

West End Natural Resources News

A publication of the North Pacific Coast Marine Resources Committee (NPC MRC) and NPC Lead Entity for Salmon Recovery.

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Welcome to the second *West End Natural Resources News* to be published during the first half of 2012.

We hope you enjoy the articles. If you would like to receive future editions by regular mail or email please send a request to tpokorny@co.jefferson.wa.us.

A Closer Look at Beaches & Birds COASST

by Tami Pokorny, Jefferson County

Tsunami debris is making headlines, but many other interesting things wash up on Washington's Pacific beaches everyday. COASST volunteers comb the shore for these new discoveries. Month after month, the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team documents seabird carcasses and other noteworthy finds. They're trained to translate found objects into rigorous and vital data that reveal important information about the coastal environment and beyond. They're also in the business of learning the language of "their" beaches – noticing what's up and when things don't seem quite right. Sometimes a new situation is obvious, like back in 2009, when dozens of dead and dying birds appeared on outer coast beaches. A "bird wreck" had occurred in which thousands of shorebirds died from

Continues on page 4



A Rhinoceros Auklet found on Hobuck Beach in December 2011. Photo: Janet Lamont



Sally, Mary Sue, Kim and Miriam document a beached seabird on Hobuck Beach. Photo: Janet Lamont

Coast-wide Marine Debris Project

by Eric Delvin

The Nature Conservancy

Lost fishing nets, crab pots and other marine debris on the Washington coast pose a hidden danger to marine life. Many hundreds of tons of jetsam and flotsam



wash up on ocean beaches. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of crab pots are lost at sea every year. "Ghost nets" keep catching fish and other marine animals, including seals, octopus, salmon and even birds.

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Marine Debris Project

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This is one conservation problem with a relatively simple solution—retrieve the lost gear, pick up the debris.

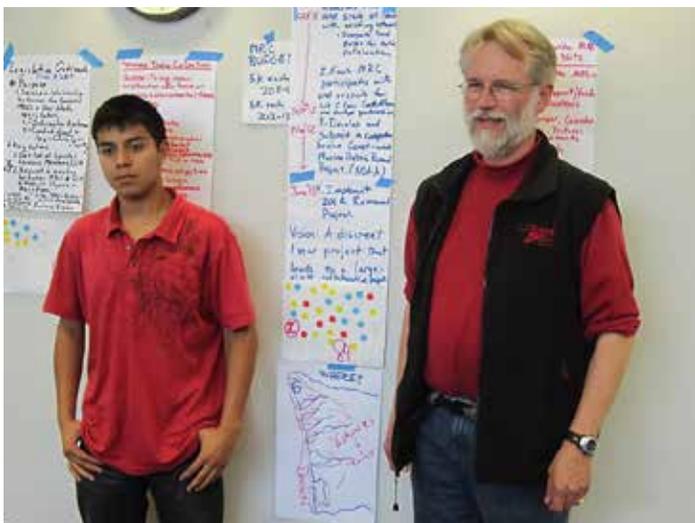
Washington coastal communities met at the second annual Marine Resources Committee (MRC) Summit in Forks in October, 2011, and made a coast-wide marine debris and lost gear cleanup project their highest priority.

Each of the coastal Marine Resources Committees, coastal Treaty Tribes, The Nature Conservancy, and other partners including the Northwest Straits Foundation and Natural Resources Consultants, Inc. have been working over the last six months to assess the problem in their areas, identify funding sources and partners and develop a plan for a coastal cleanup project.

The coast-wide project is based on a successful lost gear removal project being conducted in the Grays Harbor estuary by the Quinault Indian Nation and The Nature Conservancy, with support from NOAA, Washington Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Grays Harbor MRC. The goal is to remove lost fishing nets, crab pots, and other debris that can harm salmon, birds, and other wildlife. Project partners located and removed 23 nets and other gear in 2011 and expect to remove lost fishing gear from most of the estuary in the summer of 2012.



