

Whale lovers can show support with new license plate

CORVALLIS — A new license plate featuring a gray whale and her calf likely will be available to Oregon drivers by summer 2017.

This project is sponsored by the Oregon State University Marine Mammal Institute and enthusiasm for it is running high, said Bruce Mate, director of the institute.

Thousands of flyers will be passed out on the Oregon coast in the coming week to help residents learn more about what they can do to support the initiative.

"Everybody I've shown the plate design to has loved it," said Mate, whose institute will receive \$35 from the Oregon Department of Transportation every time a vehicle owner spends \$40 to buy the plate.

The money will go toward whale research, graduate student education and public outreach.

The license plate depicts the cow-calf pair on a two-tone blue background that emulates sea and sky. In the upper left corner is a lighthouse, and across the bottom it reads "Coastal Playground."

Renowned wildlife illustrator Pieter Folkens created the lifelike whale images, originally for a poster for the Marine Mammal Institute, which is part of OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"They're extremely detailed," Mate said. "You can see every barnacle."

The institute paid an application fee of \$5,000 to ODOT to begin the license plate process,

Mate said, and will pay another \$80,000 to cover production costs.

In addition, it needs to turn in an "expression of interest" from at least 3,000 vehicle owners stating they plan to buy the plate.

To help with that, 30,000 flyers will be distributed along the coast by Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department volunteers helping out during the annual weeklong "Whale Watching Spoken Here" celebration that runs between Christmas and New Year's.

Each flyer contains an expression-of-interest form.

There will be volunteers at all Oregon coastal headlands to help visitors see southward-migrating gray whales.

Between 10,000 and 25,000

whale watchers interact with the volunteers each year during the week between Dec. 27 and Jan. 1, Mate said.

Those interested can also be registered at www.mmi.oregonstate.edu/whaleplate.

No financial commitment is required, but it's asked that only those serious about buying a Coastal Playground plate register.

"It's a great plate and promotes coastal tourism and just a healthy image for Oregon," Mate said. "I expect a lot of people will like it, and it's a way for people to inexpensively support marine mammals."

It's not necessary to wait for a vehicle's registration to need renewal, or buy a new car, to purchase the Coastal Playground plate, Mate noted.

For \$40, a new plate can be ordered at any time without affecting the vehicle's registration cycle.

"This plate is a joyful celebration," Mate said. "Gray whales were on the Endangered Species List because of exploitation, and now they're the only whale species to have been removed from the list because they've recovered."

"And they're Oregon's flagship large whale. Ninety-five percent of the whales you see from shore are gray whales."

Visible from the coastline year-round, gray whales migrate past Oregon in both directions on their annual journey between Alaska and Baja California.

From late April to mid June, northward-migrating females

and their calves stay close to shore to avoid predation from killer whales — so close, Mate says, "you could practically skip a stone out to them."

During the first week in January, the peak time for the southern migration, gray whales pass by Oregon viewing points at an average rate of 35 whales per hour.

Mate said he is banking on the enduring mystique of whales to help the Coastal Playground plate pay off for the Marine Mammal Institute.

"Whales are huge, they're warm-blooded, they live in an environment we wouldn't do well in," Mate said. "They're really easy to emote with."

Fishing from 1B

SILETZ RIVER: Steelhead, Chinook

The Siletz River and bay is open for Chinook salmon. Fishing is slow.

Fish are throughout the bay and river. Trolling herring in the lower bay is an effective technique. Eggs and bobber or drifting eggs can be productive in the upper bay and river as the season progresses.

Consult the regulations for changes in deadline locations through the season.

Steelhead fishing is slow. Casting spinners, drifting bait or using a bobber and jig can be effective. For cutthroat trout, casting small spinners, spoons or fly fishing streamers or dry flies can be very effective.

WILSON RIVER: Chinook

Fall Chinook fishing is fair on the Wilson River. The Wilson has fished well for fall Chinook this season, and although things will probably start to slow down toward the end of the month, there are still some good fish coming in.

Keep an eye on the weather and River conditions. All of the usual techniques, such as bobber fishing, divers and bait, and back bouncing should be effective.

Although it's still a little early, Thanksgiving is time to start thinking about winter steelhead on the lower Wilson. This basin has some early returning hatchery fish and they should start trickling in towards the end of the month.

