

Climate Change's Effects – Locally by Rebecca Lexa

Last week we talked about how king tides forecast the effects of climate change. Today let's look at how this may affect nature in our area.

We don't see sea level rise because the tectonic plate we're on is being pushed up faster than the ocean is rising. As polar ice melts the water will rise more quickly and catch up to us. An influx of salt water will upset the delicate balance of Willapa Bay; too much salt will kill animals, plants and other life forms that can't tolerate it. Warming water also kills cold-tolerant species, and increases ocean acidification, a big threat to the oyster industry.

Last summer's drought was caused by less rain due to disrupted climate and weather patterns. It sickened and killed many Sitka spruce trees. Aphids that prey on spruce trees were able to do more damage because the trees were weakened by a lack of water. Moreover, it was often the older trees that were affected more, and when these old trees die they take away crucial sources of habitat and food for many other species.

Higher temperatures and drought may also cause more animals to migrate north, which upsets the balance of ecosystems established over thousands of years. Those that can't migrate quickly enough, especially small animals like salamanders, may die out. This also removes food sources for other animals.

These are just a few examples of why it is absolutely urgent that our communities join the fight against climate change.