

SCRATCHPAD

An important lesson about wildlife on the North Coast

By **NIKKI DAVIDSON**
COAST WEEKEND EDITOR



It's an image no one wants to see on the beautiful beaches of the North Coast.

A massive sea turtle, slumped lifeless with its eyes shut in the sand. It's a heart-breaking sight, but the Seaside Aquarium posted the photos on social media to share an important lesson. If you're planning on spending time on the beach this winter, it's information you need to know.

The cold weather means it is more likely people on the North Coast might come across a sea turtle in a situation like this. It can happen if a turtle becomes "cold-stunned" or hypothermic after traveling further north than usual and getting trapped

in colder waters. They might head out of the water seeking refuge from the chilly temperatures.

While the turtle may appear to have passed away, it might still have a chance of survival. According to the Seaside Aquarium, it would be very difficult for a passerby to accurately assess the situation, as the hypothermic turtle's heart could slow to as little as one beat per minute.

What you do next is crucial, because it could be life or death for these threatened or endangered species. You should pick up your phone and call an expert. Touching the turtle, or moving it back to the water, is one of the worst things you could do (and illegal).

The professionals at Seaside Aquarium first were notified of this turtle on the beach in Ocean Park, Washington. However, by

the time they arrived, it was gone. They believe that an unwitting person attempted to help the turtle by returning it to the water, as it had disappeared by the time they arrived. A second report came several days later that the same turtle was discovered a few days later on the beach in Oysterville, Washington.

This particular turtle didn't make it, but other turtles located on the North Coast have been successfully rehabilitated at the Oregon Coast Aquarium and the Seattle Aquarium.

That's why they're asking anyone who comes across a cold-stunned turtle on the beach to call the closest aquarium, state police (in Oregon the tipline is 800-452-7888) or Marine Mammal Stranding Network at 866-767-6114. If possible, you should stay with the turtle until experts can come and pick it up.

As humans exploring this wild and diverse environment, sometimes the best thing we can do is admit we don't know everything. Call an expert, and you might just save a life!

our coast weekend

ON THE COVER

A volunteer hangs decorations on the Crab Pot Christmas tree in Ilwaco.

PHOTO BY
NIKKI DAVIDSON



STAFF AND CONTRIBUTORS

COAST WEEKEND EDITOR

NIKKI DAVIDSON

CALENDAR COORDINATOR

SARAH SMITH

CONTRIBUTORS

M.J. CODY
WILLIAM DEAN
MALLORY GRUBEN
PETER KORCHNAK
REBECCA LEXA

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