

Ocean heat: Salmon, sea lions and crab all affected by high temperatures

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west Fisheries Science Center found that:

- Feeding conditions have improved for California sea lions and seabirds that experienced mass die-offs caused by shifts in their prey during the Blob.

- Plankton, the foundation of the marine food web, have shifted back slightly toward fat-rich, cool-water species that improve the growth and survival of salmon and other fish.

- Recent research surveys have found fewer juvenile salmon, and consequently adult salmon returns will likely remain depressed for a few years until successive

generations benefit from improving ocean conditions.

- Reports of whale entanglements in fishing gear have remained very high for the fourth straight year, as whales followed prey to near shore areas and ran into fishing gear such as pots and traps.

- Severe low-oxygen conditions in ocean water spanned the Oregon Coast from July to September 2017, causing die-offs of crab and other species.

“Overall, we’re seeing some positive signs, as the ocean returns to a cooler and generally more productive state,” said Toby Garfield of the Southwest Fisheries Science

Center. “We’re fortunate that we have the data from previous years to help us understand what the trends are, and how that matters to West Coast fishermen and communities.”

NOAA Fisheries’ scientists compile the annual ecosystem status report from ocean surveys and other monitoring efforts along the West Coast.

The tracking revealed “a climate system still in transition in 2017,” as surface ocean conditions return to near normal.

Deeper water remained unusually warm, especially in the north.

Warm-water species, such as leaner plankton often associated with subtropical waters, have lingered in the

more-northern zones.

One of the largest and most extensive low-oxygen zones ever recorded off the West Coast prevailed off the Oregon Coast last summer, probably driven by low-oxygen water upwelled from the deep ocean, the report said.

While the cooling conditions off the West Coast began to support more cold-water plankton rich in the fatty acids that salmon need to grow, salmon may need more time to show the benefits, the report said.

Juvenile salmon sampled off the Northwest Coast in 2017 were especially small and scarce, suggesting that poor feeding conditions off the Columbia River Estuary may be lingering.

Juvenile salmon that enter

the ocean this year amid the gradually improving conditions will not return from the ocean to spawn in the Columbia and other rivers for another two years or more, so fishermen should not expect adult salmon numbers to improve much until then.

“These changes occur gradually, and the effects appear only with time,” said Chris Harvey, a fisheries biologist at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center and coauthor of the report.

“The advantage of doing this monitoring and watching these indicators is that we can get a sense of what is likely to happen in the ecosystem and how that is likely to affect communities and economies that are closely tied to these waters.”



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Tiny: Homeowner requests small home for mom

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Developer Marlin Larsen has been attempting to open a resort adjacent to the Hammond Marina made up of yurts, tiny homes and a boat converted into living space. But Larsen’s resort units would be for temporary rental to tourists, not permanent residents.

The city will place several conditions on the property owner.

McElmurry’s tiny home must have a separate water meter, each year she’ll be required to submit affirmation that she still lives at the site and its wheel must be removed as a typical mobile home. When Linda McElmurry stops living at the site, the accessory dwelling must be removed, the sewer and water lines capped and the meter removed. Should the property be sold, the unit must be removed.

The Planning Commission-

er meeting was the last for Community Development Director Skip Urling, who retired March 16 after seven years with the city.

“I appreciate the passion of each of you,” he told city leaders at a commission meeting earlier in the week. “I wish you good luck in your efforts.”

After 37 years in planning, Urling plans to take a summer job as head chef at a fishing camp in western Alaska. “It will be a fun diversion from what my normal life has been to this date.”

Urling will be replaced on a temporary basis by Kevin Cronin, Astoria’s former community development director who now works as a private planning consultant.



Above: A tiny home like this will go in a yard next to a family home as a “mother-in-law” residence. **Below:** Skip Urling, foreground, gives his final report last week as the city’s community development director. Beside him is Kevin Cronin, who will replace him temporarily. Planning Commissioner Ken Yuill is on the left.



Cindy Yingst/The Columbia Press