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Coastal legislators applaud passage of historic marine reserves bill

SALEM – The Oregon Senate voted to support HB-3013A this afternoon, legislation that puts into practice the recommendations of the Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC). The bill will implement two pilot marine reserve projects at Otter Rock near Depoe Bay and Redfish Rocks near Port Orford and prescribes a process to evaluate the potential for reserves in four other areas of the coast. The vote was 24-3.

"This bill represents a pivotal turning point in the long and sometimes divisive debate over marine reserves," said Senator Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose), who carried the bill on the Floor today. "We now have the opportunity to move forward with a process that embodies transparency, community involvement, and good science."

HB-3013A outlines a balanced and diverse procedure for the planning of Oregon's new marine reserves, including the development of regional community groups that will assist with the shaping of potential marine reserve sites: Cape Falcon north of Manzanita, Cascade Head north of Lincoln City, Cape Perpetua south of Yachats and Cape Arago-Seven Devils south of Coos Bay.

"This bill gives us a real opportunity to start dealing with our environmental issues with a science-based approach," said Senator Jeff Kruse (R-Roseburg). "I look forward to the progress that we will make in the next two years."

HB-3013A passed out of the House of Representatives in late May with a unanimous vote. The Governor and the Co-Chairs of Ways and Means Committee have included this bipartisan bill in each of their budgets, identifying surplus settlement funds from the grounding of the New Carissa cargo ship to fund the marine reserves implementation. Sponsors and supporters agree that funds generated from an oil spill settlement should be used for marine science and conservation.

“Our community endured a lot when the New Carissa ran aground in Coos Bay,” said Senator Joanne Verger (D-District 5). “It started out as this huge hassle, eventually it became a great tourist attraction, and then it was taken away over our objections. I am glad this Legislature has recognized the nexus between the damage that was caused and the need to use the money for the betterment of our coastal resources.”

HB-3013A will implement the recommendations of the Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC). Last fall OPAC reviewed 20 site proposals for marine reserves and protected areas that clustered around nine ecologically significant areas of the coast. OPAC recommended that six go forward for further evaluation and potential implementation.

“Oregon’s marine reserve debate has been long and often contentious. The collaborative effort exemplified in HB-3013A should be the model for future dialogue if we want the outcomes to truly represent the best interests of the many stakeholders involved,” said Nick Furman, Executive Director of the Dungeness Crab Commission. “We look forward to working with the state’s fisheries managers as they take on the tasks outlined for them in this piece of legislation and, as responsible stewards of our territorial seas, offer our support as this process moves forward.”

“With this historic vote, Oregon is taking new action to preserve, monitor and research Oregon’s vital ocean resources,” said Susan Allen of the Pew Environment Group, who directs the Our Ocean coalition. “We look forward to working with Oregon’s foremost marine experts and the community to shape an ocean policy grounded in the best available science.”

The bill now moves to the Governor for consideration.

To find out more about Oregon’s process to establish marine reserves go to www.oregonmarinereserves.net

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