

Kirby Johnson

How Citizen Volunteers Are Assisting In The Management Of The Edmonds Underwater Park And The Return Of The Lingcod

Biography

Kirby Johnson is a volunteer diver for the Edmonds Underwater Park and the Seattle Aquarium. He is a temperate water aquarist and underwater photographer. In thirty years of diving in Puget Sound he has observed the marine environment and the changes that have occurred. He has coordinated a census of lingcod nesting activity in the park for the he last five years. He is currently Chair of the Snohomish County Marine Resource Advisory Committee and a member of the Northwest Straits Commission. In his other life he is an aerospace engineer.

Presentation Abstract

The Edmonds Underwater Park was one of the first underwater parks and is arguably one of the most popular sites for scuba diving on the North Pacific coast. It has been a marine sanctuary since 1970. The municipal park is owned by the City of Edmonds, a community 15 miles north of Seattle on the east shore of Puget Sound.

The park is unique in many ways. With countless hours and few dollars volunteers have constructed and maintain a veritable theme park for scuba divers. Artificial habitats consisting of many unusual features have been built among a lattice of concrete block and rope trails. Regular visitors are aware of remarkable increases in the quantity and variety of marine life in the park over the past decades. Unique circumstances of habitat and sanctuary are prime factors in the recovery. Protection is mandated by city ordinances, enforcement is largely by peer pressure. A strong sense of stewardship has grown at the site.

The park is a prototypical Marine Protected Area (MPA), and was in use before the term was coined. At 27 acres, the park is considered small by most standards to be an effective MPA. Yet independent studies by state fisheries researchers and volunteer divers confirm that rock fish and lingcod, in decline elsewhere, are larger and more plentiful in the park.

What are the reasons for the success of the Edmonds Underwater Park? The park was conceived with a definite purpose; to increase the safety of scuba diving at the site. The plan that was made was flexible and open ended, still in use today. The park has been blessed with zealous, dedicated volunteer leadership; a benevolent dictator with a mission. Deliciously simple rules dictate weekend activities; there are only two, 1.) 9am Saturday, and 2.) the Hierarchy of Tasks.

Accomplishments and experiences of the volunteer dive team will be shared as they pursue their common vision of "an excuse to go diving".