

Documentary offers underwater view, will fuel discussion

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February 18, 2009

Oregon filmmakers Karen and Ralf Meyer captured a view of the Oregon Coast that most residents never see.

Accompanied by professional divers, the couple and their company, Green Fire Productions, explored the underwater world off the coast in a series of documentaries titled "Common Ground," the latest of which premieres tonight in Salem.

The color, intensity and diversity of Oregon's sea life surprises audiences, Karen Meyer said.

She said she often hears, "I thought there was only marine life like that in the tropics."

The documentaries aren't just pretty scenes. Karen Meyer, who grew up along the Pacific Coast, hopes the films inspire residents to protect Oregon's ocean waters. The films make a case for establishing marine reserves, which are underwater state parks that protect sea life within their boundaries.

Oregon is the only state on the Pacific Coast that doesn't have such reserves.

"Marine reserves are an important tool to have in place to help build a healthy ocean and resilient ocean," she said.

Biologists interviewed in the documentary explain the benefits of reserves. They include larger, healthier marine life, greater diversity and increased ability to deal with stresses such as global warming. The documentary also chronicles Oregon's progress toward establishing reserves.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski's recommended budget includes money for two pilot marine-reserve sites — Otter Rock near Depoe Bay and Redfish Rocks near Port Orford — that could begin this summer. There also is money to fund studies for four additional sites: Cape Falcon, Cascade Head, Cape Perpetua and Cape Arago.

Not everyone supports reserves, which would prohibit fishing within their boundaries. Some coastal residents worry about the economic impact to the fishing industry.

The governor's recommendations include more time to collaborate with coastal communities



Courtesy of Oregon Coast Aquarium
Special to the S

Rocky reefs along the Oregon Coast host a wide range of sea life, including these strawberry anemones.

Premiere

What: "Common Ground III" explores the underwater world off the Oregon Coast and includes a discussion about establishing marine reserves to protect it. The 18-minute film documents the vibrant sea life in Oregon waters. A panel discussion will follow the film.

When: 5:30 p.m. today.

Where: Micah Building, 680 State St., Salem.

Cost: Free.

Contact: (503) 221-7922, Ext. 12.

Online

To watch "Common Ground III" or to see the other two films in the series, go to http://www.oceansonline.org/common_ground/cg_video.html

and others as well as gather information about effects.

Those four sites are at least two years out, said Jay Charland, a staffer with Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council.

"It's important having communities feel comfortable with what is going on," he said.

Supporters, including Susan Allen of Our Ocean, said the reserves would act as a savings account so that future generations can enjoy all coast activities, including fishing. Allen represents a coalition of groups interested in preserving coastal waters.

"The series is very helpful in presenting a balanced picture of what's happening," Allen said.

The previous "Common Ground" documentaries drew thousands of Oregonians to screenings starting with the first film in 2005. It inspired one town, Port Orford, to recommend its own marine reserve — one of the pilot programs.

Karen Meyer hopes the films continue to inspire conversations about protecting the coast. Each screening includes a panel discussion with scientists, conservationists and fishing-industry representatives.

"The ocean has always been a special place to me," Karen Meyer said.

"I love fresh seafood, and I enjoy the communities. And I want to see the places prosper and continue on in the future."

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Common Ground videos:

http://www.oceansonline.org/common_ground/cg_video.html