Eric Delvin, Jeff June and Alan Ebeling remove nets from Grays Harbor. Photo: Lorena Marchant



Forks High School science teacher John Hunter and his student, Juanito Mena, advocate for a coast-wide marine debris removal project to focus on lost fishing gear. MRC summit, fall of 2011. Photo: Tami Pokorny



Crayton Fenn and Erik Hazelton use side scan sonar to look for nets and pots in Grays Harbor estuary this June. Photo: Eric Delvin

The MRC-led project will focus on removal of lost crab pots in the ocean, beach cleanups, inventory of creosote pilings, and net removal in the Columbia River. Project proposals to public and private funding agencies will be submitted by the MRC coalition in the fall of 2012. The MRCs will also provide funding of their own, with a plan to begin the cleanup in the summer of 2013.

WDFW Rockfish Tagging Project

by Lorna Wargo, WDFW

For the past three decades - the spring (and often the fall) months find Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff venturing out onto the ocean to catch and tag thousands of black rockfish (*Sebastes melanops*). The tiny tags they use can yield an immense amount of information. Aided by hundreds of volunteer anglers, WDFW's coastal rockfish tagging program successfully supports management of this valuable and healthy resource.



WDFW technicians Michael Sinclair and TJ Wynn check for the presence of tags and collect biological data as part of the rockfish tagging project. Source: WDFW

Black rockfish are widely distributed along the Pacific coast from central California to the Gulf of Alaska inhabiting nearshore areas at bottom depths of less than 50 fathoms. Large schools of adult fish tend to be attracted to irregular, rocky bottom habitat or other underwater structures, although it is not unusual to find them actively feeding on the surface.

Recreational and commercial fishers have harvested black rockfish in nearshore areas off the Washington coast and in Puget Sound since the early 1940s. However, concern for declining populations has resulted in increasingly restrictive regulations for commercial fisheries, such as closing the ocean inside three miles (state waters) to all commercial groundfish gear. As a result commercial black rockfish landings have steadily declined to negligible levels since the mid 1980s. Black rockfish, however, remain an important natural resource to the recreational fisheries that coastal communities rely upon for a vital economy.



WDFW technician John Pabutski holds a black rockfish, the target species for the WDFW rockfish tagging study. The fish caught are typically released unharmed, but in the rare instances that a fish is injured, it is donated to a local food bank. Photo: Tami Pokorny

In 2006, a consulting firm valued Washington saltwater fisheries for fish other than salmon and steelhead at \$11.2 million and black rockfish accounts for 80% of the annual catch from Washington recreational bottomfish trips targeting rockfish. The Washington coastal recreational fishery harvests about 60,000 to 80,000 fish annually. Due to the importance of this resource, WDFW and coastal recreational charter boat fleets have been collaborating on tagging projects for the conservation of black rockfish and other coastal groundfish species.

In Washington, the first black rockfish tagging project began in 1981. Back then little was known regarding the life history of the black rockfish. Consequently, the early tagging work concentrated on gathering biological information, such as movement and growth. Over the intervening years, the project has undergone changes as study objectives were re-defined and improvements in tagging protocols were made. The overall objective of this program is to produce estimates of black rockfish abundance, growth, survival, and mortality. These statistics are then incorporated into population models for coastal black rockfish used by fishery managers. Tag release and recovery data are also commonly used to evaluate movement for marine fishes. These studies are important for defining the spatial distribution of a population and examining the relative area-specific impacts of fishing.

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COASST

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hypothermia due to a toxic algal bloom that affected their feathers. Or, the signs can be subtle, such as the appearance of floats linked to last year's Japan tsunami. In fact, COASST volunteers Eric Page and Dave Easton were among the first to discover probable tsunami debris on our coast.

COASST Volunteers Ed Ansorg, Mike Tetreau and NPC MRC member Chiggers Stokes, have been walking the most remote beaches on the north coast for a combined total of eight decades. They've seen some unusual, sad, and intriguing

groups and individuals to monitor marine ecosystem health. COASST was founded by Dr. Julia Parrish, University of Washington Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Diversity for the College of the Environment, who studied Common Murres on Tatoosh Island for over a decade.

As she painstakingly collected data on this particular colony of seabirds, she struggled with the knowledge that very little was known about other colonies along the coast and coastal seabird populations more generally. Even in the late 90s, time, money and personnel limitations of academic and agency science programs were inadequate to track changes in coastal seabird populations. To what degree might changes

in numbers or species be due to migration, oil spills, entanglement, algae blooms, climate change, ocean conditions or other factors? No one knew. With an intimate understanding of the challenges inherent in studying live seabirds along a remote and turbulent coast, Dr. Parrish considered what might be learned from data on seabird carcasses over time. She realized that any interested observer could be trained to count, measure and identify beached birds.

