

RETHINKING BEACHES

Naturalist Neal Maine wants to raise awareness about ‘amazing phenomenon’

By Lyra Fontaine
Cannon Beach Gazette

Many use Oregon’s sandy shores for recreational fun in the sun, and there’s nothing wrong with that, local naturalist and nature photographer Neal Maine said in his April 13 lecture, “Beaches: More than Sand.”

With the increase in visitors, Maine said a greater understanding of lively ecological processes and “the wonder of this amazing phenomenon” happening on beaches is needed.

He wants to change public perception of Oregon’s beaches, which were made accessible to the public, protected from private development and administered as a state recreation area in 1967.

“We’re trying to recast the beaches of Oregon as ecosystems, not just playgrounds,” Maine said to a rapt audience gathered in the Cannon Beach Chamber Hall as part of the city’s “12 Days of Earth Day” events.

With his late wife, Karen, Maine started the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, which began an official program in 1985. Last year, the program celebrated 30 years of educating visitors about the iconic rock.

Now, Maine hopes to help develop a strategic campaign called “Beaches are Alive” to raise public awareness about beach ecology. For example, instead of showing visitors how to clam, state parks

could provide lessons about beach ecology, Maine said.

He invited the audience to send “ideas, observations and inspiration” for the possible program this spring.

As Maine demonstrated with photos and animated dialogue, beaches are living systems home to a wide variety of creatures, including mole crabs, clams, tiny invertebrates, kelp, birds and more. Beaches are unique in that they are influenced by external input sources, like material from the ocean.

“The richer your awareness about the environment and how it works,” he said, “then the higher the quality of life.”

Maine displayed photos of some beach-dwelling creatures, including *Vevela velellas*, an example of “population explosion.”

“You’ve seen more than you’ve ever wanted to see,” he said.

Meanwhile, razor clams, with their quick burrowing into the sand, are an example of biological specialization. “They have evolved for that specific habitat.”

Maine showed photos of gulls “dancing” for their food. He said delicate, specialized birds may be affected by human modifications to the beach.

What may look like an oil spill on shores — a brown, oily substance with frothy bubbles — is indeed oil released from photosynthesizing algae called diatoms.

“They’re a huge source of solar conversion,” Maine said, adding that the substance was made up of “good oil.”



Microplastics are one concern for beach environments.

“This year there was the greatest distribution of microplastics I’ve ever seen,” Maine said, adding that he has seen an “incredible volume” of plastic debris, which can be ingested by sea animals. “These become sponges for chemical structures in ocean water so we get concentrated chemical material in these particles.”

Maine suggested beach cleanups be combined with “Beaches are Alive” education. Keeping beaches free from trash is a benefit for both coastal residents and visitors.

“So many people go to the beach and walk and find that solace and atmosphere that they need,” Maine said. “You can try to put some of that in the bank, because June will be here soon.”

Dire risk prompts Wyden stopover

Senator to seek federal funds for Seaside-area tsunami safety

By R.J. Marx
Cannon Beach Gazette

“Help!” is the message from Seaside School Superintendent Doug Dougherty, and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden responded to the SOS Sunday, April 24.

Dougherty and Seaside Mayor Don Larson served as guides on a tour of the city’s tsunami zone, from Seaside High School to Broadway Middle School before going east to Seaside Heights Elementary School.

“My view is when you talk about disasters, this has historically been considered a place there is a federal role,” Wyden said.

“It’s not about somebody’s political philosophy when coming together to ensure when our communities are facing life-and-death situations we are there for them.”

Dougherty told Wyden that Seaside is the most vulnerable to tsunamis of any city in Oregon. “Seaside, then Gearhart, then Cannon Beach,” Dougherty said.

Most of Oregon’s other coastal towns have some kind of elevation, Dougherty said, providing some protection.

Federal studies only plan for 38-foot tsunami waves, but studies by the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries found past tsunamis scaled 80 feet.

“If the federal government doesn’t get the heights right, that’s going to affect everything else,” Wyden said. “As I understand it, Doug Dougherty is trying to plan for real world circumstances, not for some mythical figure.”

Wyden, the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, said he would seek predisaster and Federal Emergency Management Agency funds.

“What really needs to improve is the judgments of members of Congress in terms of priorities, and that’s my job,” the Oregon Democrat said.

Wyden said he sees raising the issue of tsunami awareness as a national one.

“Seaside would be different than a small community in the Midwest or something on the East Coast,” Wyden said. “Disasters are something where Congress comes together and says, ‘We’ve got to come together in terms of preventative medicine.’”

Wyden said he plans to take Seaside’s message back to Washington, D.C.

“There’s nothing better than coming out and seeing something like this,” Wyden said. “Otherwise you’re just reading government reports and talking about this in the abstract.”



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE
Seaside School District Superintendent Doug Dougherty and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden behind Seaside High School.

‘Fisher poet’ Densmore comes to Cannon Beach



Poet and fisherman Dave Densmore.

Poet and fisherman David Densmore will be reading poems and stories at the Cannon Beach History Center & Museum in Cannon Beach on Thursday, May 12, at 7 p.m.

Dave Densmore has appeared in *The New York Times* and *Smithsonian Magazine*, he was one of the subjects of a documentary called “fisher poets,” and has published several books of his writings. He is well known as an artist and fisherman on the coast of Oregon and in Alaska. He has appeared at events for the Bioneers: the Columbia River Keepers events, and at New Bedford’s Working Waterfront Festival. When not fishing in Alaska or writing in Oregon, he spends his time in Belize and Guatemala.

The event is free and open to the public, it will be held at the Cannon Beach History Center & Museum, 1387 S. Spruce St. Coffee and tea will be served.



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