ship to shore

UFA hires Scott Kelley

KETCHIKAN (KDN) — United Fisherman of Alaska, a statewide commercial fishing trade association, has hired Scott Kelley as its executive administrator, according to a press release from UFA.

Kelley, a Juneau resident, is the former director of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Division of Commercial Fisheries, and will replace Mark Vinsel, who is retiring after 18 years working for the organization, according UFA. Kelley will start the position in June.

"Scott's immense knowledge of commercial fisheries in Alaska is well-respected and his relationship with commercial fisherman is extremely valuable," UFA Executive Director Frances Leach said in a prepared statement. "We are very lucky to have him join our organization."

Dam to be removed

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) — A dam that diverts river water to Washington state's Lake Whatcom will be removed next year as part of a project that aims to restore salmon habitat.

The Bellingham Herald reported Monday that Bellingham's dam on the Middle Fork Nooksack River has been diverting water since 1962 to supplement the city's main source of drinking water.

Bellingham project engineer Stephen Day says the system that pulls water from the river will be redesigned and moved upstream after the dam is demolished.

The Middle Fork Nooksack River Fish Passage project aims to restore access to spawning and rearing habitat for endangered chinook salmon and steelhead and bull trout.

Day says the state has set aside $10.5 million for the more than $16 million project.

13th dead whale near S.F.

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Authorities say a dead gray whale has washed ashore in the San Francisco Bay Area, bringing the total to 13 dead whales found in the area since March.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports that the whale carcass was found Thursday along the Point Reyes National Seashore near Limantour Beach.

The Marine Mammal Center plans a necropsy to determine what killed the whale.

The center says more whales have been spotted in the San Francisco Bay Area since early March and scientists fear it's because they are starving and can't complete their annual migration from Mexico to Alaska.

Great white shark lurks

GREENWICH, Conn. (AP) — An organization that electronically tracks ocean life has detected a nearly 10-foot long great white shark in Long Island Sound.

OCEARCH says it got a ping from the shark they dubbed Cabot off the coast of Greenwich, Connecticut on Monday morning.

Chris Fischer, OCEARCH's founding chairman and expedition leader, says the 500-pound plus shark was tagged last year off Nova Scotia and has traveled as far south as Florida.

Fischer says it's not unheard of for great whites to be in the sound, but "We were quite surprised to see this one so far to the west." He says the shark is probably after bait fish.

Great whites have a predictable migratory pattern, and can move 100 to 150 miles per day, and he expects Cabot to exit the sound and continue north.

Dolphin swim ban nears

KEAUHOU, Hawaii (AP) — Federal officials are in the final review stages of rules that would ban swimming with Hawaiian spinner dolphins, officials said.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officials are nearing completion of regulations proposed almost three years ago that would create a 50-yard (46-meter) barrier around the mammals, West Hawaii Today reported Wednesday.

The practice of swimming with Hawaiian spinner dolphins — or "naia" in the Hawaiian language — has created a booming tourism industry around the state.

Blue Starr Oyster Co. launches Flupsy

Crew Enterprises workers use a crane to launch a new Floating Upweller System made for producing oysters and oyster seed on May 7 at the old pulp mill docks in Ward Cove.

Staff photo by Dustin Safranek

Built by Crew Enterprises at Ward Cove

By DUSTIN SAFRANEK
Daily News Staff Writer

Alaska has a multiplicity of aquatic farms ascending into the market with new ways to farm and new rigs to grow stock. According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, for 2019 there are 19 currently permitted aquatic farming business for the culture of Pacific oysters within the entire state with approved permits. More than half are in Southeast Alaska alone.

With so many years of history, methods change over time. The commercial industry continues to motivate innovation in order to meet market demand and operation efficiency. Old methods that have been a necessity in the commercial industry are, at time, due for revision to keep up with a consistent demand.

Local and global markets have kept aquatic farmers in Alaska busy and this has some business owners rethinking their business plan. One Pacific oyster farmer in particular.

Eric Wyatt, a Prince of Wales Island resident and owner of Blue Starr Oyster Company, stood May 7 at the edge of the old and weathered cement slab behind the old pulp mill in Ward Cove. There, sandwiched between the two moored Alaska Marine Highway System fast vehicle ferries Fairweather and Chenega, rested Wyatt's new 53-foot aluminum floating upweller system, or Flupsy, dry docked on the loading dock a few meters from the water and ready for launch.

The farmer's plan was to haul the new Flupsy back to POW and upgrade his old wooden Flupsy with the new more efficient prototype aluminum Flupsy. He plans to use it as a larger nursery to feed the juvenile shellfish on his oyster farm. Once mature the oysters are transferred to the next process; submerged baskets designed to expedite growth for a larger product.

The barge-like craft rested on display on two metal horses about 6 feet off the surface of the pulp mill dock. The shape of Flupsy resembled a craft from "Tron." The material reflected a different shade of silver off its surface upon every different angle. The old Wards Cove Packing Company estate was set afar and accented the remnants of the Ketchikan Pulp Company that was set anear. Both were an important part of the history surrounding the marine seascape and the christening that was about to take place.

The Flupsy's owner walked its perimeter and explained to anyone interested the function of a nearby feature. His son, Morgan Wyatt, grabbed a ladder and, with his dad, both were soon on top of the rig. The Wyatts pointed at several different troughs and explained the function and importance of each individual design.

The rig at profile fit a close resemblance to a floating hatchery, but on a serious upscale due to its uni-body and rectangular design. Even the Flupsy's girth is half the length at 25 feet. Although the rig has a 6-foot depth, the water levels in both pontoons are adjustable through a submersible design and pump system, that controls how high the platform sits off the sea surface.

