

# The Oregonian

## Marine reserve proposal whips up furor

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**The Oregonian**

A so-not funny thing happened Monday on Gov. Ted Kulongoski's way to force-feeding a system of marine reserves off the Oregon Coast.

Innocent businesses were hurt . . . anglers were short-sheeted . . . clouds gathered . . . rain fell on a parade.

Here's what happened:

A Portland-area boat dealer agreed to a conservation organization's request to stage a spring chinook salmon clinic.

Late the previous week, an agenda was published that included the seminar and listed a briefing on marine reserve/no-fishing zones among the angling seminar topics. It was a red-hot button.

Anglers who are painfully aware of (and violently opposed to) the governor's plan to create up to nine reserve sites along the 300-mile coastline reacted electronically, on the Internet, via cell and other phones and back and forth across the Blackberry cyber-thicket. A boycott was suggested, and the boat dealer (unaware of the coastal firestorm) was flooded with calls when he opened his doors for business after the weekend. Some warned him they would picket the store.

"What is going on?" the dealer asked me Monday when he called for some contact information to help rescue him from the Maelstrom. "All I wanted to do was show anglers how to catch more salmon."

Passion, poison and paranoia are at the boiling point on the coast (and beyond) over Kulongoski's demand that the state initiate a modest system of experimental marine reserves. This, despite a recent whirlwind tour of coastal communities by the governor's staff to take the temperature and try to salve some wounds.

It's about the only thing his staff has done right (although it should have included a few meetings inland, where thousands of other ocean users live).

It was too late.

By trying to force the system into existence, the governor's office polarized the coast, alienated anglers, stripped them of their historic reputation for conservation and, almost certainly, guaranteed the involvement of the Legislature.

A few anecdotal thumbnails:

Beginning in April, coastal communities are supposed to come up with lists of areas they would like included in marine reserves, whether or not they want them. The list will be perused by the state's Ocean Policy Advisory Council. The council members are deeply divided, but most want to slow down and smell the salt air.

A system of wave energy parks carrying even greater potential consequences remains an unknown despite requests from some council members to fold it into the process.

No one knows how the mechanics of the reserves -- protection, research, enforcement, etc. -- will be

funded. In a similar effort well under way in California, the state apparently has turned over the reserves to out-of-state environmental groups that caused wide areas of the state's coast to be closed to fishing with little justification. The same organizations have the governor's ear.

Late last week, the ocean council's science and technical advisory committee took the unprecedented step of advising against the speed of the process.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife was deeply involved in the research and development of nearshore habitats but has had to pull money and effort from those projects to deal with the furor. Fact is, the department is doing a much better job of managing ocean resources than almost any other state, but a biological and scientific decision has been remanded to a political process.

The Sierra Club, which has made significant progress in bridging gaps between environmentalists and anglers or hunters, stands to lose much of that momentum. The request to the boat dealer for the supposed spring chinook clinic came from the Sierra Club. Huh? Since when has the Sierra Club been interested in helping anglers catch more fish?

Internationally recognized and deeply respected marine biologists who can speak eloquently to the effects of marine reserves are being pilloried instead of heeded.

A report on lessons learned from establishing an excellent system of reserves in British Columbia has been largely ignored by the governor's office.

"I didn't know what to tell my client," said Trey Carskadon of BDC Advertising, who handles the boat dealer's account. "I thought it would blow over in a day or two, but the more I learn about marine reserves, the more I see how complex it is."

Needless to say, the event was canceled.

"There are some very good reasons to have some protected zones where people can expect to see and enjoy marine resources without harvest," Mike Jespersen of Aloha said.

Jespersen runs an ocean charter business out of Depoe Bay and is among the most measured voices in opposition to the current process.

"I don't have problems with the idea of providing marine parks," he said, "but the whole process is basically messed up."

Jespersen said many areas of the coast already are in de facto reserve status because of their inaccessibility and low use by anglers and divers. Marine protected areas such as those off Three Arch Rocks and other coastal reefs and islands should be studied first, he said.

The governor's process needs to get back to basics. Instead of railing against reserves, anglers should be asking for them from the same moral high ground they routinely insist on raising their own fees to pay for fish and wildlife management . . . or for more protection for salmon and steelhead . . . or for better habitat inland and elsewhere.

Kulongoski's staff has tainted the public's perception of anglers into one of greed and narrow attitudes. That's not who we are or what we stand for.

Finally, the process needs to come from the ground up -- from Oregon users and coastal communities, not at the behest of special interest groups. We're quite capable of demanding our own environmental protection.

There are, indeed, compelling reasons to have a system of parks and reserves, but this kind of urgency isn't necessary, and reserves defeat their purpose if rushed into existence.

There's a term, "barotrauma," which refers to what happens when a rockfish is pulled to the surface too fast. It suffers from the bends, and with some, the bladder bulges from the intestines into the mouth as the pressure changes too quickly.

With all due respect, governor, barotrauma is also a pretty good description of what's happening on the coast.

We're all choking on the results.

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