YAQUINA RIVER: Chinook

The Yaquina River and bay is open for Chinook salmon. Fishing is slow. Trolling herring in the lower bay is an effective technique.

Eggs and bobber can be productive in the upper bay and river as the season progresses.

COOS COUNTY LAKES AND PONDS: Trout

Rainbow trout were stocked in Upper Empire, Bradley, Saunders, Powers and Butterfield lakes last month.

Anglers have been catching lots of trout on Powerbait, flies, or by trolling spinners. This was the last stocking of these lakes until the spring.

Trout anglers are also catching trout in Eel and Tenmile lakes. Trolling wedding ring

spinners tipped with a night-crawler has been really effective.

UMPQUA RIVER, SOUTH: CLOSED

The South Umpqua is now open.

WINCHESTER BAY: Bottomfish, perch

Fishing for bottom fish in the Triangle and South jetty has been successful.

TENMILE BASIN: Trout, bass, yellow perch, coho

Trout fishing in the streams of the Tenmile Basin are now closed until May 22, 2017.

Trout fishing in Tenmile Lakes is open all year.

There is no wild coho fishery in Tenmile Lakes this fall.

Largemouth bass fishing has been decent over the past couple weeks. Anglers are catching bass near structure or on the deep end of the weed lines using spinner baits, jigs, or rubber worms.

Fishing for yellow perch has picked up in Tenmile Lakes. Anglers have been catching a few yellow perch measuring 14 to 15-inches long.

Worms fished near the lake bottom work very well for catching yellow perch. Anglers should fish in water depths of 15 feet or deeper to consistently find the bigger yellow perch.

PACIFIC OCEAN and BEACHES: Bottomfish, surf perch, salmon

The ocean remains closed for Dungeness crabbing due to high toxin levels.

Recreational harvest of razor clams is closed on the entire Oregon coast due to elevated levels of domoic acid. Harvest of mussels is open on the entire Oregon Coast.

Before any shellfish harvest trip, make sure to check the Oregon Department of Agriculture website for any updates.

Recreational ocean salmon fishing from Cape Falcon to Humbung Mt. is closed for salmon fishing, except the Elk River Chinook Terminal Season is closed.

Both the All Depth and the Nearshore Halibut seasons are now closed.

Fishing for bottom fish opened back up to all-depths.

Fishing for black rockfish has been good from Coos Bay south to Bandon. Fishing for ling cod has been decent.

The marine fish daily bag limit is seven fish and a separate daily limit for lingcod (2). Anglers can only keep 3 blue rockfish and 1 canary rockfish as part of their daily limit and there will be no harvest of China, quillback, or copper rockfish. Anglers may harvest 1 cabezon per day.

BOTTOM FISHING:

Fishing for bottomfish was limited last week due to weather conditions. For those

few who did venture out, there was some success with lingcod and rockfish.

The recreational groundfish fishery is open at all depths through March.

ODFW encourages anglers to release all prohibited rockfish by using a descending device to safely return fish to a depth of 60 feet or more. Even fish that are severely bloated can survive after being released at depth.

For more information and videos, please see the rockfish recompression webpage.

There's a new rockfish in town: the Deacon rockfish. Deacon rockfish is a newly identified species that was formerly referred to as the solid version of blue rockfish. What does that mean for anglers? Nothing in 2016.

Every rule that refers to blue rockfish (like the daily bag limit of 3 now applies to blue rockfish and deacon rockfish combined.

PACIFIC HALIBUT:

Recreational halibut fishing in all Oregon subareas are now closed for the remainder of 2016. This year, anglers were able to catch approximately 95 percent of the Oregon recreational quota of just over 220,000 pounds.

The 2017 quota will be determined in early January 2017.

MUSSELS

NOTICE: Mussels harvesting is closed along the entire Oregon coast due to elevated levels of biotoxins.

Razor Clams:

NOTICE: Razor clam harvesting is closed along the entire Oregon coast due to elevated levels of domoic acid.

This includes all beaches and bays.

BAY CLAMS:

Bay clamming is open along the entire Oregon Coast from the Columbia River to the California border. Check the ODFW Shellfish website for where and when to harvest your favorite bivalves. Updated maps on where to clam.

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