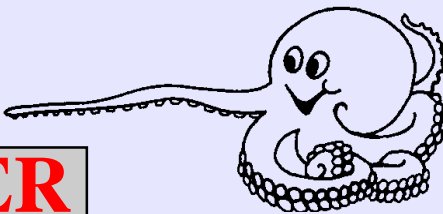
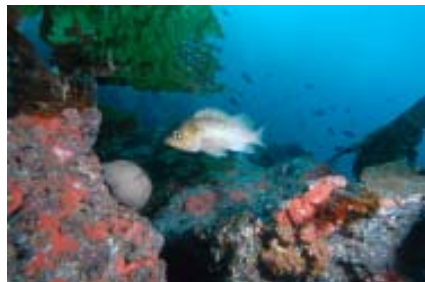


THE REEF SEEKER



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December - 2009



MARINE LIFE PROTECTION ACT UPDATE

This could also be subtitled "How We Almost Lost Farnsworth Banks" as a dive spot.

The Marine Life Protection Act, at least as far as it relates to Southern California, is drawing to a close. The final chapter will be written in Los Angeles (near LAX) on Wednesday, December 9, when the full Department of Fish & Game Commission hears the pros and cons of what's known as the preferred Alternative, as crafted by the Blue Ribbon task Force (BRTF), along with three other proposals crafted by three working groups of the Regional Stakeholders Group (RSG). It's presumed that the commissioners will approve the BRTF Preferred Alternative recommendations.

Although it still represents a great step forward with large swaths of coastline and island shoreline that was previously open to unrestricted harvesting of ocean life now under

levels of regulations ranging from limited catch to no-take, it still could have been better. This has been first and foremost a political process and the reality of the politics of the situation were in play all the way along.

How does that affect divers, you might ask? Simply put, we - as a group - were pretty much AWOL from the discussion. That's not good.

There were definitely diving representatives, both consumptive and non-consumptive, that were appointed to the Regional Stakeholders Group (RSG). But the RSG was originally designed to be a deliberative consensus-finding group and it transformed itself into a one-man-one-vote body. That means, because the RSG was heavily weighted with consumptive interests to ensure they felt they had a voice, a lot of the more conservation-friendly proposals were simply voted down on a straight "party line" vote. Also not good.

Many of the consumptive diving interests, mainly spearfishermen and kayak fisherman (who also snorkel/dive) were quite vocal in their desires. But there weren't too many voices from the non-consumptive side speaking up.

So in ten years, if the level of life in the ocean continues to decline

because the steps we're about to take aren't enough, look back on our collective silence as a key culprit. We've had a tremendous opportunity here and many of us closely involved in this process have been begging people for years to speak up, but no to avail. It's sad, but there's not much we can do about it now except learn from this lesson for the future.

But overall,, as I said earlier, it's a large step forward with areas around Point Dume, Palos Verdes, Laguna Beach, and San Diego getting protection, as well as some of the areas around Catalina. Interestingly enough, part of the process involved the discovery - to the surprise/shock of many - that the Avalon Underwater Park has never had any formal level of protection. It's been treated as a reserve only because everyone agreed that would be the case but it has no force of law should someone decide that they didn't want to honor that agreement. That will change as the Park now gets Reserve (no-take) status, the highest level of protection possible.

But we did come within an eyelash of losing the ability to dive at Farnsworth. As you may have read when I wrote about this a few weeks ago, there was a last-minute provision inserted to immediately (upon implementation) make Farnsworth a no-anchor zone with

a recommendation that moorings be installed at some point down the road. This would have effectively removed Farnsworth as a viable dive spot for commercial recreational dive boats.

After some hurried consultation with MLPA staff and RSG members, some behind-the-scenes wrangling, and an impassioned speech on my part, we got that reversed. Now, the proposal reads to look into the feasibility of a mooring system at Farnsworth, install it if it's feasible, and then make the area a no-anchor zone.

There have also been some people who have asked my why I'm against moorings at Farnsworth. I'm not. It's just that (for numerous reasons) I don't think it's feasible. If we can overcome those hurdles (which include things like maintenance, liability, and enforcement), then I think that would be terrific.

And I think one of the great things that has come out of this MLPA process is that while for years and years, people have kicked around the notion of moorings at Farnsworth, it's never gained any traction on an official basis. But now, there's an official directive to see if it can, or can't, be accomplished. So that's a very good thing.

If you're interested in attending the meeting, it's open to the public. The meeting starts at 10AM at the Radisson Hotel, 6225 West Century Boulevard, only a few blocks from LAX. Public comment will be taken from 10:15AM-12:30PM. If you want to speak, note that speaker cards must be turned in no later than 10:10AM.

Hope to see you there.

REEF SAVER CARDS IN 2010

I haven't worked out all the details yet, but there will be some sort of a change in the Reef Saver Cards for 2010. One reason for this is that we simply won't be having as many trips as we have in the past, and we want to make sure you have ample opportunity to "make back" in discounts the investment you make in the card.

So the two changes I'm mulling over right now would be (1) to lower the overall price on the card, and (2) to change it from a 10% discount on trips to a flat rate discount for reach trip.

But I'm also mulling over the idea of extending the flat rate discount to our foreign trips as well (maybe on a per day basis). Plus I've still got to work out how we'd deal with the discount on repairs. And whatever discount applies to holders of a Reef Saver Card would still apply to members-in-good-standing of all the affiliated dive clubs we work with.

So it's a work-in-progress and I hope to have everything finalized by the end of the year. If you've got any suggestions for me (other

than that you get everything for free - although I guess that could work if I charged enough for the card) let me know.

