

Program Meeting
**Introducing
Twin Harbors Waterkeeper**
*December 1st - 1:30 pm,
Hoquiam Library
Downstairs Meeting Room*

November
December
2019



The Sandpiper



Damn Dam Proposal

The new millennium ushered in an era of dam removal following a century-long binge of damming rivers across the country and around the world. The conservation group American Rivers reports that in 2018 alone more than 82 dams were taken down in the U.S. restoring more than 1200 river miles.

Reversing the damage dams wreak on salmon has been a driving force behind their removal. So why is the State of Washington studying a proposal to build a new dam on the Chehalis River, one of the most productive wild salmon rivers in the state?

Building a flood control dam in the Upper Chehalis Basin has been debated going back more than 20 years. The current proposal, now in the environmental review phase, gained traction following the catastrophic flood of 2007 which inundated the cities of Chehalis and Centralia and surrounding properties and submerged and closed I-5 for five days.

The dam has been proposed as part of the Chehalis Basin Strategy (Strategy), a state initiative created in 2014 with a two-pronged mission to both reduce flood damage and restore salmon habitat throughout the entire Chehalis Basin. Even if it works as planned the dam would not eliminate all flooding but aims to reduce the peak flood elevation in the cities of Centralia and Chehalis during a major flood.

According to the dam's sponsor, the Chehalis River Basin Flood Control Zone District, approximately 2,500 "structures of value" are in the 100-year floodplain upstream of Grand Mound in the upper Basin. A core objective of the dam is to remove flood risk to 635 of those structures. The cost of the

dam could easily top \$1 billion with expected cost overruns.

Communities in the lower Basin, including the cities of Aberdeen, Hoquiam, Elma and Montesano would stand to benefit little, if at all, from the dam in terms of reducing flood damage, yet would bear the costs and potential impacts of the dam to the Chehalis River ecosystem, including salmon runs that support both tribal and non-tribal commercial fisheries. The Lower Chehalis River and its estuary make up the most economically important waterway for Quinault Nation fishermen.

The potential impacts of the dam to the Chehalis River system are likely to be many and varied and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (**DEIS**) being prepared by the WA Dept. of Ecology is intended to detail and analyze those impacts.

What is already known is that the Upper Chehalis River where the dam would be built is a stronghold for salmon and steelhead with great potential for habitat restoration to increase their abundance. Notably, no salmon runs in the Chehalis River are currently listed under America's Endangered Species Act, a rarity not only in Washington State, but for rivers up and down the West coast.

As has been well-documented, salmon play a critical role in supporting entire ecosystems. When they return to their birth waters to spawn salmon feed myriad animals from bears to Bald Eagles and Osprey. And while they don't actually eat salmon, songbirds are more abundant on salmon rivers, benefiting from the nutrients decaying carcasses infuse into the food webs birds and other wildlife depend upon.

continued on page 3



Photo by Shane Anderson

The President's Perch



By Janet Strong

Here's a little "salad bar" of tidbits about this and that, well before your Thanksgiving feast:

If anyone doubts the fun to be had while birding with Mary O'Neil, just read the column to the right of this one. Even in miserable weather, the group finds a whole bunch of birds who don't seem to care that it is cold, raining or whatever. So I encourage each of you to join in, lend your eyes and focus those binocs on the next avian scene visited by our chapter birding group. Mary sets the dates and places and announces such at our meetings and by email.

The beautiful metal signs designed by Terry Small are now installed at Bottle Beach State Park and in Ocean Shores. O.S. Mayor Crystal Dingler says to look for them "along trails and walking areas near the water and dunes for good exposure" to the public. As you probably know, our chapter sign task force worked with Terry to incorporate our logo and many of the local birds we all love into her beautiful artwork. The students at Green Hill School in Chehalis manufactured them and Linda and I delivered them to the Westport and Ocean Shores areas. Soon the Westport signs should be showing up in appropriate places.

Election of 2020 Officers will take place at the December 1 program meeting. Our long-time Treasurer, Diane Schwickerath is resigning this month after serving faithfully for over ten years, paying the bills and keeping the books for our chapter. We owe her much more than thanks for all her conscientious work on the chapter's behalf. Please come and participate in the election of the Officers for 2020.

I wrote a poem to Fudge Point State Park, a new addition to our beloved state parks. It is located on Harstine Island:

*A new state park on the Sound,
Lovely place to walk around
Down from the forest to the beach,
With Mt. Rainier nearly in reach.
Sea lions cavorting up and down,
Rafts of ducks bouncing along,
Shorebirds zip just out of view
Protesting my presence – You are WHO?
I keep drift logs company
For an hour or two.
Life can't get better
Than this hour or two.*

Birding the basin

by Mary O'Neil

On a very wet, drizzly, Grays Harbor Wednesday Morning potential birders met at Tractor Supply Parking Lot to venture out into the mist in search of birds. After expressing concerns that no bird in it's right mind would be out in weather like this, the hardy 3 who showed up took off to drive the Brady Loop in spite of their misgivings. Once on the Brady Loop Road, it didn't take long before: "Slow Down", "Look over there", "What's that on the power line" and other such phrases filled the car. It took a good 2 hours to troll the 15 mile loop, and there were delightful surprises all along the way.

