

Continued from Page 8

The first, “A Photographic Journey through the Columbia River Estuary,” captures the beauty and biodiversity of the 146-mile estuary between the Bonneville Dam and the Pacific Ocean through photographs.

Its companion, “There and Back Again,” is an act of advocacy and scholarship focused on the Columbia River’s most recognizable symbol — salmon.

Through interviews, photos and science writing, Welle highlights ongoing efforts to restore long-overlooked salmon habitat along the river, reaching from West Sand Island to Sauvie Island and further upstream.

“I would actually be a little surprised when I would talk to friends and neighbors who didn’t know about the salmon (population) problem,” said Welle of the books’ origins. “It dawned on me, this is not common knowledge.”

In that respect, Welle views the books, available locally at the Columbia River Maritime Museum or via [patwelle.com](http://patwelle.com), as public outreach for her decades immersed in Columbia River ecology.

If audiences are struck by the photo book’s sun-dappled riverscapes or intimate closeups of osprey and wapato, Welle hopes perhaps they’ll also be inspired to explore the health and viability of that nature in “There And Back Again.”

“A lot of scientists talk to scientists, which is all great, but sometimes the public needs to understand more of what we’re doing,” Welle said. “Photography became my medium.”

When Welle retired from the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council in 2019, she sought to continue her restoration efforts while ramping up her photography.

Inspired by Jim Lichatowich’s “Salmon Without Rivers,” she began writing and researching her own book, while adding to the Columbia River photo collections she’d been crafting for years by foot and by kayak.

“I spend a lot of time just being in areas I like,” Welle said of locales like nearby Waikiki Beach on the Long Beach Peninsula. “The photograph comes once you get to know a place.”

Chronicling the work of organizations like the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce, “There And Back Again” argues for the urgency of salmon habitat restoration, giving the species new hope to spawn and mature upriver while correcting a 150-year misconception that salmon use the Columbia purely as a travel “corridor.”

Restoration efforts vary depending on the river region and salmon species but could include removing invasive plant life, digging new channel connections or



Photos by Pat Welle

**ABOVE:** A western painted turtle in Multnomah Channel near Portland. **LEFT:** A map of the Columbia River estuary. **BELOW:** Morning fog at the Cape Disappointment boat ramp, near Ilwaco.



obstructing the current with logs and detritus to increase pooling, shade, food sources and protection from predators. Welle preaches patience to outsiders who might see such restoration projects as superficially destructive or idling.

“One of the (restoration) projects I enjoyed the most was working with a reluctant landowner, and after years of working on their property, then the neighbor gets interested. So there’s a snowball effect. You’re pitching people!”

While Welle’s books cite several blunt statistics of ecosystem loss — like salmon

populations dwindling since the 1850s or a 70% destruction of their spawning habitat — the author still detects hope among conservationists, fishermen and scientists. In as little as one year after restoration, her reporting shows, salmon can now take refuge in new portions of their native streams.

“(Salmon) have evolved over a million years,” Welle said. “They went through earthquakes, volcanic activities. All these changes up and down the river, they evolved. And they came back. We’re throwing them a lot of curves, but they are resilient.”



**Crews planting red alder saplings on a restoration site.**