GREAT ESCAPE ON DECEMBER 6

We've eliminated the page 3 box that usually lists all our upcoming local trips (more on that in a moment) but wanted to mention that our last trip of the year is this coming Sunday, December 6, on the *Great Escape*. Our intended destination is San Clemente Island and it's not unusual this time of the year to get some excellent conditions - sometimes the best of the year - in which to dive.

And to be clear, even though we're running a bit light, I am committed to doing this trip regardless. So there's no chance that we'll cancel because of a light load. (Of course, you'll have to hear me complain about losing money all day, but that's another story.)

It's shaping up to be a great weekend and we'd love to have a really nice end to the 2009 diving season so I hope you'll be able to join us. Just give me a call at 310/652-4990 and get yourself signed up.

DIVING VACATIONS

**February 7-13, 2010 • Florida
(Manatees & Caverns)**

March 12-21 • Socorro

May 21-29 • Bonaire

Staff Friends and Family

Buy one adult admission, get one

FREE

*Experience an
ocean adventure...*

*Touch sharks and rays.
Watch sea otters play.
See underwater divers.
And meet more than 11,000 animals—
It's educational and fun!*



Purchase an adult, general admission at the Aquarium ticket window and receive a FREE adult admission with this coupon. Limit (4) discounts per coupon. Not applicable with online tickets or any other offer. Not valid at off-site sales locations. Distribution of this coupon on Aquarium grounds is prohibited. No cash value. May not be sold. Valid through December 24, 2009. D-SFF

Valid through December 24, 2009

Open daily 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.



AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC

(562) 590-3100 www.aquariumofpacific.org • 100 AQUARIUM WAY • LONG BEACH, CA 90802

TWO-FOR-ONE AT THE AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC

You may have noticed the exceedingly large coupon at the top of this page. It's a special two-for-one offer to the Aquarium of the Pacific, good through December 24. Buy one adult admission at full price, get a second one free. So basically, it's a half-off coupon offer.

If you do swing on by, keep an eye out for Reef Seekers staff diving in the exhibits and giving presentations. I volunteer every Thursday from 9AM-1PM, and Betsy Suttle is there on Sunday mornings, also from 9AM-1PM. Make sure you wave and gesticulate wildly so we'll know you're there.

The Aquarium is a great place to explore (and they've got a pretty good gift shop too for some holiday shopping) with over 12,000 animals in dozens and dozens of exhibits. There's a great interactive aspect as well as you can touch Bat Rays, Sharks, or even have a Lorikeet sit on your shoulder begging for nectar.

Anyhow, it's loads of fun and if

you want to go between now and Christmas, you can go for half price.



2010 LOCAL BOATS

As we're going to press (November 30) we're still working on our 2010 local trip schedule. Normally, we publish it on December 1 so you can start planning but 2010 is going to be a very different year for the local dive industry.

For one thing, many stores (us included) are going to be cutting back on the overall number of trips they're going to be running. This means there's a lot of calendar-juggling going on by the boat captains as to what dates will be kept and what dates will open up.

We are further complicating matters by trying to make sure that in 2010 (unlike in 2009, as well as '08 and '07) our local trips don't overlap with our foreign trips. And

that tweaks the calendar even a bit further.

In general terms, we're going to try to be diving at least once a month with a Reef Seekers trip. As I've indicated in previous writings, when we were running a much fuller schedule, we could absorb the occasional light-load boat (which means we take a financial loss on the trip) but that's simply not practical now due not only to the recession but also that with a more limited schedule, you simply don't have as much a chance to make up for lost revenue.

So it's been a combination for us of moving some of our dates around as well as waiting for other stores to decide what they need so that it can all mesh together in a way that works for us, the other stores, the boats, and (key component here) for you.

So I hope that we'll have our schedule available for you in the January issue of this newsletter. What I can tell you is that I'm aiming for the first trip to be no earlier than January 16 or 17 and most likely January 30 or 31. So you've got time to plan (or to ask Santa for a gift certificate).

TRAVEL TIP

I usually put this in our pre-trip notes for those who do vacations with us but thought I'd pass it on to everyone. When you travel, be sure to take a power strip with you so that you can plug all manner of things in once settled in to your hotel room or boat. You can get decent ones inexpensively at most office supply stores and it really makes it easier when you need plugs for chargers, laptops, batteries, and other things.

DEEP SEAS HAVE LOTS 'O FISH

There's a new study out (the Census of Marine Life) that shows there is a far greater range of ani-

mals living in the (dark) deep seas than previously thought. Looking into waters as much as three miles deep, researchers counted 17,650 species of animals. The project's still got another year to go, having originally been planned as a 10-year study. Who knows how many more things they'll find?

MR. C RETIREMENT PARTY

Just a reminder that the *Mr. C* retirement party is this coming Friday, December 4. The boat will actually be sold at auction on Saturday, and Tom Rossin, longtime captain of the *Mr. C*, has decided to hang up his dive captain shingle (although he'll still continue to captain tugboats around the Pot of

Los Angeles and Long Beach). But if you'd like to say goodbye to the boat &/or reminisce with Tom and others, the whole shebang starts at 4PM Friday at the 22nd Street Landing in San Pedro.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Hard to believe it's already the holiday season . . . but it is. It's been an interesting year to say the least but we're still here, a full (almost) three years after we closed the doors on the retail storefront. We've got a lot of big plans for 2010 and we want to again thank you for hanging with us through another year. We feel like we've made some pretty good friends amongst all of you, and we appreciate the continued association.

PICTURE PAGE - The Grand Canyon, 11/2009

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2009)



Sunset
our first evening there



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A precarious perch



The Watchtower
at the eastern entrance



Gorgeous view



Sunrise
the next day