

Astoria's migrating sea lions

By **LISSA BREWER**
COAST WEEKEND EDITOR



On the weathered East Mooring Basin docks near Astoria's Pier 39, a cacophony of barking signals the season. A lone sea lion surfaces near the pier's edge, it's long whiskers in view for seconds before disappearing underneath the Columbia. Others lie in crowds farther offshore, a collective weight pressing on the river's aging pilings.

Hundreds of sea lions, gathered along the south side of the river, migrate from southern California each spring in search of the eulachon, a small, metallic fish within the smelt family. Returning as the smelt begin their annual run, the sea lions then

move on to salmon and sturgeon, competing with local fishmongers.

Once listed as an endangered species, sea lions have in recent decades rapidly increased in number, with more seeming to make the journey to Astoria each year. These dock dwellers have also been the subject of some controversy, with salmon advocates devising unique strategies to keep the barking predators at bay.

For others, sea lions awaken a love for the coast. Children smile on from the pier as these creatures lounge beneath the shining sun. One brewery along Astoria's riverfront even lets onlookers catch a glimpse from above through a large section of glass flooring, where a sea lion or two often rests in the shade.

As summer closes in, these marine mam-

mals will again head south for breeding grounds along the California coast, leaving Astoria's docks a bit quieter, but taking with them one beloved element of the region, if just for another season.

A sea lion swims in the Columbia River near Pier 39 in Astoria.

Lissa Brewer



our coast weekend

ON THE COVER

The Astoria Sunday Market is open now through early October, featuring local produce, fresh flowers and handmade goods.

PHOTO BY
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