Grant funds sea lion barriers on Rogue River

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Sea lions that gather near the mouth of the Rogue River will soon find that their lounging areas have been blocked off the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) announced Monday.

Approximately 350 feet of barrier will be put up on local mooring docks to discourage sea lions from frequenting the boat basin and Rogue River estuary. Curry Sportfishing Association, the primary sponsor of the project, will build the barrier.

Last year, Curry Sportfishing Association members constructed a 60-foot barrier on a breakwater and 150 feet of barriers on boat docks. This yearâ€™s project will add to the existing barriers to make it much more difficult for the sea lions to haul out and rest.

The project is funded in part by a $20,000 grant from the ODFW's Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program. The Curry Sportfishing Association is contributing $38,212. In addition to the R&E Program grant, ODFW is contributing $30,399 to the project including hazing and barrier equipment, consultation and hazing monitoring. The National Marine Fisheries Service is providing $4,500.

Sea lion predation on runs of Rogue River fall chinook salmon, along with the animals stealing fish from anglers, has been increasing in the estuary over the past five years.

â€œMany sea lions have learned that it is very easy to take a salmon off an anglerâ€™s line,â€• said Todd Confer, ODFW district fish biologist. â€œThis resulted in a significant impact on the fishery that affected both local commercial fishers and sport anglers.â€•

The barriers, which consist of pipe barricades and motion-activated sprinklers, are part of a three-part effort

that was implemented last year and includes: putting up barriers on docks and breakwaters to make it more difficult for sea lions to loiter in the boat basin; to remove fish carcasses from fish cleaning stations; and to haze sea lions from the estuary.

According to Curry Sportfishing Association president Mark Lottis, the organization raised $30,000 to hire a full-time hazer in 2006 who chased sea lions from the estuary using seal bombs and cracker shells, which produce noise to frighten the animals, but causes them no physical harm. The group plans to have a hazer on the water again this year during the July through mid-September peak salmon fishing season.

â€œLast yearâ€™s hazing program was excellent,â€• said Lottis. â€œWe couldnâ€™t have hoped for better results.â€•

In 2005, between 50 and 75 percent of salmon that were hooked by anglers were taken from their lines by sea lions. The 2006 hazing program reduced that number to about five percent. The group expects to see similar results this year, with fewer sea lions lingering in the estuary and boat basin due to the additional barriers.

Created by the Oregon Legislature in 1989, the Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program is funded by a surcharge on sport and commercial fishing licenses and commercial poundage fees. The programâ€™s seven-member citizen board reviews fish restoration and enhancement project proposals and makes funding recommendations to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

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