Count, measure and identify them they have, and do. Since 2000, COASST has grown to more than 700 volunteers monitoring over 350 beaches in northern California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, with sister programs in Canada, Russia and South America. On the Olympic Peninsula, beaches from Copalis to Neah Bay and the Straits are walked monthly by 90 COASST volunteers.

Beached Birds: A COASST Field Guide is a fascinating guide to dead seabirds. Makes a great gift for any curious, beach-going person!

things in that time. Like other COASST volunteers in our area, the three became involved in this University of Washington citizen science project through a long-standing appreciation for the unique and beautiful qualities of our coast and a desire to help steward it. “Being a COASST volunteer is having one’s finger on the pulse of the ocean,” remarks Chiggers. “Seabirds are the proverbial canary in the mineshaft. If seabirds are in trouble, it won’t be long before we’re in the same mess. The quality of our lives and our future as a species are inextricably linked to the ocean.”

The COASST vision statement imagines “a future in which all coastal communities contribute directly to monitoring local marine resources and ecosystem health...” Acting on that vision, the COASST organization actively collaborates with agencies, non-profit organizations, community



Seabirds landed in this fish tote while it was upright and then couldn't fly back out of it. (Note carcasses in front of spilled tote.)

Photo: Chiggers Stokes

Janet Lamont coordinates the volunteers and collects their data on birds and volunteer hours at the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary office in Port Angeles, where she also manages the Olympic Coast Discovery Center. “I can’t stress enough how important our volunteers are to keeping us informed about what is happening on the outer coast. When you have volunteers monitoring the same stretch month after month they are really attuned to changes,” she says. The program divides western Clallam and Jefferson counties’ coastline into beaches and beach segments of about a kilometer in length, although the access trail can be a lot longer than that. “Some of our volunteer citizens have been monitoring for us every month for more than ten years,” she says. Most travel from Forks, Sequim or Port Angeles.

Although COASST volunteers all share what some might consider a macabre fascination with dead birds, many of them are amateur naturalists who also manage to enjoy live-bird watching. Some have adopted the habit of recording the names of all the birds they see on each walk. They notice how the beach changes with the seasons and the relatively unusual appearances – of a Sandhill Crane or a Whimbrel for instance. John Hunter, Forks High School science teacher and NPC MRC member, has been monitoring Beach 2, just south of Kalaloch Beach for more than three years. “We’ve seen relatively few dead birds along this section of beach. There’s an eagle’s nest in the middle of it that probably collects most of the carcasses. We’ve actually seen what appeared to be wing marks in the sand where an eagle grabbed one from the beach.”

Although more than 100 species appear on the COASST list for Washington, most of the beached birds encountered represent only a few species. Of these, some are more likely to be found at certain times – such as Common Murres at the end of their nesting season, in July or August. In the winter, migratory birds such as Northern Fulmars wash up more often than at other times.



*Ed Ansorg looks over three dead porpoises entangled in a net and washed up on Mosquito Creek Beach.
Photo: Chiggers Stokes*

There is typically no clear information on the specific cause of death, but COASST volunteers do sometimes find dead seabirds and other creatures entangled in fishing line, hooks, net, or some other man-made substance. On June 10, Chiggers and Ed found a fish tote on a wilderness beach just south of Goodman Creek in Olympic National Park. Floating in the ocean like a bathtub, the tote had partially filled up with water. Four birds had landed in it but sadly found themselves unable to fly back out. That same day, they found three harbor porpoises entangled in fishing net. This information is very valuable to COASST. If we don’t take time to evaluate the human-caused hazards that exist for seabirds and other marine life, it’s very unlikely anything will be done to prevent or mitigate the dangers. Although it can be uncomfortable to contemplate the fate of animals such as these, the deaths are also a sign that the waters adjacent these beaches team with life – this ecosystem is one of only five highly productive, yet fragile, zones of upwelling world-wide. Signs of human-caused mortalities mean we can all do better to protect our marine resources by tracking and responding to problems.

