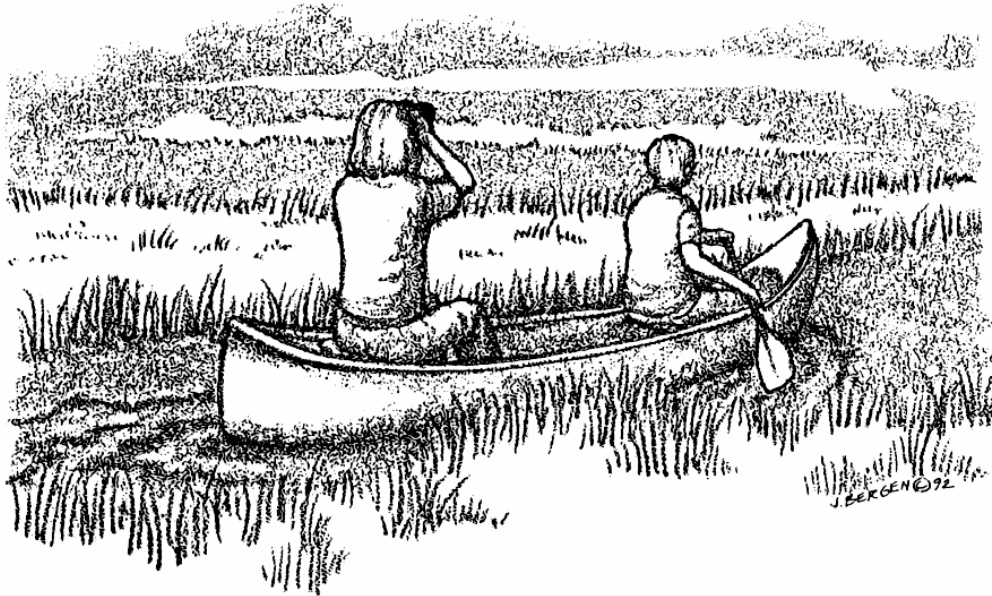


# Non-Consumptive Uses of the Estuary

by Kenn Oberrecht



*As they approach the sea, most coastal rivers form estuaries: partly enclosed bodies of mingling fresh and salt water where a tremendous array of organisms thrive.*

*Throughout history, estuaries have attracted humans and invited settlement and development. Many have provided safe havens for ships and navigable waters for moving freight and passengers inland or out to sea.*

As it has for several thousand years, the Coos Bay estuary continues to provide food for locals, mainly in the form of fish and shellfish, but it also offers a variety of opportunities for non-consumptive uses, some of which many of us take for granted or overlook.

*A few hardy souls even keep in shape by skimming their rowing sculls across the bay.*

The most obvious non-consumptive recreational use of the bay is boating, with power or sail. Sailboards have increased in numbers and popularity in recent years, and a growing number of people are enjoying canoeing and kayaking, especially in the more protected waters of the sloughs and inlets. A few hardy souls even keep in shape by skimming their rowing sculls across the bay.

Family hiking along the edge of the estuary can be both recreational and educational, especially if you make a concerted effort to observe and study the plants and animals you'll encounter along the way. At the South Slough Reserve, you can join one of the organized nature hikes, or pick up

trail guides at the interpretive center and go on your own. On the North Spit are beaches, trails, and old roads to hike. You can also hike the railroad right-of-way along the North Slough or the mile-long road that skirts the west side of Pony Slough.

Jogging and fitness walking are other ways for couples and families to regularly enjoy the estuary. Whether you work out in town, upriver, or downbay, you can be assured of plenty of wildlife and shipping activities to ward off boredom.

*The estuary also provides artists and photographers with unlimited subject matter, any time of the year.*

Similarly, bicycling is another superb way to enjoy the bay and reap the benefits of healthful exercise. With a bicycle you have the added advantage of being able to haul extra gear with you or pack along food and beverages on daytrips.

Most of us enjoy picnics, but we needn't confine them to the occasional summer weekend or holiday outing. Combine a sunrise breakfast with a birding trip to the bay during fall and spring migrations. Or break up a stressful work day with a sack lunch or deli takeout at the bay's edge. Some people even conduct business lunches this way.

The estuary also provides artists and photographers with unlimited subject matter, any time of the year. Opportunities range from sunny scenes with big skies and puffy clouds to close-ups of wildflowers, or the muted moods and pastels of foggy-morning ship shapes and waterscapes.

Those of us fortunate enough to live here sometimes lose sight of the fact that the Coos Bay estuary is one of the major attractions of the south coast. Tourists and other visitors get to enjoy it only briefly, temporarily. It's there for us any time we choose to use it.

