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In time, however, Hopkins started seeing trash accumulate again. So, he decided to make a long-term commitment to keep the lake cleaner than he found it by adopting the site through Project AWARE's Adopt a Dive Site program.

"I really want to emphasize that this is a partnership involving local area divers, Eugene Skin Divers Supply owners Michael and Diana Hollingshead, and the Oregon Parks Department — specifically Justin Helberg, park manager at Jessie M. Honeyman Park," Hopkins said. "Mike and Diana have supplied free gear rentals to cleanup participants and the park staff have taken care of properly disposing of the marine debris we bring up."

After adopting the West Boat Ramp site, Hopkins and other local scuba divers began performing monthly marine debris surveys that mapped out the location of any new trash that needed to be disposed of.

"Because of our success, we started branching out to different areas of the lake such as under the Canary Bridge and Church Beach — which is near the day-use gazebo by the east boat ramp," Hopkins said. "So far, we've had 79 divers participate in removing 2,216 items, with a total weight of 3,736.33 pounds from Woahink Lake."



Before COVID-19 shut everything down, volunteers had eliminated almost

all of the trash at the site, a great accomplishment for Hopkins.

Divers pick up underwater debris during their training at Woahink Lake on Aug. 1.

However, the monthly surveys stopped when all Oregon state parks closed in March.

That changed last weekend when Hopkins had his first opportunity to dive at the site after it reopened to the public.

"Thankfully we only found a few small items of marine debris, which amounted to about 1.5 pounds," Hopkins said. "Unfortunately, we also removed a cat litter box full on concrete that weighed nearly 50 pounds."

But he wasn't there just to just collect more debris. Hopkins spent the day instructing students who were in their final stage of becoming diving certified.

"We had a large family of eight that were learning all

PHOTOS BY LENA FELT/SIUSLAW NEWS

about our underwater conservation efforts," Hopkins said. "Our goal was to teach them to be good stewards of our aquatic world and how to preserve the habitat that the animals and people of the area rely upon."

According to Hopkins, his hobby for diving turned into his dream career, but along the way he also found a passion for environmental conservation.

He and his team plan to continue maintenance at Woahink Lake, along with branching out to cleaning up Blue River Reservoir Dam as well.

"We are also planning our next underwater cleanup at Woahink, so keep an eye out for us around Labor Day weekend," Hopkins said.

To report marine debris or to help participate and learn how to safely remove these unwanted items from the water, contact Eugene Skin Divers Supply at 541-342-2351.

To find out more about the Project AWARE's Dive Against Debris program, visit www.projectaware.org.

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Public charge rule blocked

A judge issued new injunctions this week blocking the public charge immigration rule during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will allow immigrant communities across Oregon and the rest of the country to access critical health care and public benefits during the current health crisis.

The injunction issued against the Department of Homeland Security prevents the agency from enforcing, applying, implementing, or treating as effective the "public charge" rule for any period during a declared national health emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The rule had expanded the list of benefits that the federal government could consider in deciding whether a person can enter the United States or obtain lawful permanent residency.

"The public charge rule has worsened health disparities, especially for the Latino/a/x community, at a time when they are most hard hit by the lethal coronavirus," said Patrick Allen, Oregon Health Authority Director. "Here in Oregon many immigrant families decided not to access public benefits, even leaving their children without health insurance."

In January the Supreme Court issued a ruling that lifted an October 2019 decision to block the public charge rule, allowing it to go into effect. As a result, the Department of Homeland Security began enforcing the rule on Feb. 24, just before the coronavirus outbreak became a nationwide pandemic.

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