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State outlaws sea star harvest

Move to ease pressure on populations

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
KMUN

It has been nearly a decade since researchers and beachcombers watched sea stars seemingly melt away in front of them.

Beginning in 2013 and 2014, a mysterious disease decimated sea star populations on the West Coast. The cause of sea star wasting syndrome, which hit some 23 different species of sea stars, remains a scientific mystery, though there are several theories and the disease occurred in step with changing ocean conditions.

One thing remains clear: Some sea star populations have not fully recovered. At least one species is being considered for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act — the sunflower sea star, whose population declined by as much as 90% across its traditional range from Baja California to Alaska and by an estimated 98% off the Oregon Coast alone.

To ease pressure on sea star populations, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted last week to prohibit people from harvesting any sea stars off the Oregon Coast.

Commercial sea star harvests have not been allowed since 2014, but people have been able to harvest the animals on a recreational basis — up to 10 sea stars per day, per person. Actual participation is believed to be very low, with only a few people collecting sea stars here and there to dry as souvenirs.

Dried sea stars available to buy in local gift shops do not, in general, come from Oregon, noted Steve Rumrill, the shellfish program leader for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

But issues of sea star conservation surfaced during public discussions about an update to Oregon's Rocky Shores Management Plan. People asked the Fish and Wildlife

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Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The Port of Astoria will see fewer cruise ships than expected this season.

In a hit to the Port, many cruise ship bookings canceled

Twenty-two ships set to dock in Astoria, down from 42

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian

After bookings for a record cruise ship season, the Port of Astoria has seen nearly half of the reservations canceled.

At a Port Commission meeting in February, Bruce Conner, who manages cruise ship marketing for the Port, said 42 oceangoing vessels planned to dock in Astoria.

But over the past several weeks, a number of cruise lines delayed arrival dates or canceled altogether. The Port schedule now lists 22 ships set to visit, with the first planning to dock in early April.

"For our community, absolutely, it just saddened me," Conner said.

The coronavirus pandemic has made it difficult for cruise lines to staff vessels and ensure virus protocols, Conner said.

After speaking with representatives from other ports along the coast, Conner said the wave of cancellations has not been unique to Astoria.

While he expects the Port schedule to remain

steady moving forward, with the possibility of adding a few ships back, Conner called the situation "fluid."

"This industry, it changes daily ... it's one thing and the next day it's another thing," he said.

Will Isom, the Port's executive director, said he viewed the initial 42 visits as "more so on paper" rather than a reasonable expectation.

In a typical year, cruise ships are an important source of revenue for the Port, oftentimes bringing in upward of \$1 million.

"If we're able to get 30 ships in here, you're looking at a million dollars in revenue, and that's just a small piece of it, because the overall impact of the community is longer when you start looking at the onshore excursions that take place, and the amount of traffic that comes downtown," Isom said. "There is a huge economic benefit to the entire region."

With the cruise ship industry taking a hit during the pandemic and Astoria only seeing two cruise ship visits — both crew-only vessels waiting out virus restrictions — since the end of 2019, the financial impact has

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Giant fossil named for Ilwaco graduate

Simmons discovered the remains of a sloth

By PATRICK WEBB
Chinook Observer

SEATTLE — Gordon "Gordy" Simmons has achieved an honor few can match.

The Skamokawa resident has had a fossil named for him.

"Gordy" is the name bestowed by the Burke Museum in Seattle on the skeleton of an extinct giant ground sloth.

Simmons discovered the remains of the beast in 1961 while working on expansion of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

And more than 60 years later, he never tires of telling the story.

He and his crew were trying to cement in a fourth light tower on the new runway when they encountered an obstruction. "We



Gordon 'Gordy' Simmons, of Skamokawa, is pictured at the Burke Museum in Seattle with the fossil of the giant sloth.

couldn't get the tower in and out pipped a bone," he said. "I thought at first it was a cow bone, but it would have had to be a pretty big cow!"

He knew immediately it was unusual. "Better call the university — we've got

a dinosaur down here!" he told his crew. "The guys were mad at me because we lost three days' work! We thought it was a bison, then saw the claw."

As is common on construction sites, when bones are found work stops in case

there is a need to investigate a human foul play or figure out any archaeological significance.

It was the latter that had staff at the Burke Museum celebrating.

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Prosecutor to target poachers

New position part of state campaign

By MONICA SAMAYOA
Oregon Public Broadcasting

For the first time ever, the Oregon Department of Justice has hired a special prosecutor solely dedicated to locating, investigating and prosecuting poachers.

The new position comes as the state has recently seen a spike in the unsolved illegal killing of wildlife, including deer, elk and wolves.

Jay Hall was hired last month to be the new assistant

attorney general dedicated to enforcing anti-poaching laws and providing expertise and resources to local law enforcement for poaching investigations and prosecutions. He previously spent 12 years prosecuting major crimes for the Lane County district attorney's office and developed expertise in using state racketeering laws against organized poaching rings.

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A bull elk was illegally killed and left to waste near Elgin.

Oregon State Police