One of our first sightings was one of the most beautiful Kestrels I've ever seen. It was very pale and almost looked golden. (Maybe the tinted windows changed the colors a bit.) - But beautiful it was. In the same general location were California Scrub Jay, Red Shafted Flicker, and American Robin.

As we cruised through the fields, we were struck by the number of crows dining on bits of corn not quite all plowed under. Look - over in the tree on the far side of the field - Is that another crow? Wait a minute. Check out the little bird flying around it. That's the crow. The big bird in the tree was a juvenile Bald Eagle. About 3/4's of a mile farther were two more very large birds in the top of a snaggy Douglas-fir. Taking a closer look at these, you could definitely see the white heads and tails of adult Bald Eagles.

Farther along as we passed a well overgrown path marked "No Trespassing" we saw a curious trespasser at the far end of the path. (No easy sightings today.) Looking very hen-like, we wanted to call it a grouse - ruffed?, blue?, Spruce? (It was under a Sitka Spruce tree after all.) But it's tail did not quite conform to the wedge shape of a grouse's tail. It stood to walk and graze and then we saw the long pointy tail of the Ring Necked Pheasant.

In spite of earlier misgivings, the 3 happy birders concluded that they had an outstanding day.

The next field trip has not yet been mapped. December is coming on us very quickly and all are encouraged to get in on Christmas Bird Counts to name a few:

Leadbetter CBC (Pacific County) – tba, 2019 Coordinator: tba Wahkiakum CBC – December 30, 2019 Coordinator: Andrew Emlen Cowlitz-Columbia CBC – January 1, 2020 Coordinator: Bob Reistroffer. Grays Harbor (tba) and Olympia (Black Hills) (tba)

Remember: When stress gets you down Go Birding!

Dam Proposal Continued from Page 1

Of all the potential impacts of the dam to fish, the consequences for Spring Chinook are of particular concern. The abundance of Spring Chinook in the Upper Chehalis River where the dam would be built has declined by nearly 98% from historic levels. Even that alarming figure, however, may be optimistic. The WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife recently acknowledged that the abundance of Springers in the Chehalis River may have been overestimated in ongoing fish counts.

Spring Chinook are highly-prized by fishermen of all types, but for Chehalis Tribe and Quinault Indian Nation fishermen they hold special significance. Adult Spring Chinook return to their native rivers as early as February, historically a time of food scarcity for the tribes.



Photo Marine Mammal Commission

Spring Chinook are also particularly important for Southern resident orcas in that their migration timing comes at a critical feeding time for this population. Southern resident orcas typically travel along the Washington and Oregon coasts in Spring to hunt for Spring Chinook which are especially rich in fat and have the highest caloric value of all salmon species and runs. The controversial debate over removing four dams on the Lower Snake River has heated up in the last year due the potential to restore Spring Chinook runs to feed orcas.

While the plight of Spring Chinook is especially dire, salmon runs throughout the Pacific Northwest are in trouble as the effects of climate change intensify. Warm ocean temperatures seen in recent years, for example, have meant lean times for salmon as the productivity of their prey, like plankton and krill, falls.

We can't control poor ocean conditions but we can control how hard we work to protect and restore the freshwater habitat so important to salmon. We can also control whether or not we build a new dam, which would pile on more of the kind of cumulative impacts to salmon that have led to their severe decline.

Many conservation and angler groups as well as the Chehalis Tribe have already said they oppose the dam. The Quinault Indian Nation, the only tribe with treaty rights in the Chehalis Basin, will eventually take a position based on its independent scientific evaluation of the dam's possible impacts on the Nation's treaty rights and resources, particularly salmon fisheries.

The year 2020 will be a critical year of decision making about the dam, beginning with the release of the state's **DEIS** on February 27, 2020. That will be a critical opportunity for the public to speak up about the dam and the future of the Chehalis Basin.

We'll keep you posted!

What's the alternative to building a dam?

Addressing the flooding challenges in the Basin without building a dam would likely rely on many and various actions such as restoring natural floodplain functions, moving people out of harm's way and keeping them out of danger in the first place.

