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LATEST NEWS

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OSU begins COAST study

An [Oregon State University](#)-led team of researchers is conducting a major project off the Oregon coast this summer to study the complex forces that move ocean waters, life forms and debris between shoreline and deeper waters.

The findings are critical to a host of industries and issues: fisheries management, pollution control, coastal tourism, shipping and invasive species.

"A great deal is known about the currents off the Pacific Coast that transport water and sand in northerly and southerly directions," said Jack Barth, professor of oceanic and atmospheric sciences at OSU and a principal investigator for the study. "Much less is known about the transport of waters across the continental shelf."

The interdisciplinary OSU study, called Coastal Ocean Advances in Shelf Transport (COAST), appeals to ocean chemists, biologists and physicists in a complete study of the waters off the coast.

The aftermath of the much-publicized sinking of the New Carissa off Coos Bay illustrated how crucial these processes can become. Hundreds of gallons of oil leaked from the vessel, and despite sophisticated current and wind models, oil showed up in places that surprised researchers.

"There is an assumption that if you take something out to the deep ocean and dump it, it will stay out to sea," Barth said. "Ships, for example, have to be a hundred miles out of port to dump ballast water to keep invasive species out of our bays. But how do we know how far in toward shore those waters can go?"

The COAST project will also focus on the movement and health of phytoplankton blooms that are critical to the ocean food chain and help absorb carbon dioxide from the air. The Pacific Northwest has begun one of the best salmon seasons in recent memory, and the health of these phytoplankton masses is key to that success.

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