Ben Crew of Crew Enterprises started construction on the Flupsy one year ago in May of 2018, but with Eric Wyatt's industry experience, they designed the big rig together during a one-year period prior to construction.

"I grew up and around boats, and its what I know," said Crew. "Eric and I worked very close on design with my knowledge of metals and his of oysters."

Crew studied flotation concepts and designs, while Wyatt toured other oyster Flupsies in Alaska and Washington state. With their combined research they discovered ways to make a healthier growing product without the demand for additional space or power.

"There were a lot of complications designing it," Crew said. "If we changed one thing, then that would affect other elements of the design."

Crew added that "this was one of the most time consuming things I have ever designed."

Wyatt noted that aluminum tariffs that occurred around the start of construction about doubled the total materials cost for the project.

After much observation and thought they designed a trough system that moved fresh seawater in and old water out through the use of an ancient machine: A paddle wheel.

Wyatt made note that all the Flupsies that he toured were designed for electric use only.

"In Washington, where they have big Flupsies and lots of them, they are all tied into the grid," he said. "This design doesn't work for us, because we are off grid, and we need to go to a lot more places."

Eric Wyatt stands with his son Morgan Wyatt aboard their new floating upweller system made for producing oysters and oyster seed on May 7 at the old pulp mill docks in Ward Cove.

Staff photo by Dustin Safranek

The addition of a 6-foot diameter, 5-foot wide paddle wheel with an aluminum housing and a five horsepower gasoline motor driving it sets it apart from most other Flupsies. Wyatt scrapped the popular method to circulate water by electric pump, as seen on most other Flupsies, and swapped it with a water wheel design.

"You don't get that flow naturally, You have to pump it. The fresh water has the food," Wyatt said, noting the critical importance of a consistent supply of fresh water.

The paddle wheel forces fresh seawater water loaded with plankton into one large main trough. From there, water is transferred into 16 smaller side troughs, and each side trough has eight grated bins, where the oysters can live in a more controlled, or richer environment than available in the wild.

From the troughs, water is forced up and through the bins where it exits the Flupsy and is dispersed back into the sea.

There would be 128 bins total, except for the paddle wheel housing extends into the trough space, docking two bins from the rig and tallying the bin count to 126. Each bin is used to incubate and grow thousands of oyster seed.

Wyatt's Flupsy is shiny, not brown. Everything on board was constructed of aluminum.

"The aluminum is a very light metal, easier to work with and has a longer service life" said Crew.

The Flupsy's submersible system is partitioned to the hull of the vessel, which in this case is the two pontoons that are located on the two longer sides of the craft. Each pontoon has three chambers, and each chamber has one port with camelot

See 'Flupsy launch' page B-9

ADF&G increases king salmon bag, possession limit

KETCHIKAN (KDN) — The Alaska Department of Fish and Game on Friday announced an increase to the bag and possession limit of king salmon for anglers in Herring Bay — and the bag and possession limit for king salmon for all anglers in three Ketchikan terminal harvest areas.

In Herring Bay, the increased limit will be three king salmon of any size beginning June 1, and any king salmon harvested in the terminal area will not count for the nonresident annual limit, according to Fish and Game.

The Herring Bay terminal harvest area extends from the southernmost entrance of Hole-in-the-Wall harbor to 1.5 miles north of Whitman Creek, where signs and rocks mark the boundaries, and then to the mouth of Herring Cove Creek.

The area opened by the order will allow anglers to target hatchery-produced king salmon that originate from the Whitman Lake hatchery, according to the department.

Bag, possession and size limits for salt water areas that are beyond the designated harvest areas are more restrictive than those in Herring Bay, and anglers should be cautious to not exceed the limit for all areas where they are fishing, according to the department.

For the terminal harvest areas of Thomas Basin, Mountain Point and Neets Bay, the bag and possession limit for all anglers will be one king salmon of 28 inches or greater in length.

For nonresidents, the annual limit is three king salmon, of 28 inches or greater in length.

The Thomas Basin and Mountain Point terminal harvest areas will be open from June 1 through June 14, according to Fish and Game.

The Thomas Basin area is defined as seaward of the Stedman Street Bridge to the breakwater.

The Mountain Point area includes the waters of George and Carroll Inlets north of a line from Mountain Point to Cutter Rocks Light, and south of the latitude of the George Inlet cannery site. All waters of Carroll Inlet will be open.

The Neets Bay Terminal Harvest will open from June 15 to Aug 14, in the waters east of the longitude of the eastern most tip of Bug Island.

"Anglers are reminded that until June 15 (Thomas Basin and Mountain Point) and Aug. 15 (Neets Bay) the salt waters outside of the designated terminal harvest areas are closed to king salmon retention," according to the department announcement. "Therefore, anglers fishing in multiple areas for other species must be diligent to ensure they do not possess king salmon in areas that prohibit the retention of king salmon.

"On June 15, 2019 regionwide regulations will apply in the Mountain Point, Thomas Basin and surrounding areas, and on Aug. 15, 2019, regionwide regulations will apply in Neets Bay and the surrounding area," the announcement continued.

The Alaska Board of Fisheries has authorized Fish and Game to open terminal harvest areas to target surplus Alaska hatchery king salmon.

"The areas opened by this emergency order will allow anglers to target Alaska hatchery-produced king salmon originating from the Deer Mountain Hatchery, Whitman Lake Hatchery, Neets Bay Hatchery and the Carroll Inlet remote release," according to the announcement. "Projected returns to these facilities will exceed broodstock needs, thus a surplus of hatchery fish are available for harvest by sport anglers."