Many COASST volunteers have obtained marine mammal stranding training and know what steps to take in the very rare instances when a stranded sea otter, seal, whale or other marine mammal is found alive and in trouble. Barring

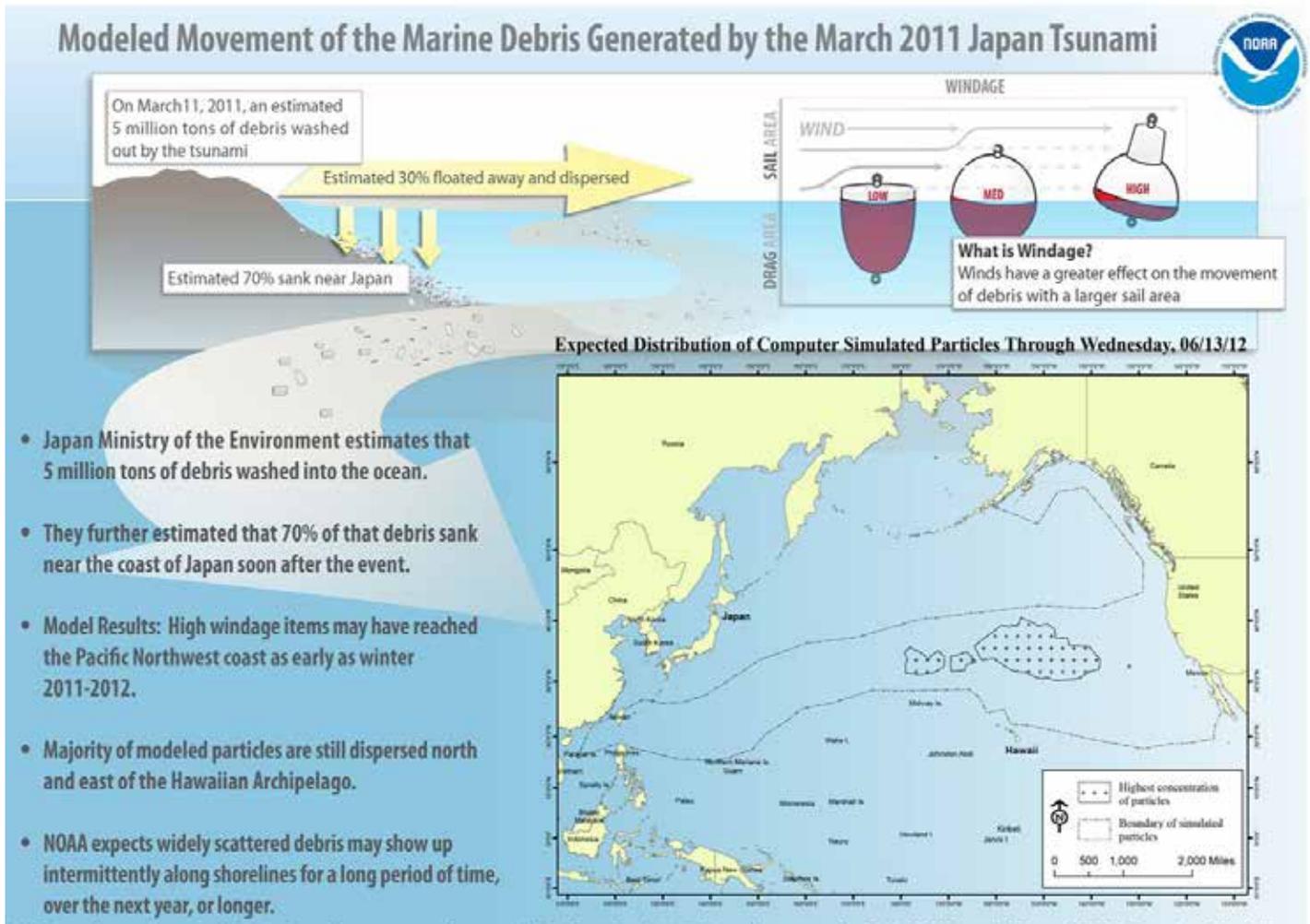
dangerous algal blooms or an oil spill, it's generally uncommon to see distressed birds on the beach, but they're prepared to respond to these situations as well.

