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Local News  
Sports  
Community  
Business  
Crime  
Court Update  
Arts  
Opinion  
Obituaries  
Legal Notices  
Archives

## Arts

### Movie seeks common ground on marine reserves By Joel Gallob, Of the News-Times

Karen Meyer traveled around the world to get back home to Oregon, seeking information and something seemingly more elusive - common ground upon one of the most controversial ideas in ocean management: marine reserves.

Perhaps a bit surprisingly, she says, she found it in the making of "Common Ground: Oregon's Ocean."

The film, which will premier in Newport at the Performing Arts Center on Tuesday (7 p.m., \$5 charge), takes the viewer around the world. It visits marine reserves that have been in place for years and the Oregon coast, where the concept is, Meyer says, "actually pretty widely accepted."

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Along the way, Meyer got to see and videotape some of the world's most beautiful places, including some in Oregon only a handful of scientists have seen: parts of the continental shelf, the rocky reefs, living kelp forests and fish-rich shallows of "Oregon's Ocean."

There's no question which side of the marine reserves debate Meyer and her company, Green Fire Productions, is on. What's more interesting is the distribution of viewpoints she encountered. Where the timber wars of the Northwest have produced a severely polarized debate, the issue of marine reserves, Meyer says, has generated a more mixed response. As with landlubbers, there are a lot of fishermen who support them, a lot who fear them, and many somewhere in between, she says.

"There's a quote from Dr. Jane Lubchenco in the movie," Meyer says, "that if we want to have healthy fisheries and healthy fishing communities, we need to have healthy marine ecosystems. The reality around the world is we've seen fisheries crash, and for the same reasons we see here."

"I've listened to a lot of fishermen," she said. "I've gone out on a lot of boats, and seen the work they do. They're amazing - smart and tough and independent. They have to know so much, and the rules they live with are complex and always changing."

The fishermen and the fish, she says, are at the heart of the coastal fabric, and the weave of the state. But fishers are caught in between, she says, in several ways. They are caught between the need to make a living now and the desire to pass on a viable ocean and abundant resources to their children. They're caught between reduced permitted catch levels here and cheap imports of farm fish from Norwegian and Chilean coastal pens. And they're caught between rising costs on the one hand and a reduction in the number of buyers they can sell to on the other.

The debate on marine reserves has been contentious yet, Meyer says, there is common ground.

She did not find what some environmentalists have argued exists - a vast swath of underwater ecosystems devastated by trawlers. "It's not clear how bad the effects have been," she said, "there isn't enough assessment yet." Some areas clearly have been hurt, she says, but some of the key habitats, the rocky reefs and pinnacles, are places that destroy fishing gear but shelter rich and diverse communities.

But she did find that across the globe, marine reserves are working. "I interviewed fishermen off the Georges Bank, off St. Lucia in the Caribbean, in the Florida Keys," she said, "who were all pretty much against marine reserves at

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the outset. Then a few years later, they'd become ecstatic supporters of the reserves. I talked to the manager of a Florida Keys reserve. The fishermen had fought it tooth and nail. Now they're coming back to her, telling officials where to do the next series of reserves," she recalled. "They're thrilled at the results they're getting outside the reserves."

Meyer doesn't think marine reserves off Oregon would produce such dramatic results so quickly. The temperate water rockfish here grow slower, reach sexual maturity later, and achieve peak fertility much later than fish in the warm Caribbean waters. "It'll take longer here," she acknowledges.

The process that may end up creating reserves in Oregon waters has thus far been highly inclusive, and Meyer supports that. She wants all stakeholders - fishers, local governments, scientists, environmentalists and the public - to have a voice and a vote in the process. This may not produce the largest, or biologically the best reserves (though it might, by adding the fishers' knowledge to that of the scientists). But it will get reserves that are politically sustainable.

"Marine reserves are not a silver bullet," Meyer says. "They're a tool, a part of the answer. But with them, we can hope to have a mechanism to get us out of crisis-to-crisis management." Reserves, she says, are not an alternative to catch limits and gear restrictions. But they could be an alternative to huge emergency closures, as we've seen first with commercial rockfish trawling on most of the continental shelf, and then, more briefly this September, for sport and charter rockfish fishing.

The goal is to have sustainable fish species, sustainable ecosystems, sustainable fishing communities and sustainable coastal economies, she says. The trick is getting there - finding "common ground" for "Oregon's Ocean."

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