabilitators in Northern California on Christmas Eve 2010. That year, many pelicans stayed unusually late in the Pacific Northwest and had a perilous return migration in winter when environmental conditions suddenly shifted and prey became unavailable.

H06 was found near San Francisco starving, hypothermic and unable to fly any further, having lost about 40% of his normal body weight. After a few weeks of care and feeding by International Bird Rescue, he was released under the Golden Gate Bridge with a blue, individually coded color leg band. Since then, we have observed this bird six times in the Pacific Northwest during summer, and once in the San Francisco Bay Area in November, indicating an appropriate seasonal return

trip south.

We now know that not only has this bird survived to be at least 15 years old, but he returns traditionally to fish the Columbia and Grays Harbor region in summer, despite that one life-threatening experience when he lingered north too long.

While brown pelican counts in Oregon have been trending down in recent years in association with a variety of factors, white pelicans have visibly increased in our region.

The Columbia River estuary provides a unique opportunity to see brown and white pelicans together. White pelicans nest upriver on Miller Sands and are typically freshwater birds. They feed by scooping fish from the surface and do not perform the dramatic aerial plunge diving that brown pelicans do over the sea. While brown pelicans are large, they seemed dwarfed standing next to the group of 43 white pelicans that were also roosting on East Sand Island this month.

East Sand Island lies within Clatsop County and is owned and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Public access is forbidden during the seabird breeding season. Pelican Science is a research, conservation and educational nonprofit based in Astoria. We urge people to take care to avoid disturbing large roosting groups of pelicans whenever possible and hope that you enjoy watching them fly and feast while they are here.

Deborah Jaques is a wildlife biologist.

The Columbia River estuary provides a unique opportunity to see brown and white pelicans together.

C. Clumpner



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Twisted

The July 22 edition of The Astorian had a twisted far-left cartoon by Kevin Siers, "Uncritical race theory." If it was correct, instead of biased, the guy's shirt would say DEM, instead of GOP.

The history is that the slave states were Democrat! Abraham Lincoln was of the Whig Party, a precursor of the Republican Party.

DICK DARBY
Astoria

Bravo

Bravo to the Washington Department of Ecology and the entourage of dedicated lawyers, environmental organizations and activists who came together to defeat the world's largest fracked fossil-gas-to-methanol refinery in Kalama, Washington!

Kalama is a small town, with a culture closely integrated with the surrounding landscape and outdoor recreation, especially boating and fishing. A clean Columbia River is absolutely essential to a healthy ecology and thriving communities. The fact that the port even considered such a massive fossil-fuel project is a slap in the face to our communities, our economy and our livelihoods.

The claim that the project would have benefited Kalama's economy is inaccurate (see NoMethanol360.com), and ignorant

of the crippling impacts of climate crisis on essential resources and commodities. Port of Kalama commissioners wasted seven years pushing this failed proposal.

Thanks to the Department of Ecology for performing thorough research and making the safe and appropriate decision to reject the shorelines permit. They have once again demonstrated a willingness to make science-based decisions to protect Washingtonians.

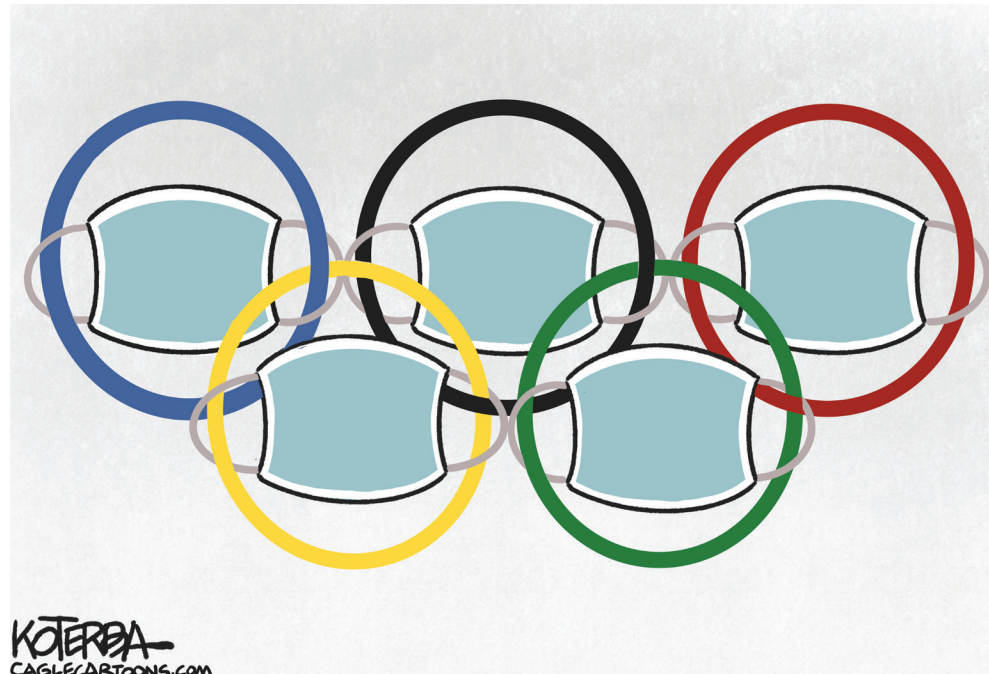
Northwest Innovation Works cited the regulatory process as the basis for abandoning this project, a fancy way of saying they failed to provide evidence to support the project's safety and compliance with environmental standards.

I am elated that the refinery will be left in the dust alongside several other fossil-fuel projects proposed for Washington in recent years. Washington deserves a strong and healthy future, and nothing supports that vision more than a transition away from dirty fracked gas, and towards renewable energy and a sustainable future.

SALLY KEELY
Kalama, Washington

Historic victory

On June 11, in a historic victory for a safer, healthier future, Northwest Innovation Works canceled its lease and withdrew its shoreline permit appeal, ending the threat of the world's largest fracked gas-to-methanol refinery in Kalama,



Washington!

I am thrilled to leave another fossil fuel project behind as Washington transitions towards renewable energy. This methanol proposal disrespected Washington's goal of reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Gov. Jay Inslee and the Department of Ecology exemplified respect for science in their opposition to the refinery, and we are grateful to them for protecting our health and environment. Their rejection of this dirty project, combined with pushback from the community and climate defense organizations, caused the company to walk away from Kalama, like it did in Tacoma,

Washington.

With the world slipping deeper into a climate emergency, we must transition to clean, renewable energy. Projects that increase fossil fuel reliance are misaligned with this vision, and our communities and coalitions will continually remind legislators that coal, oil and fracked gas have no place in a healthy future.

I am exuberant that the Kalama refinery is joining the Millennium coal terminal and the Tesoro-Savage oil terminal in the dust, and I am excited to support future clean energy proposals.

LINDA HORST
Kelso, Washington