Currently COASST needs help to monitor the Ozette triangle beaches (Cape Alava, Wedding Rocks, and Sand Point), Hole-in-the-Wall (north of Rialto), the three remote beaches that Chiggers, Ed and Mike monitor, and several beaches in the Kalaloch area. Formal, classroom COASST trainings are offered in Forks and Port Angeles once per year; on-the-beach trainings occur monthly at Hobuck Beach (Neah Bay) or other locations led by current volunteers. Contact coasst@uw.edu for more information or visit: <http://depts.washington.edu/coasst/involved/volunteer.html> for a calendar of upcoming trainings and events.

Special thanks to Janet Lamont and Chiggers Stokes for contributing to this article.



Tatoosh Island. Source: Washington State Coastal Atlas



NOAA's "GNOME" computer model provided the data to support this graphic. For more details, please visit marinedebris.noaa.gov.

Ocean & River Resources Fair

The 4th Annual Ocean & River Resources Fair and potluck barbecue was held at the Forks High School on June 16 in conjunction with an open house to present the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership (WCSSP) draft regional salmon recovery plan. More than 50 people enjoyed displays from WCSSP, COASST, the Pew Forage Fish Program, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, North Olympic Peninsula Skills Center, Feiro Marine Life Center, StreamKeepers and Sea Grant, as well as the terrific potluck dishes. Steve Allison grilled fresh salmon to perfection and the bluegrass band Crescent Blue entertained everyone with great music. Thanks to all who participated. Hope to see you back next year!

Beach Cleanup

Washington CoastSavers (www.coastsavers.org) reports that this year's coast-wide beach cleanup on April 21 was a record-breaking success. Over 1300 volunteers (the most ever!) cleaned up more than 20 tons of marine debris. That's 40,000 pounds of household plastics, lost fishing gear, and other trash that is no longer on Washington beaches, poisoning our wildlife and spoiling our beautiful coast.

Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Update

A 66-foot-long dock from Japan washed up on a beach in Oregon the week of June 4. On June 12, three kayakers discovered lumber linked to Japan on the Makah Indian Reservation. On June 15, a 20-foot boat from the Tohoku region washed up at Long Beach. Chunks of yellow and blue insulation foam are becoming increasingly abundant on many of Washington's beaches. Nine of the 404 total reports of tsunami debris have been confirmed according to the *The Seattle Times*. Approximately 1.5 million tons of the estimated 50 tons of debris created by the event was buoyant enough to float. Some fraction of that amount continues to drift toward the U.S. West Coast.

Learn more about tsunami debris:

<http://marinedebris.noaa.gov>



Ian Miller discusses Washington Sea Grant programs with fair attendees who are also enjoying the potluck aspect of this event. Photo: Katie Krueger

“Washington’s Coastal Marine Advisory Council” Forms to Represent Washington’s Pacific Coast

by Rod Fleck, City of Forks

In direct response to the request of Washington's coastal communities and its Marine Resource Committees (MRCs), Washington's Department of Ecology Director Ted Sturdevant appointed twelve stakeholder representatives, joined by four others representing the MRCs, to a coastal advisory body on ocean policy recently named Washington's Coastal Marine Advisory Council. The purpose of the council is to provide the state's Pacific coast stakeholders with a forum to advise the governor and the various state resource management agencies as to what issues, concerns, and/or needs exist along the coast. A recent, significant development was the appointment of Bob Nichols from Governor Gregoire's staff to the group as the Governor's liaison. This has reaffirmed the fact that the coast is a significant part of Washington with a distinct voice that is of high interest to the state.

One of the first opportunities for this advisory body is to provide its set of proposed ideas that will lay the foundation for undertaking coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP) for the state's Pacific Coast.

Creating a marine spatial plan for the coast will be a huge undertaking that will require sustained funding and ongoing collaboration between state agencies, local communities, tribal governments, and interested stakeholders to create a dynamic, integrated ocean usage framework. While such a

Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification

Washington State is on the front line of ocean acidification – an evolving condition of oceans and inland marine waters in which carbon dioxide enters seawater from the atmosphere or from the decomposition of organic matter. It is linked to, but separate from, the warming of the ocean due to climate change.

