Hatfield Marine Science Center and Visitor Center

The Hatfield Marine Science Center (HMSC) on Yaquina Bay in Newport was originally established in 1965 as a marine laboratory for Oregon State University (OSU). It is named in honor of Mark O. Hatfield, U.S. senator from Oregon for thirty years.

The center is home to OSU researchers, students, and faculty from five colleges at the university and more than ten departments. On-site partners include state and federal agencies involved in the research and management of the marine environment, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The HMSC is a unique laboratory facility that plays an integral role in marine and estuarine research, instruction, and management, as well as serving as a base for oceanographic research. The research that has been conducted over the last forty-five years includes:

• the population structure and genetic diversity of whales, dolphins, sea lions, and fur seals

• application of tree-ring techniques to monitor the growth increments of long-lived marine organisms

• effects of nutrients and other pollutants on estuarine invertebrate communities and critical ecosystem processes

• shellfish aquaculture in West Coast estuaries

• acoustic monitoring for the detection of earthquakes associated with seafloor volcanic and tectonic activity

• genetic effects on growth, survival, disease resistance and morphology of Pacific oysters

• climate variability and climate change effects on marine food webs and Pacific salmon

• marine ecosystem processes and their effect on seabirds, and seabird-fishery interactions

• Geological research to understand the dynamics of the global seafloor spreading system and the impact of its volcanic eruptions and hydrothermal vents systems on the ocean environment.

• Understanding the distribution and life history of various species of plankton and fish

The HMSC also plays an important role in the community—from both an economic standpoint and as a public learning resource—providing up-to-date information about marine science investigations being conducted in the Pacific Northwest.

HMSC's Guin Library, a branch of the OSU Libraries, is available to all HMSC staff and the public. It has a significant collection on the marine and estuarine environment of the Pacific Northwest and serves the State of Oregon as a print and digital resource for historic and rare information. The library houses a wide range of local, state, and regional publications, including maps, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reports, student research papers, and local government documents.

The HMSC Visitor Center, open since 1965, is managed by Oregon Sea Grant, an integrated program of research, education, and public outreach to help people understand, responsibly use, and conserve ocean and coastal resources. Oregon Sea Grant is based at OSU and is part of a national network of Sea Grant College Programs, organized under NOAA.

The Visitor Center is an important site for public education, offering a dynamic setting for exploring and discovering coastal and marine resources. The overarching theme of the Center is to show how scientific research enhances our ability to interpret the natural patterns that shape the world.

With an elaborate remodeling from 1994 to 1997, the Visitor Center launched interactive exhibits that incorporate new and emerging technologies and hands-on education programs. Off-site field studies include dock walks, coastal habitat investigations, and at-sea adventures. Other marine education programs include summer camps, scout programs, career development days, home-school programming, and theme-based festivals. Family programs include the Oregon Coast Quest program and Las OLAS (Ocean Learning Activities in Spanish), a bilingual education program. Approximately 150,000 visitors and over 11,000 K-12 students go to the HMSC Visitor Center each year.

Oregon Sea Grant uses the HMSC Visitor Center and marine education program to carry out research, evaluation, and education in free-choice learning—the learning that happens when people visit science museums, zoos, and aquaria in their leisure time and make conscious choices about what, where, and how they want to learn. OSU graduate students in science education and marine resource management use the Visitor Center as a research site. Current research focuses on how visitors learn, effective signage and strategies for increasing learning outcomes, and how the use of different technology formats affect visitor learning.

Written by Nancee Hunter

Further Reading:

Hatfield Marine Science Center Visitor Center. http://hmsc.oregonstate.edu/visitor.

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