



Maple, 5, rides a wave during Seaside Oregon Family Adventures Surfing family camp June 29 at Short Sands Beach in Oswald West State Park.



About 30 children and adults were given surfing lessons and information about ocean safety and awareness during Seaside Oregon Family Adventures Surfing family camp June 29 at Short Sands Beach in Oswald West State Park.

Local nonprofit opens the door to the world of surfing

SOFAS offers free day camps for locals

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Lauren Ahlgren and Dennis Smith, founders of the nonprofit Seaside Oregon Family Adventures Surfing, believe everyone should be able to take advantage of Oregon’s natural marine resources by surfing along the North Coast.

“The neat thing about surfing is that it’s free,” said Ahlgren, the owner of Oregon Surf Adventures school. The problem, she added, is learning to surf is not. “Not a lot of the local community that’s working and surviving here can afford to learn to surf.”

Especially in Oregon, where wet suits are crucial, gear rentals and instruction costs can add up, which challenged Ahlgren’s belief that “everyone that doesn’t have the resources needs to be able to do this.” With the help of Smith, the owner of Seaside Surf Shop, and a local benefactor, who wants to remain anonymous, Ahlgren’s passion overcame that obstacle and materialized into the Seaside Oregon Family Adventures Surfing organization.

“The idea was to make surfing available to everyone,” Ahlgren said.

Since its creation in June 2014, SOFAS has focused on offering one-day family camps, complete with instruc-

tion and gear provided free of charge to participants. One camp was held last summer, but with an increase in fundraising and donations, the organization can provide three camps this summer.

The first camp of 2015 was held June 29 at Short Sands Beach in Oswald West State Park with an attendance of about 16 kids and 14 adults from Nehalem to Astoria, Ahlgren said. The second camp is scheduled for Aug. 14, and the date of the third camp is to be determined.

During the camps, adolescent participants, along with their parents or chaperons, receive surfing instruction according to their ability level. Experienced instructors, mostly from Oregon Surf Adventures, also educate participants on ocean safety, awareness and surfing etiquette. Short Sands is an optimal location for the campers, many of whom are beginners, because it is a predictable beach, Ahlgren said.

The camps provide a venue for families to connect over a shared experience in a positive, recreational environment. Personally, Smith said, he has had customers who started surfing with their children, and it helped them grow closer to one another.

Involving parents and chaperons also increases the likelihood the children can go surfing again, because the adults get information about places to go, surfing safety and how to oversee the activity.

Besides containing the knowledge of where to go, adults also have the actual ability to take the kids there in the future, Ahlgren said.

“Unless the children have a parent or chaperon who can see what we’re doing, they’re not going to be able to do it again,” she said. “To be self sufficient is really important.”

Ahlgren also is an advocate for the way surfing connects individuals to their health and helps them become more aware of their overall fitness. It gives people a new reason to set fitness goals, she said, adding, “I think it’s contagious, when you want to be able to catch a wave.”

There is no age requirement to go to a SOFAS camp. As long as a child can fit into a wetsuit, the instructors will teach them to surf. The camps can accommodate about 20 children. Any more and it becomes a lot of children in the water at one time, Ahlgren said.

During each camp, a couple instructors are delegated to compile data for each camper, such as the number of waves they catch, the tricks they perform, their etiquette and how long they ride each wave. At the end of the day, each camper receives a specialized award recognizing something they accomplished during the camp.

Parents and children had positive things to say after the June 29 camp. Athena Dickau, of Gearhart, attended with her daughters, 2-year-old Nora and 4-year-old Lexi. Lexi had surfed twice before, but doing

it through the camp was a new experience.

“She was way more stoked than she normally is,” Dickau said. “It was a good confidence boost. ... She’s got a new love now.”

As for making it a family activity, she said, “there’s something about the challenge of every wave, the ocean is very powerful,” and “conquering it together” was a positive shared experience. Her husband surfs, so it was a good bonding experience, she said.

