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THE WILDSIDE



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THE WILDSIDE


June 2020


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UPCOMING EVENTS

Cocktails & Fishtales

June 17 at 6 p.m.
Facebook LIVE
Olympia oyster research in the south Puget Sound

July 15 at 6 p.m.
Facebook LIVE
Shoreline Management

August 19 at 6 p.m.
Gig Harbor Brewing*
Sharks of Washington State

Digital Summer Beach Walks
Check our full digital summer beach walk schedule online!

*Location subject to change due to the current pandemic.



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Please recycle

UPDATES FROM HWW

guessed by now, summer will look different at Harbor WildWatch this year. From the beginning of the pandemic, our team has met weekly via Zoom to answer the questions we all have and deciding the best way to support our community, volunteers, and team as we make digital pivots. We have taken our plans week-by-week, looking further ahead in broad strokes of contingency. I look forward to these meetings every week for the camaraderie over morning coffee and sanity of planning during such an uncertain time.

In fact, it seems that everyone's summer is going to look a little different. Maybe you had a special event, travel plans, hopes to go camping, a job or personal prospect... It looks different now.

Our team hopes that during this unsure time you can find your love for the environment, stewardship, and community through Harbor WildWatch. **We miss all of you.** Trust us when I say that you're constantly in our thoughts and considerations for our programs. Summer may look a little different, but different might be a new reason to stay curious and look at new opportunities.

What's next for Harbor WildWatch this summer? We joke that our lives are scheduled around the tides. If there's

Digital Programs and What's Ahead

Carly Vester, Communications Specialist

You've probably

a low tide, chances are, we're at the beach! Last year we led close to 40 public beach walks from June-August, plus weekly touch tanks at the Farmer's Market, Summer Sounds Concerts, and Movie nights.

While we are going to continue exploring our beautiful, local beaches digitally this summer, we also plan to mix things up a bit and share other Puget Sound beaches. This includes traveling north to the San Juan Islands and west to Tongue Point near Port Angeles. We hope that we can bring the familiar intertidal creatures to our community, as well as some new surprises they may not normally see in the south Puget Sound intertidal zone! Think urchins, sea slugs, kelp, and more.

Tune into both our Facebook page and YouTube channel all summer long for videos, most of which will be live and interactive.

And as always, thank you. Your support during this time means a great deal to all of us. We invite you to reach out to us if you have any specific ways *we* can support *you*. Maybe you're unable to go to a particular beach, or you simply have a burning science question. We're here for you.

We hope that you are staying healthy, taking a breather when and if you can, and finding a way to find the sunny spots... even if they're in your own home!

Photo above: Education Director, Rachel Easton, and Science Specialist, Stena Troyer, at Tonuge Point, Washington.

Volunteer Feature

Every year at Harbor WildWatch's Annual Meeting, we celebrate our wonderful volunteers. Cyndy Dillon has been a volunteer with Harbor WildWatch for over ten years and we are excited to recognize her as our Community Science Volunteer of the year. We sat down with Cyndy for a quick Q&A to talk about her experience with Harbor WildWatch, what she's learned, and her favorite parts about being a volunteer.

Tell us about becoming involved with Harbor WildWatch: I trained as a Beach Watcher volunteer in Kitsap County in 2009 with Joyce Murray, who told us about Harbor WildWatch. Beach Watchers let the few volunteers from Gig Harbor use Harbor WildWatch hours for our volunteer commitment. I also enjoyed getting back into marine biology that I studied in college.

What programs have you volunteered at? Mostly *Get Your Feet Wet* beach walks, a few *Pier Into the Night* touch tanks, and a couple of low tide Beach Surveys, but I also volunteer with Stena in Puget Sound Seabird Surveys at Purdy Sand Spit.

What is your favorite part about volunteering with Harbor WildWatch? Learning about invertebrates from the incredibly smart beach naturalists, who are so enthusiastic and always sharing new information.

Do you have any fun memories from volunteering that you would like to share? Watching the excitement of the kids in discovering marine life, such as a young boy who found a gunnel under a rock at Kopachuck and raced to gather others to observe it. I am also astounded by seaStars & Beyond students who sound like PhD candidates when they describe specific invertebrates. One not so fun memory at Narrows Beach was when a toddler touched a beached lion's mane jelly and wouldn't stop screaming, which set off his older brother too. We offered some meat tenderizer for the sting, but the mother whisked the boy off to an urgent care clinic.