Low pH levels already affect oysters, clams, scallops, mussels and other animals along the Washington coast by reducing their ability to form shells or skeletons. Acidified waters are suspected of contributing to a recent crisis in larval supplies in the Northwest's shellfish industry. Some of the creatures that use calcium for their shells – like small sea butterflies, copepods, krill and crabs – are a critical link in the food chain. They provide food for herring, smelt and other small fish that are eaten by larger animals. What happens to the sea's smallest creatures directly or indirectly impacts species such as salmon, ling cod, halibut and whales.

The public is invited to meetings of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Ocean Acidification to learn more about this very challenging situation with enormous implications for our natural environment and the economy. The panel — the first of its kind in the nation — includes science experts, federal and state policy makers, tribal leaders, Washington's shellfish and fishing industries, non-profit environmental organizations and others. Its purpose is to develop recommendations on what our state can do to respond to ocean acidification and reduce its harmful effects on Washington's ecosystem and economy. For meeting information,

video clips, presentations and more visit: www.ecy.wa.gov/water/marine/oceanacidification.html

Coccolithophorids are single cell plant plankton. These beautiful organisms surround themselves with minute and highly structured calcite plates, called coccoliths. Too small to be seen with most microscopes, they are nevertheless an important food source for juvenile salmon and other fish.

*Riebesell, Ulf; Zondervan, Ingrid; Rost, B; Zeebe, R E; Tortell, Philippe D; Morel, Francois M M (2000): Seawater carbonate chemistry and processes during experiments with *Emiliania huxleyi* (PML B93/11A), 2000. doi:10.1594/PANGAEA.726883



*Normal coccolithophorid. Source: Riebesell et al. 2000**



*Coccolithophorids at low pH. Source: Riebesell et al. 2000**

Advisory Council from page 7

task is challenging, the hope is that the regulatory framework associated with any such plan would ensure the continuation of existing, sustainable economic uses while addressing how new emerging uses will be integrated along the coast.

The group is currently drafting operating procedures, creating a committee structure, and establishing its own voice. Doug Kess, from Pacific County, was elected the organization's chair with Rod Fleck from Forks elected vice chair. The group will be meeting on July 27, 2012 in Grays Harbor and those interested are welcome to attend. More information on the coastal advisory body is available at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/ocean/advisorygroup.html> or by contacting Jennifer Hennessey by phone at: (360) 407-6595 or email at: jennifer.hennessey@ecy.wa.gov.

WDFW Neah Bay “Area 4B” Recreational Fishery Research Project

by Lorna Wargo, WDFW

In 2011, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) initiated a three-part research project at Neah Bay. The project’s purpose is to evaluate conservation measures implemented to protect rockfish specifically in Marine Catch Area “4B,” an area that extends east from Tatoosh Island to the Sekiu River.



*John Pabutski, WDFW technician, holds a vermilion rockfish caught, and quickly released after the collection of data, in Marine Catch Area “4B” as part of a WDFW recreational fishery research project.
Photo: Tami Pokorny*

In response to rockfish abundance concerns, more conservative recreational fishing rules for Area 4B were adopted in 2010. These new fishing regulations included a deep water (>120ft) closure for bottomfish fishing; no-retention of rockfishes other than black and blue; and a daily limit of six black and blue rockfish combined. Additionally, the aggregated daily limit for bottomfish was reduced from 15 to 10 in 2011. In evaluating these measures, the project is also piloting new tools for monitoring recreational fisheries. With the National Marine Fisheries Service listing three Puget Sound rockfish species (canary, yelloweye and bocaccio) under the Endangered Species Act and the corresponding federal permitting requirements for recreational fisheries, it is clear more rigorous fishery monitoring is vital to meet managers’ increased need for information.

In the first part of the project, WDFW marine fish scientists are analyzing data collected through established dockside sampling programs to evaluate the effectiveness of regulation changes in meeting the expected reductions in rockfish mortality in the sport fishery.

A “test” fishery to evaluate the mix of bottomfish species in Area 4B comprises the second part of the project. WDFW biologists and technicians are employing recreational angling techniques and gears to fish for rockfish in Area 4B to help determine the following: how catch varies by targeting pattern, area, depth, and season; and how test fishery catch rates and observations correspond to those observed in the recreational fishery. The initial test fishery was conducted from July to September 2011 and is currently being repeated (April – September 2012). Over the course of the season, two test fishery cruises of 10-12 days each will be completed monthly. Following study design criteria, agency staff fish for a prescribed number of “rod-hours” each day at randomly determined depths and locations.