Maya Vidal, of Cannon Beach, was there with her 4-year-old daughter Kailani. Vidal said the activity fosters a sense of camaraderie among individual families and also the group of children, who are good at energizing and encouraging one another.

“It makes it easier for kids in transition,” agreed Jeff Jackson, who was there with Maple, 5. “It’s an excellent opportunity for kids to learn how to surf and build some water skills. The trick is just to have fun.”

Mallory Robertson, 9, said her favorite part of surfing is “being able to catch some waves.” For her brother, 6-year-old Wade, the best part is doing a pop-up. It was their



Surf camp is in session. Lessons and gear were provided free of charge by SOFAS, a nonprofit organization that aims to bring families closer together through surfing. Another camp is scheduled for Aug. 14.

second time at the camp. Their mother, Evelyn Bian, said she and her husband, Jeff Robertson, originally were uncomfortable taking the kids out on their own, “because we didn’t know what we were doing.” Since attending last year’s camp — and learning more about the ocean environment, tides and currents — they felt comfortable going alone as a family earlier this year.

SOFAS is sustained through grants, fundraising collaborations with businesses and private donations. Any donations families or individuals wish to contribute for

attending a SOFAS camp are voluntary.

Three camps per year is a sustainable goal for the organization at this time, Ahlgren said. Each camp costs the organization about \$1,400, which covers the cost of the instructors — who are college kids and can’t work for free, Ahlgren said — in addition to a meal provided at the end of the day, awards and other supplies. Ahlgren donates her time for the camps.

For more information about SOFAS, visit www.sofa-surfing.org/ or call 503-436-1481.

Circle Creek Habitat Reserve to get butterfly-friendly violets

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Fall and early winter are the best times for planting because the flowers are getting dormant, “and they stay nice and wet, so they’re well-established by spring,” Voelke said.

Increasing the presence of early blue violets will cause a reemergence of the Oregon silverspot butterfly at suitable habitats. The Oregon silverspot butterfly, which is federally listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened, relies entirely on the flower because it is the only species where the adult butterflies will lay eggs and where the larva can successfully feed and develop, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Clatsop Plains and Long Beach Peninsula used to teem with butterflies but they haven’t been seen much since the 1990s, NCLC Communications Coordinator Bonnie Henderson. The theory is that is because of how the environment on those prairie lands has changed. Some violets remain, but not enough to support a robust butterfly population, Reich said.

Recovery plan

The conservancy’s approach to restoration of butterflies is really habitat-focused, Henderson said.

Reich agreed, adding, “Part of the recovery plan for the species is to bring back the population, and before we can do that, we need to have a habitat.”



Jason Spear, 23, and Ari Freitag, 25, summer stewardship interns for the North Coast Land Conservancy, unload numerous beds of early blue violets at the organization’s Circle Creek property.

Rather than releasing a batch of non-native butterflies onto the plains and peninsula and hoping they will remain, the conservancy is trying to build a suitable habitat that will support native butterflies repopulating themselves.

The conservancy is managing the coastal prairie habitat, on which the Oregon silverspot butterfly is dependent, using strategies such as mowing, topsoil removal, topsoil inversion, removing invasive species and planting native plants, like the early blue violets. The presumption, Henderson said, is the butterflies will find the flowers and introduce a new generation of the species. She described the management strategy as “a totally natural process, aided by a lot of human activity.”

The early blue violets are just a small part of a larger

story, Reich said. The conservancy is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and Willapa National Wildlife Refuge on a five-year North Coast prairie restoration project. The group is in year two of the project, having spent the first portion preparing plots at research areas for testing site-management strategies.

While reintroducing the Oregon silverspot butterfly population will be a bonus, the primary goal of the project is to boost the native prairie ecosystem being lost primarily to development and invasive species, Reich said.

The partners will monitor the research plots to see which conditions native plants and animals respond best to. Successful techniques then can be implemented on a larger scale, Reich said.

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