



People stop to look at the dead humpback whale calf that washed ashore on the Seaside beach Sunday. Officials are asking people not to touch the whale.



Dalin D'Alessandro, a research assistant at Portland State University, holds up a sample of a whale kidney.



Mollie Schmidt, with the Seaside Aquarium, front, and Jason Husa, a volunteer with the Oregon Marine Mammal Stranding Network, back, cut open the whale and collect tissue samples during a necropsy.

Climatologist discusses effects of climate change on coastal living

Research shows policy strategies can mitigate impacts

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Policy decisions made today regarding land use can help communities adapt and mitigate the negative impacts of climate change, according to climatologist John Stevenson.

Stevenson kicked-off the Listening to the Land series this year with his presentation, "Climate Change and the Coast," at Seaside Public Library on Wednesday, Jan. 20. The monthly speaker series, presented by the North Coast Land Conservancy and the Necanicum Watershed Council, is offered through May.

Stevenson, a regional extension climate specialist with Oregon Sea Grant and the Climate Impacts Research Consortium, helps communities respond to climate-driven changes in coastal hazards, water resources and forest disturbance. He examined how the warming climate is affecting life on the coast and what the future might look like if current trends continue.

Addressing climate change

Many rapid climate changes can be contribut-

ed to human activity and the emission of greenhouse gases, which play a critical role in determining the global temperature, Stevenson said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration recently reported 2015 was the warmest year on earth since record-keeping began in 1880. The temperature along the Oregon Coast has changed during the past century, as well, and is steadily increasing.

Climate change affects a lot of the earth's systems, such as fresh water sources, vegetation, wildfire occurrence and wetlands.

In fresh water systems, climate change leads to decreased summer flow, increased water temperature and flooding after extreme precipitation events. For vegetation, the coast may experience species shifts and low elevations may become unsuitable for Douglas fir by the mid- to late century.

Fire disturbance also is likely to increase, although there is limited historical activity on which to base assessments, Stevenson said. Wetlands also will be affected by rising sea levels, a byproduct of climate change, with a predicted loss or mitigation of estuarine habitat and tidal swamps.

A whale of a mystery

Whale from Page 1A

such as bullet holes or something stuck in the mammal's throat, then it can take days or weeks to determine a cause of death, said Keith Chandler, the general manager of Seaside Aquarium.

It was clear the animal did not die from old age, as it was only about a year old, Chandler said. He said it is not unusual to see a whale wash ashore on the North Coast, but they tend to be gray whales. Humpbacks are rare — Chandler said he has only seen a few in his 20 years with the stranding network — but the species was spotted in nearby waters recently.

"There were a few humpbacks hanging out in the mouth of the Columbia River last year," he said. "They are usually further offshore. It could have died offshore and with the storm, washed in."

The whale was one of at least five cetaceans to wash up in the area in three

days. A harbor porpoise and two striped dolphins were found Saturday Jan. 30. One dolphin was found in Cannon Beach and the other in Ocean Park, Washington. A third striped dolphin washed ashore in Seaside Monday. Chandler said it is "quite unusual to get them all together," especially the striped dolphins.

The Ocean Park dolphin showed signs of being entangled in a net and had a hole in its tail that appeared to be from a gaff, Chandler said. The dolphin from Seaside had a similar hole in the same area, but it had not undergone a necropsy by Tuesday. Chandler said it could be a single event — getting caught in the net — that caused the unusual occurrence of killing multiple dolphins at once. If a single event is the cause of death, Chandler said, then "we know it's just an accident," as opposed to persistent conditions impacting a species, like disease.

City crews planned to bury the whale at the beach by Wednesday morning.



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