

viewpoint

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Connect to Oceans

Protection of our state's resources shouldn't stop at the shoreline BY KITTY PIERCY

One of the reasons I love serving the city of Eugene and the state of Oregon is the dedication of so many to preserving our most spectacular natural resources. We act locally to ensure these protections. Surely one of the most important is our beaches. Every year, Eugeneans flock to Strawberry Hill, Heceta Head and the Oregon Dunes to stroll, boat, fish and tidepool with their friends and families. Oregon would not be the same without these special places. The world depends on their survival.

As we approach Earth Day, I urge each of you to remember former Gov. Oswald West's move, almost 100 years ago, to create strong protections for Oregon's beaches. I think we can all agree it was done with much foresight and planning for the future. That bold stroke ensured preservation of our beaches' natural beauty and heritage for generations to come. Now there are efforts underway to protect the waters that flow into the cliffs and rockpiles around Astoria Canyon and the rocky reefs off Cape Blanco. As interconnected elements that contribute to the survival and health of Oregon's ecosystem, our ocean and its beaches depend on each other.

Our ocean is not inexhaustible. We've seen the rich array of Oregon's ocean creatures seriously decline over time. More than 150 years ago, fur traders exterminated sea otters from our coast. While California and Washington residents still witness sea otters living in their natural habitat, we in Oregon see them only in aquariums. Oregon's groundfish industry has lost more than half its income to declining fish stocks since the early 1990s. Beach and fishing closures have become all too commonplace.

One solution proposed by the nonprofit group Oregon Ocean and Gov. Kulongoski is the implementation of marine reserves in our state waters — areas where fish, wildlife and plants can thrive untouched by invasive trawls, traps, nets and lines. It seems unworthy of us that Oregon, a pioneer in the creation of state parks along its coastline, is the only state on the West Coast without any marine reserves. California has just adopted a marine habitat protection plan in waters off their central coast between San Jose and Santa Barbara that would put in place a network of marine protected areas across 200 square miles of ocean.

Studies have shown that these marine reserves are particularly valuable in promoting stable, healthy fisheries. With a large host of plants and animals living in a pristine area, fish have a chance to recover, growing big and fertile. Scientists have found that fish in marine reserves will double their population size and grow 30 percent larger than fish outside of reserves. When these networks of marine reserves are carefully placed, they

can help the areas in between the reserves, since healthy fish "spill over" into areas that are valuable to our state's fisheries.

What made the creation of California's marine protected areas so unique was the high level of public involvement. The state brought together an enormous, diverse group of people — divers, fishers, local residents, business representatives and scientists with decades of experience studying California's coastal waters — to design a proposal for the Fish & Game Commission. This process underscores the importance of taking into account *all* of the ways Oregonians use the ocean — from fishing and boating to research and surfing.

Educating the public is essential in order to ensure that our state's ocean conservation efforts are well-understood and inclusive. I want you to know that a great opportunity for each of you to learn more about the science of marine reserves and the threats facing Oregon's ocean is the screening of the film *Common Ground: Oregon's Ocean*, playing Tuesday, April 24, in Lillis 182 at the UO. The short, free documentary will be followed by a panel discussion with scientists, fishermen, conservationists, policy makers and the audience. Put it on your list of really important "to dos."

We in Oregon led the nation in creating public beaches and ocean state parks. We should show this same foresight by creating "underwater parks" through marine reserves. We mayors across Oregon need to join with our communities and band together to create a strong voice in support of this state, national and, yes, world resource. One great way to celebrate Earth Day is to view next week's film and talk about how marine reserves make us responsible stewards of our ocean's wealth for this and future generations. Oh, heck, do more than view. Get inspired, and like Eugeneans always do, take action.

Kitty Piercy is the mayor of Eugene. For more info on the oceans, visit www.oceansonline.org