Is there anything else you would like to share? Harbor WildWatch has done a tremendous job adapting to lockdown requirements in making information available online to volunteers and the public. *(Thanks for the kind words, Cyndy!)*



A "Yelp" From Kelp

Stena Troyer, Science Specialist

It wasn't in the budget for me to attend the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference this April, but it turns out that there are some silver linings to the COVID-19 situation. Due to social distancing requirements this in-person event in Vancouver, BC was re-organized at the last minute and held virtually. While it is a bummer that participants were prevented from being together in the same space, the virtual shift made this incredible event accessible to a wider audience, myself (and 3,500+ unique attendees) included! Over two days, this conference highlighted a range of the latest scientific research on the state of the Salish Sea.

Bull kelp (*Nereocystis luetkeana*) is one of more than 20 species of kelp found along the shorelines of British Columbia and Washington State. Within the Salish Sea, bull kelp is the primary species that forms a floating canopy or kelp forest. Kelp forests are important because they provide shelter for a diverse variety of marine wildlife including species of concern like Chinook salmon and

rockfish species. This critical habitat is also delicious!

According to one presentation featuring essentially a seaweed buffet, kelp crabs prefer eating bull kelp over many other species of brown algae.

As a primary producer, bull kelp is a food source for more than just kelp crabs, but many marine species and people too. I'm personally a big fan of bull kelp salsa! Another presentation found that nutrients gained from bull kelp can be detected in animals at the top of the food web. Even if the top predator doesn't eat kelp directly, they rely on the animals that do (again this includes people). Bull kelp clearly plays an integral role in the ecosystem and has value economically and culturally. It was also clear from this conference, that understanding the distribution of kelp is complicated. *(Continued on Page 3)*

What Am I? (Page 1): Sea Sacs or Sea Grapes (*Halosaccion glandiforme*)



SCIENCE WITH STENA

(Science with Stena, continued)

Bull kelp is difficult to study due to its largescale distribution along complex coastlines and sizeable seasonal variability (bull kelp is an annual species that flourishes in the spring/summer and dies away in the fall/winter). To tackle the challenge of better understanding what factors drive either persistence or loss kelp beds in the Salish Sea, research groups have used a variety of creative ways to collect data: from community science surveys using kayaks and GPS, to logging onto google maps and detecting kelp beds using satellite images.

The Washington Department of Natural Resource's presentation was one of my favorites because it synthesized a wide variety of historical and current data from the late 1800's to recent years in order to determine a baseline of kelp presence in the Puget Sound. Having a prediction about the historic presence of bull kelp helps us understand how this important habitat has changed.

While kelp forests along the Washington coast and Strait of Juan de Fuca generally have had stable (although variable) kelp forests, researchers found that since the 1870's, the extent of bull kelp decreased by 62% in the south Puget Sound. The exception to this extensive



Kelp Canopy loss in South Puget Sound, presented by Max Calloway with Puget Sound Restoration Fund

FIELD UPDATES

Pictured are Max and Michael. Michael joined our organization 9 years ago and he brought Max the very next year. Since then, these two have put in an impressive amount of hours serving as volunteers and interns and we are so grateful for their hard work and dedication over the years. Both are planning to pursue the sciences at University. When we received this photo of the two of them outside Harbor WildWatch, our whole team felt the joy and pride. Thank you both for inspiring stewardship of the Puget Sound — we are so proud of both of you!

decrease was bull kelp beds in the Tacoma Narrows where healthy beds persist today.

While the Narrows lacks the wave action associated with healthy kelp beds on the coast and in the strait, it is likely that the intense tidal currents in the Narrows act similarly to the benefits of wave action and this elevated water flow provides refuge from kelp stressors such as warmer water temperatures, low nutrient concentrations, and herbivorous predators like that bull kelp hungry kelp crab. Researchers from the Puget Sound Restoration Fund observed that these stressors increased in kelp beds the further south they were from the Narrows. The kelp bed along Squaxin Island, which is the most southern extent that bull kelp has been observed and a site with the most extreme exposure to stressors, continues to persist despite unfavorable kelp conditions. The kelp bed at Squaxin Island is a cautious cause for hope!

We know that kelp is environmentally, culturally, and economically important and a wide-scale loss of kelp habitats would be devastating. As climate change and other threats alter the marine environment, bull kelp may be used as an indicator of ecosystem health: if kelp is in trouble, whelp, we're in trouble. According to the reported declines, I'd say that kelp is "yelping for help" and thankfully people are taking notice. According to many of the presenters, stakeholders are collaborating on The Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan which is a regional response that provides a framework prioritizing kelp as a necessary element of ecosystem recovery. It is encouraging to know that there is consensus for coordinated action to research, manage, and ideally reverse the decline of kelp forests in our region.

If you'd like to learn more, the Northwest Straits Commission published the The Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan. You can also check out the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference website and watch the recorded presentations on kelp and beyond.

Con-"grad"-ulations!

We are so proud of our graduating Harbor WildWatch students and volunteers — congratulations to each and every one of them!

