

Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council

Re: The Importance of Seabirds in Designating Marine Reserves

Dear Members of the Oregon Ocean Policy Advisory Council:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we would like to encourage the Oregon's Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC) to consider the needs of marine birds as they undertake their planning for ocean activities in Oregon especially with respect to the designation of marine reserves and the location of wave energy facilities. PSG is an international, non-profit organization that was founded in 1972 to promote the knowledge, study, and conservation of Pacific seabirds. It has a membership drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Russia, Japan, South Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage seabird refuges and populations, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of certain areas of the ocean for marine birds, both those that nest in the Pacific northwest, and those that nest elsewhere and come to the Oregon coast during their non-breeding season. Marine birds are top predators and as such require healthy stocks of forage fish and invertebrates for their continued success. These resources are patchily distributed and strongly influenced by oceanographic features at a variety of scales. Because of the importance of krill to the marine food chain, the Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted a complete ban on commercial fishing for all species of krill in west coast federal waters and specified essential fish habitat for krill. PSG supports this designation and would encourage OPAC to recognize this type of ecosystem protection as it considers marine reserve designation. The Important Bird Area program, a project of the Audubon Society of Portland, has made an initial step in the recognition that certain areas of the ocean are more important to marine birds than others. Three at-sea areas in Oregon that are outstanding in their importance for foraging sea birds have been identified by this program: the Astoria Canyon, Heceta/Stonewall Banks, and Cape Blanco/Port Orford Reef. There is, however, only limited information on use of at-sea areas by marine birds and our understanding

of mechanisms that influence their distributions and population dynamics is not well developed. A current example of this uncertainty is that we are not able to adequately explain the current die-off of puffins and auklets that is occurring off Oregon as evidenced by the larger than normal numbers that are washing up dead on the beach.

Over a million marine birds nest on offshore rocks along the entire Oregon coast. During this period of their life cycle these birds are much more place based and generally forage in a more restricted area than during the non-breeding season. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's marine refuges (Oregon Islands, Cape Meares, Three Arch Rocks) protect nesting on coastal rocks, reefs, islands and several headland areas but does not have authority over the surrounding ocean habitat. The Oregon Ocean Resources Management Plan recognizes this incongruity and suggests that state programs should be strengthened to complement federal bird and mammal protection programs. PSG urges OPAC to consider this opportunity during the planning process for marine reserves and wave energy facilities and to actively pursue suggestions for co-management opportunities for these crucial areas for marine bird reproduction.

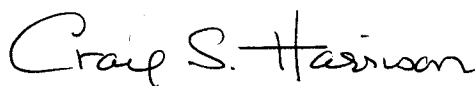
The Pacific Seabird Group supports the recommendation to Governor Kitzhaber and the more recent efforts of Governor Kulongoski that Oregon establish a limited system of marine reserves in the Oregon territorial sea in order to test their effectiveness. As OPAC moves to develop marine reserves PSG urges you ensure the scope and purpose for marine reserves is broad with a focus on all marine biodiversity. PSG also supports the general recommendations for next steps in the planning process put forward in OPAC recommendations including an inclusive process for participation by all stakeholders and contributors. Specifically we encourage participation in:

- 1) defining reserve objectives and suggesting preliminary reserve sites;
- 2) provision, assembly and review of available information on proposed reserve sites;
- 3) studies to establish baseline conditions for proposed sites; and
- 4) the articulation of well-formed hypotheses that will serve as a basis for reserve evaluation.

We encourage federal agencies to follow Oregon's lead and establish similar reserve areas in the federal waters off the Oregon coast. We also encourage federal and state agencies and legislatures to prioritize the funding for research and monitoring studies that will enable to determine the effectiveness of reserves, and whether the objectives for them are being met.

Should OPAC members need additional information on marine birds in Oregon PSG's members would be pleased to assist with obtaining all available information.

Sincerely,



Craig S. Harrison
Vice-Chair for Conservation