Many actions, such as forest and wetlands restoration, installing engineered logjams and building other structures to restore the complexity of river channels and banks, would also improve conditions for salmon and other aquatic species. Additional actions could include voluntary property buyouts and conservation easements, improved land use practices, and flood proofing measures such as building flood walls and raised platforms to protect specific structures and provide refuge for people and livestock.



A study published today in the journal *Science* reveals that since 1970, bird populations in the United States and Canada have declined by 29 percent, or almost 3 billion birds, signaling a widespread ecological crisis. The results show tremendous losses across diverse groups of birds and habitats—from iconic songsters such as meadowlarks to long-distance migrants such as swallows and backyard birds including sparrows.

“Multiple, independent lines of evidence show a massive reduction in the abundance of birds,” said Ken Rosenberg, the study’s lead author and a senior scientist at the *Cornell Lab of Ornithology* and *American Bird Conservancy*. “We expected to see continuing declines of threatened species. But for the first time, the results also showed pervasive losses among common birds across all habitats, including backyard birds.”

The study notes that birds are indicators of environmental health, signaling that natural systems across the U.S. and Canada are now being so severely impacted by human activities that they no longer support the same robust wildlife populations.

The findings show that of nearly 3 billion birds lost, 90 percent belong to 12 bird families, including sparrows, warblers, finches, and swallows—common, widespread species that play influential roles in food webs and ecosystem functioning, from seed dispersal to pest control.

Among the steep declines noted: Grassland birds are especially hard hit, with a 53-percent reduction in population—more than 720 million birds—since 1970.

Shorebirds, most of which frequent sensitive coastal habitats, were already at dangerously low

numbers and have lost more than one-third of their population.

The volume of spring migration, measured by radar in the night skies, has dropped by 14 percent in just the past decade.

“These data are consistent with what we’re seeing elsewhere with other taxa showing massive declines, including insects and amphibians,” said coauthor Peter Marra, senior scientist emeritus and former head of the *Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center* and now director of the *Georgetown Environment Initiative* at Georgetown University. “It’s imperative to address immediate and ongoing threats, both because the domino effects can lead to the decay of ecosystems that humans depend on for our own health and livelihoods—and because people all over the world cherish birds in their own right. Can you imagine a world without birdsong?”

Evidence for the declines emerged from detection of migratory birds in the air from 143 NEXRAD weather radar stations across the continent in a period spanning over 10 years, as well as from nearly 50 years of data collected through multiple monitoring efforts on the ground.

“Citizen-science participants contributed critical scientific data to show the international scale of losses of birds,” said coauthor John Sauer of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). “Our results also provide insights into actions we can take to reverse the declines.” The analysis included citizen-science data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey coordinated by the USGS and the Canadian Wildlife Service—the main sources of long-term, large-scale population data for North American birds—the *Audubon Christmas Bird Count*, and *Manomet’s International Shorebird Survey*.

Although the study did not analyze the causes of declines, it noted that the steep drop in North American birds parallels the losses of birds elsewhere in the world, suggesting multiple interacting causes that reduce breeding success and increase mortality. It noted that the largest factor driving these declines is likely the widespread loss and degradation of habitat, especially due to agricultural intensification and urbanization.



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
Georgetown Environment Initiative



Smithsonian
National Zoological Park
Conservation Biology Institute

Meeting program

Introducing Twin Harbors Waterkeeper



Lee First, will talk about the Chehalis River and Willapa River Watersheds' newly formed *Twin Harbors Waterkeeper* organization, which is part of the international group, Waterkeeper Alliance. Lee will take you on a virtual journey down the Chehalis River, from the headwaters of the proposed dam to the estuary in which it flows.

The meeting starts at 1:30 pm at the downstairs meeting room of the Hoquiam Library. Refreshments will be served and we will be making the drawing for the winning ticket for the owl quilt donated by master-quilter, Jule Monnens.



Last Chance

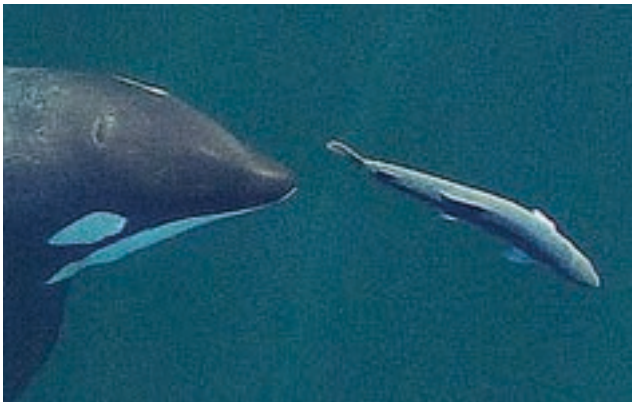
Tickets available at the December 1st meeting, Drawing at end of the meeting.



