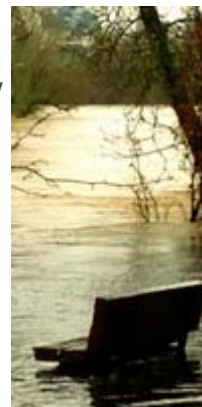


# What Does the Pacific Northwest's Recent Floods Mean to Coastal Waters?







Ever since liquid water formed on our tiny planet, floods have been a fact of life on Earth. Recently, the Pacific Northwest made national news due to some unprecedented winter storms which provided recorded rainfall, snowpacks and flooding. As all that water streams off the land and into the ocean, what does it mean for the species and ecosystems that exist offshore?






**A Mixed Blessing** For the modern American, the word "flood" may conjure images of a Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans, its streets submerged beneath swirling brown waters. We forget that flooding is a natural and often beneficial process. Consider the Nile River delta, where annual floods have turned the desert into fertile farmland for thousands of years. This is because flood waters carry organic nutrients which work like powerful natural fertilizers. Once the waters recede, the land is essentially recharged. Old vegetation is swept away, clearing space for new growth to spring from the freshly enriched soil. A similar process can occur in the Pacific Northwest. In fact, some of the



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most biologically diverse areas on the coast are the result of alluvial (flood-produced) soils - including the coastal redwood forest along the California / Oregon border.



There are often unanticipated problems with flooding when waters jump river or stream banks and move through human communities. In addition to property damage and safety issues, the waters can also come into contact with toxic substances.

This includes oil, gasoline, non-organic pesticides, caustic chemicals and even human waste. As flooding affected western Oregon this past week, public health authorities were quick to act, issuing widespread warnings for people to stay away from the water. Yes, the water looked muddy, but much of it was

more contaminated than we realized.

Now that the waters are receding, running off into the ocean, is the problem over?

**Staying Safe** Although natural processes will cleanse ocean waters of organic materials introduced by runoff, manmade contaminants may stick around for a long time. As a result, there are some precautions visitors should take when touring coastal areas:

- Check your area for any announcements, updates or warnings related to water quality.
- Avoid swimming, wading or tidepooling where hazard warnings exist.
- Heed any public health signs or barriers you see erected on beaches, estuaries or at the mouths of rivers.
- Remember that the soil can be contaminated well below the surface, which may effect the safety of common seafood animals like shellfish. Check your local resources to see if this presents a hazard before you go out clamming.

## Eating To Save Our Oceans

### Waste Not, Want Not

Many of us are looking for ways to save pennies wherever we can. Food is one of

the most wasted household resources, although we often don't realize it. However, there are ways to curb food waste before you head to the market. We've provided tips in this column to save natural resources, limit waste and keep some extra change in your pocket.

- Before you go to the market, create a shopping list and stick to it. Impulse buying often results in wasted food.
- Never shop hungry. This too leads to impulse buying.
- Plan your meals to match your lifestyle. After a long day at work, you may not have the energy to create elaborate meals from scratch when simpler recipes will suffice.
- Eat up leftovers. Or, when you're cooking dinner, pack up the leftovers for lunch the following day.
- Buy local items while in season. They will be cheaper to buy and you'll save natural resources because the items will not have traveled across a continent to reach you.

*Eating to Save our Oceans is an ongoing feature designed to help our friends and supporters learn simple, practical and fun ways to protect our global oceans through smart food choices. Additional tips and articles will appear in upcoming e-newsletters and on our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) page.*



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