The third component of the research project is a voluntary logbook program. This pilot effort is testing the use of a voluntary angler logbook as a cost-effective, long-term approach to monitoring the recreational bottomfish fishery. The logbook will be used to obtain detailed information about the chronology and catches from individual fishing trips throughout



*A China rockfish, also from Marine Catch Area “4B.”
Photo: Tami Pokorny*

the whole year. Sport anglers were enlisted to help design the logbooks which were distributed in June. An initial core group of volunteers, trained for rockfish species identification, will document their fishing activities and submit reports on a monthly basis.

Both the pilot test fishery and logbook program aim to provide valuable data and insights to evaluate fishery monitoring programs and identify improvements. To this end, WDFW seeks to collaborate with recreational anglers who are interested in rockfish conservation and willing to share their expertise.

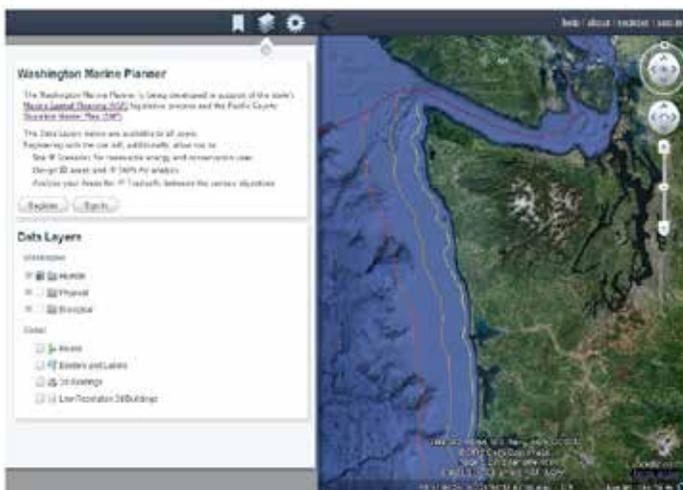
CMSP and Washington Marine Planner Introduced in Forks

Recent legislation requires Washington to begin Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP) for the Pacific Coast, as well as elsewhere (see also “Washington’s Coastal Marine Advisory Council” on page 7). This effort and process is of importance to our community as it will have implications for existing and future uses of our marine waters.

On June 26, Jennifer Hennessey of the Washington Dept. of Ecology presented information about CMSP at the Olympic Natural Resources Center in Forks. Paul Dye and Matt Marsik of The Nature Conservancy also introduced the Washington Marine Planner, a geographic information system built on Google Earth that is designed to help address fundamental gaps in the data available to support marine spatial planning.

The planner is a customizable web-based tool designed to help explore trade-offs between, in particular, renewable energy and marine conservation management objectives. It provides a process for integrating existing databases with local knowledge about coastal and marine resources and their use. The Conservancy and Ecotrust have begun a pilot project in Pacific County to support CMSP and their Shoreline Master Program Update.

Participants in the Forks event left the ONRC with a better sense of what coastal marine spatial planning is, how the Washington Marine Planner could be used, and why CMSP is important to people who live, work and play along the Washington coast. The MRC is hoping to have similar educational sessions on CMSP in the Fall.



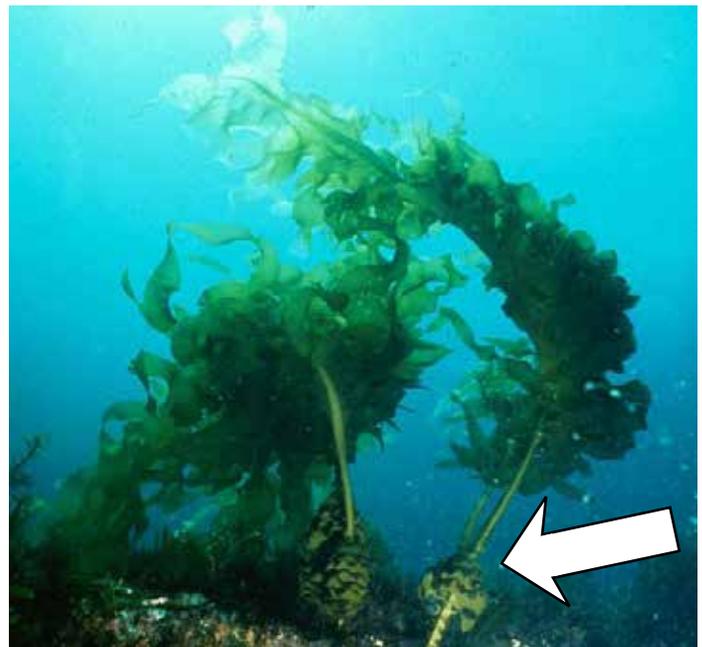
For more information see <http://washington.marineplanning.org>