Signs Up

As you learned from last month's Sandpiper, Grays Harbor Audubon developed a grant which allowed us to post full-color signs at our local beaches and along the trail to Bottle Beach. The signs are up at Bottle Beach and we heard that Ocean Shores has their signs in place. We're waiting for the Port of Grays Harbor to place theirs in Westport, but expect to hear about an upcoming celebration, highlighting these important reminders. A special thanks to Terry Small who designed the signs.





A young resident killer whale chases a chinook salmon in the Salish Sea near San Juan Island, Washington, in September 2017. Oregon State University/Flickr

Feds propose PNW habitat protections for Orcas and Humpback whales

by Jes Burns Follow

Federal wildlife regulators are proposing to designate large swaths of the Pacific Ocean off Oregon, Washington and California as critical habitat for endangered humpback whales and orcas.

One of the habitat designations is specifically for Southern Resident Killer Whales, which spend about half the year in the Salish Sea north of Seattle. They feed on salmon. There are fewer than 80 of these orcas remaining.

The National Marine Fisheries Service is also proposing two critical habitat areas for two distinct groups of humpback whales that breed off the coast of Mexico and Central America. The new habitat designation covers the Pacific Northwest feeding grounds of the whales.

If finalized, the designation would provide an extra level of protection that would require any federally permitted project to consider impacts to the whale habitat.

“That’s anything from an Army Corps of Engineers permit for construction in water to a Navy sonar testing or training activity or NOAA doing a federal approval for a fishery,” said Lynne Barre, recovery coordinator for the NOAA Fisheries Southern Resident Killer Whale program.

It also would scrutinize offshore oil, gas and renewable energy projects in the designated area. At a public hearing in Newport, Oregon, Tuesday, local fishermen and crabbers voiced concern about the effects it would have on the fisheries. The Dungeness crab industry has been under pressure recently because of humpback whale entanglements in crabbing gear.

Related Coverage

‘There Aren’t A Lot Of Other Options:’ Port Orford’s Season Of Crab And Crisis

“A critical habitat designation can create a negative stigma,” said Oregon Coast Crab Association President Joseph Conchelos during the hearing.

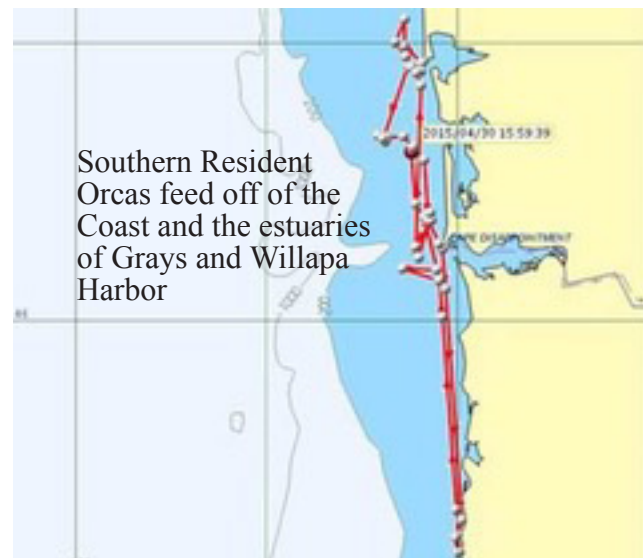
Because the Dungeness crab fishery is regulated by the states, there wouldn’t be any direct impact. And officials said the issue of entanglements is regulated by endangered species protections already in place.

The proposed critical habitat areas for the humpbacks and orcas overlap significantly. The total area comprises 233,000 square miles – an area about the size of Oregon, Washington and Idaho together.

“Right now, nothing short of bold and courageous actions are needed to recover Southern Resident Killer Whales. And this critical habitat designation for these whales is part of that,” said Ben Enticknap of the conservation group Oceana.

But Enticknap ended his support at excluding the Navy’s Quinault Underwater Tracking Range area near the Olympic Peninsula from the proposed designations for all three species. The Quinault Range is in key orca territory, but it was left off because of the potential impact on national security.

One more public hearing in the Pacific Northwest is planned in Seattle on Wednesday, Nov. 6. Public comment for the humpback critical habitat proposal closes Dec. 9. **Public comment for the Southern Resident Killer Whale proposal closes Dec. 18.**





**Audubon's 120th
Christmas Bird Count**
will be conducted
between the dates of
December 14, 2019
through
January 5, 2020

GHAS Mission

The mission of the Grays Harbor Audubon Society is to seek a sustainable balance between human activity and the needs of the environment, and to promote enjoyment of birds and the natural world

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**Grays Harbor Audubon Society
P.O. Box 470
Montesano, WA 98563**

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Program Meeting

Introducing

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***December 1st
1:30 - 3:00 pm***

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