

Ship Report Transcript

Monday, July 15, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Monday, July 15th, 2024. Well, today we're going to talk a little bit about marine weather if we have time for ship traffic.

And then today, I want to talk a little bit about the incident that happened on the Columbia River Bar this weekend, where some people died when a boat flipped. And I just want to talk a little bit about the dangers out there and what we can do to protect ourselves if we are out in a boat. First to look at our marine weather, high pressure over our waters will maintain gusty northerly winds for much of this week. Seas will remain primarily wind driven and choppy. Today we have northwest winds 5 to 10 knots, rising 10 to 15 in the afternoon. Seas 3 to 5 feet. Wave detail, northwest three feet at 5 seconds apart. And our in boundaries.

Today we have the La Bamba arriving from the Panama Canal, headed for the Vancouver Anchorage. She'll be picking up upriver passing Astoria around 2:30 a.m. in Vancouver by about 8:30 a.m.. Saga Enterprise arriving from Los Angeles, headed for Vancouver. I think she might be picking up copper concentrate up there at the Port of Vancouver passing Astoria around 4 a.m., Vancouver around 10 a.m. The Texas is arriving from Alaska, headed for Portland, refined petroleum there. She's delivering that passing Astoria around 7 a.m. in Portland around 1 p.m..

The Glovis Spring is arriving from San Francisco, headed for Portland. She's got brand new Hyundais on board delivering those, passing Astoria around 2:30 p.m. in Portland by about 8:30 p.m.. The Selene Leader arriving from Vancouver, B.C., headed for Vancouver, Washington. Subaru's on board, they're delivering those passing Astoria around 3:30 p.m. in Vancouver by about 9:30 p.m. and the BTG Denali arriving from China, headed for the Astoria Anchorage, picking up wheat upriver. Eventually she will arrive in Astoria's Anchorage around 10:30 p.m. and outbound hours. We only have one today. The BBG Bright leaving Portland Potash on board, leaving around 8 a.m. passing Astoria outbound around 4 p.m..

And heading out to sea from the Port of Astoria this morning is the research vessel Atlantis. She's been in port in Astoria, probably picking up supplies, maybe changing scientific crews. She'll be heading out to sea on another research adventure. At about 930 this morning.

Well, as many of us know by now, there was a tragedy this weekend on the Columbia River Bar here locally, which is that very dynamic area near the mouth of the river where it meets the ocean.

A recreational boat overturned on Saturday morning. And of the five people on board who, from what I read in news reports, were assisted by nearby charter fishing boats and the Coast Guard. One is dead and two are missing, one of whom is a child. The Coast Guard called off the search on Saturday night after an extensive search for the missing people.

Of course, there's been some discussion about this on local social media. And after seeing some comments from people to the effect that they went across the bar once and it was calm, implying "what's the big deal?" I thought that it might be a good moment for me to talk a bit more about the

dangers of that part of the river and why this boat may have gotten in trouble that area at the mouth of the river.

The Columbia River Bar, I'm sure you've heard this, has been termed the graveyard of the Pacific because of all the vessels that have wrecked there throughout history. Even now, with dams and jetties in place to control the river, the Columbia River Bar is considered to be among the most dangerous river entrances in the world, if not the most dangerous. In The World. So no one's kidding here or exaggerating. Where we live is world class dangerous.

Why is that? And why isn't it terrible all the time? Well, there are many technical nuances of why the bar is so dangerous. I don't know them all. But from a broad perspective, you have at the river's mouth one of the world's largest rivers, slamming into one of the world's largest oceans. That's a lot of water moving fast. A lot of force. And remember that a cubic meter of water weighs a ton.

So there is great turbulence when those two waterways meet, especially when the tide is about halfway through the cycle, when the tide is falling and the river is racing towards the sea at speeds of about seven knots or more in some places.

It was during one of these Max Ebb tidal times that this incident occurred.

Then you have the added turbulence on either side of the channel near the jetties, those areas outside the channel near Clatsop and Peacock spit on either side of the river entrance – they can get like dangerous washing machines of unpredictable turbulence under those conditions.

I don't know where this boat was located when it capsized, but if it was outside the main channel in either of those areas, the turbulence could have just been too much for the boat to withstand or the people on it to control it. And so it flipped, capsized.

At other times during the tidal cycle, like during slack water between tides or even on a rising or flood tide, as they call it, the river is often calmer and so is the bar. Knowledgeable mariners watch the tide tables and time their crossing for the calmest water possible. So it's possible to cross the bar when the water is relatively calm. I've done it several times in boats. It's a matter of timing.

So this accident happened during the max ebb period, the absolutely most dangerous and turbulent time to be on the river in the area of the bar. Once a person is in the water, the cold, 60 degree water survival becomes a challenge.

So I wanted to explain that briefly without much other comment. This is a tragedy for the people on board and for those who assisted them out there. My deep condolences to those who have lost loved ones and to those whose lives have been permanently altered by this tragedy. But a reminder to us all that our river is nothing to be trifled with, and your best protection is experience, knowledge and applying that knowledge in terms of timing, equipment and judgment to stack the deck in your favor when you were out on the mighty Columbia.

Related to this, I'm going to be taking a little time off from the show starting midweek for some vacation time, and I'll be sharing a really interesting interview I did with a local author, John Kopp, about a book he wrote called CG 41332. It's the true story of a Coast Guard tragedy that happened here in the 1970s during training on the bar on an ebb in a boat that capsized on the bar. Student trainees died in that incident, and it caused the Coast Guard to revamp their procedures drastically.

So you'll be hearing that starting Wednesday and through next week. It's a harrowing story, a real story about something that happened here and greatly affected, for the better in the long run, an agency that we all rely on and respect.

But those same conditions that swamped that Coast Guard boats then are still happening out there now. If you are in the wrong place at the wrong time, bad, irreversible things can happen even to those who are trained to handle it.

So if you are going out on the river in a boat, be aware that the experience demands something of you, that you watch the tides and the weather and that you learn before you go, that you pay attention, that you know what you are doing, or take someone with you who does and that you respect the river at all times.

I know I say it over and over, and there are always those who seem not to hear, but I will keep saying it. For as long as I can. And for as long as it needs to be said.

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