

Posted: Oct 31, 2007 - 08:24:42 PDT

---



### **Capturing the image of Oregon's ocean**

Do you know what Oregon's ocean looks like underwater? I didn't until a few years ago, despite having lived in the central Oregon coast range for nearly 20 years. Like many Oregonians, I enjoy Oregon's ocean bounty topside - I crab in the Alsea Bay, kayak in the bays and the ocean and buy my fish from the docks in Newport. \_\_\_Few of us get the privilege of seeing what lies beneath the surface of our beautiful coastal waters. As a filmmaker, I got lucky, however. The film "Common Ground: Oregon's Ocean" came about because of my interest to learn about the state of our ocean, and ask the question, are we doing okay? I spoke to world-renowned scientists at Oregon State University and learned that we have one of the most productive ocean ecosystems in the temperate world. Oregon's underwater landscape is remarkable not only for its deep underwater canyons and stunning mountains, but also for its status as an unsung hero in Oregon's landscape. But, these same scientists are raising red flags of warning for our underwater Yellowstones.

During production of "Common Ground," I had conversations with family fishermen up and down the coast who echoed what the scientists said. I heard over and over again their concerns about the decline of fish stocks. Anyone who reads this paper has heard of the boom and bust fishery cycles that have plagued our coast, the now frequent dead zones, the uncertainty of the status of nearshore fish stocks and rampant coastal development. It's undisputed that we all want a healthy ocean and rich fisheries for future generations.

The question is, how to get there? Do we rely on existing regulations and just accept more of the same and increased instability for Oregon's fisheries? Or, do we reverse our downward course and embrace one of the most promising conservation tools out there now - marine reserves.

In the dozens of "Common Ground" screenings and discussions we held in communities along the coast, I was impressed by the strong and diverse interest and support for marine reserves. Right now I am working with fishermen on the southern Oregon coast who are putting forward their own proposal for marine reserves in their fishing grounds. They decided to be proactive and wanted to be sure that they'd maintain their fisheries for the future.

Setting aside areas of our ocean for fish to feed, breed and thrive is a relatively new concept for Oregon, but it's a concept whose time has come. It only makes sense that in this state, which revolutionized the state park system with Governor Oswald West's initiative to create ocean-front state parks, extend its conservation ethic out into the open ocean, where millions of plants and wildlife will enjoy strong protection. These underwater parks will be just as beneficial as parks on land-they'll preserve habitat and marine life that are essential to a healthy coastal economy and way of life.

By filming these magnificent underwater landscapes, I've done my part to capture what our ocean looks like now. Now it's time for others to do the same by supporting marine reserves in order to bring our underwater ecosystems closer to how they were left to us, so that our children can look back and say "thanks."

I encourage you to also sneak a peek at what lies underneath the waves off of Driftwood or Agate Beach or any of your favorite local beaches. There's a lot worth saving in these special coastal places that some of us have been lucky enough to call home. If you haven't seen "Common Ground: Oregon's Ocean" yet, please e-mail me at [karen@greenfireproductions.org](mailto:karen@greenfireproductions.org), and I'll send you a complimentary DVD.

Karen Meyer is the executive director of Green Fire Productions. Her film "Common Ground: Oregon's Ocean" has been shown in more than 35 cities and towns across Oregon.