Watch Out for WAKAME on Tsunami Debris

The enormous dock that beached in Oregon in early June was colonized by wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*), a kelp species now found around the world and as far north along the West Coast as San Francisco Bay. Tsunami debris is likely to be a vector for future arrivals of wakame and other potentially invasive species. A native of Japan, it was first observed in southern California in early 2000 and is highly invasive and disruptive of native kelp ecosystems.

Wakame is most likely to be found on larger objects, such as floating docks or pier pilings, which were suspended on or in the water while in Japan. If you suspect wakame, contact Allen Pleus, WDFW aquatic invasive species coordinator, Ph: (360) 902-2724. Email pictures, the date and time found, and location information to him at Allen.Pleus@dfw.wa.gov. If it is safe to do so, collect a sample in a plastic bag and keep it cool. Wakame has a spiral, frilly part just above the holdfast (rootlike structure that releases spores). Our native brown kelp lacks this part.

Read and follow NOAA marine debris handling guidelines: <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/info/japanfaqs.html>



Wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*) is a highly invasive kelp species native to Japan and cultivated there. Source: Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) of Australia. Arrow points to the spiral, frilly part.

Descending Devices Aid Survival of Rockfish

by Lorna Wargo, WDFW

Nationwide, recreational angling associations, fishery management entities and researchers are exploring best practice approaches to improve the survival of sport caught fish from deep water. In Washington, popular marine sport fisheries catch rockfish. Inhabiting nearshore areas to deep ocean waters, rockfish experience an expansion of their swim bladder when brought to the surface which makes it difficult for them to swim back down. Studies have shown that rapid return of rockfish to the water is very important to their survival. A descending device can be used to quickly return rockfish to the depth they were caught. A variety of devices can be purchased; instructions for home-made options are also available.

WDFW coastal rockfish projects now utilize descending devices as a “best practice” when tagging. As part of the Neah Bay “Area 4B” recreational fishery research project, WDFW researchers are using different descending devices to evaluate effectiveness and ease of use across rockfish species, fishing depths and locations. To promote the use of descending devices among recreational anglers, WDFW is engaging in outreach efforts scheduled for summer 2012.



*A WDFW technician inserts a coded wire tag in a black rockfish.
Photo: WDFW*

Rockfish Tagging Project from page 3

To collect this scientific information requires tagging thousands of rockfish annually. Most tagging trips depart from Westport, Washington but many trips also originate from Ilwaco, La Push and Neah Bay. During a typical tagging trip, 10 to 12 volunteer anglers are tasked with catching rockfish - as many as possible. WDFW biologists and technicians then scan the rockfish to detect previously placed tags and collect biological data such as length, sex and tissue samples for genetic analysis before releasing the fish back to the water. If no tag is detected, the fish is tagged using a PIT (Passive Integration Transponder) tag similar to the kind used for pets. The tag number is recorded electronically and again biological data are collected. Processing time, from the time a fish is brought onboard, tagged, measured and released, is about 15 seconds. When necessary, a live-well is utilized to fully recover fish prior to release. Eventually, tagged fish are caught by anglers onboard charter vessels and private recreational vessels. The charter vessels deliver the carcasses to port where technicians scan them for tags. Over the years, millions of carcasses have been screened for the presence of these tags and from these recoveries we have learned more about black rockfish abundance, seasonal distribution and migration patterns.



Two examples of descending devices. Photo: Tami Pokorny

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Copper rockfish on a descending device. Photo: Lorna Wargo