



Oregon: One Last Piece of the Puzzle

Little Fish Are a Big Deal

Magnificent views, tide pools rich with life, and busy fishing ports are some of the characteristics that make the Oregon coast a special place for visitors and residents alike.

Just offshore, within sight of Oregon's public beaches, a vibrant marine ecosystem can be seen everywhere: the spouts of gray and humpback whales migrating nearby, satisfied fishermen with their day's bounty, and thick swarms of seabirds such as sooty shearwaters, marbled murrelets, and common murrets gliding along the ocean surface. All of this activity depends on an abundance of small fish—commonly known as forage fish—that provide the fuel for this system but tend to go unrecognized by the general public.

In recent years, decision-makers around the world have begun to recognize the role that these small, schooling prey fish play in healthy oceans.

California and Washington have established policies to conserve forage fish in state waters for the sake of the broader ecosystem. In addition, the Pacific Fishery Management Council recently voted unanimously to forestall the expansion of fishing on forage species such as sand lance, sauries, and smelts. Oregon's representatives on the council provided the leadership necessary to protect forage fish in federal waters extending from three to 200 miles offshore. Action by Oregon state leaders is the last piece of the puzzle needed to complete protection for West Coast forage fish.

Oregon should join Washington and California and adopt a policy to conserve forage fish in state waters, which extend three miles from its coast. By protecting forage fish, we protect the marine food web and all the wildlife that depend upon it. And Oregonians will be able to enjoy the benefits of a healthy ocean, from fresh seafood to whale watching, and exploring coastal waters teeming with life, for years to come.



The ocean off Oregon's coast is one of the most productive marine ecosystems on Earth.

Prevailing winds pull nutrient-rich water from the ocean depths in the spring and summer, stimulating the growth of microscopic plants and animals known as plankton. This upwelling creates a rich feeding ground for forage fish, which converge in vast schools known as bait balls that become a buffet for everything else in the ocean. Seabirds, whales, and highly migratory fish such as albacore tuna travel thousands of miles from the western Pacific to congregate along Oregon's narrow continental shelf. From Astoria to Brookings, fishermen and fishing communities thrive because of predator fish attracted by an abundance of forage fish.

Oregon does not regulate forage species such as sand lance, sauries, and squids, leaving these prey fish vulnerable to new fisheries that can start up with no catch limits or conservation measures in place.

Forage fish represent a crucial piece of a healthy ocean. It's time for Oregon to protect them.



Take action:

Ask the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a forage fish management plan that will protect forage fish as a critical component in a healthy marine ecosystem. Write the department at odfw.comments@state.or.us.

For further information, please visit:

pewenvironment.org/pacificfish

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