

- Liz Fox: Hi, this is Positively Ocean where we celebrate the ocean and look at what's working well, I'm Liz Fox. Typically this segment is all about the people who work to improve the ocean but this story is different. It's about how the ocean can help us. Last month wildfires devastated families, incinerated neighborhood and rocked communities to their core across Northern California. The devastation in many cases was complete, lives lost, houses leveled and businesses burned. While firefighters squelches the last flames a few weeks ago, first responders took their first breaks, park rangers coordinated social services and families whose lives were on hold made their way to Doran beach on the Sonoma coast. They all knew inherently that the ocean could help them reset and as people pick the fractured pieces of their lives and begin their after the fire chapter the ocean can tend to them, wave after wave after wave. Tara Carpenter works at Cal Fire air base were she spend the previous eleven day's mixing water and powdered flame retardant and then filling the air tankers that dispersed it. This was the first thing I was looking forward too when I got a day off, this is my first day off so this is exactly what I wanted to do.
- Liz Fox: Carpenter grew up in Bodega Bay where her family works in commercial fishing, recently she's taken up poke polling as a hobby. With a long bamboo garden stick she prodded Cabazon from tide pools in crevasses with a very zen goal.
- Carpenter: Sometimes I just come out here to, not even the hoax of catching, but just relax, it's very relaxing.
- Liz Fox: And science backs up what carpenter and her family know from generations of ocean experience. In his book, Blue Mind, Marine Scientist and writer Wallace J Nichols dissects the combination of the oceans elements and the impact on our brains and bodies. The full sensory experience of being in, near, or on water calms and resets people's abilities to cope with stress.
- Wallace J Nichols: The ocean really is medicine, it makes our bodies and our minds work better. There's an important role, not just in immediate urgency and sort of aftermath of tra a and disaster, there's that role of the ocean and our water but it should have a long tail. I think there's also a roll in returning regularly and hitting that rest button because the work that comes after any kind of loss and tra a is hard, it's relentless, it requires creativity and a lot of attention.
- Liz Fox: During the crisis, Sonoma county and California State parks recognized peoples need to be near the ocean. They waived fees connected, evacuees with in town services and shuffled non emergency reservations. Chris Troutner, a park aid at both park systems, was stationed at the Douran Beach kiosk.
- Chris Troutner: They can just be twenty cars deep of a line you know. If I see kids in the back with masks on I just wave them through immediately and just tell

them, Hey we're just going to do what we can to get you in there and get you somewhere that's a little easier to breath.

Liz Fox: Troutner said the ocean was a safe, familiar place for people who are able to escape the flames or smoke in their RV's or campers.

Chris Troutner: I think when you have to go to a shelter it kind of adds to the harshness of the reality of your situation, like to stay in an auditori on cots. Coming out to a campground, especially if you have young kids, it can just like going on a vacation. Especially if they've come here before it's so familiar.

Liz Fox: The parks offered temporary places to stay, the ocean will continue to calm those who seek it in the long run, and surprising transformations can continue to happen at the ocean. Nicholas describes in his book when groups of struggling veterans participated in group therapy sessions they learned about ocean conservation. Many found new meaning in life by becoming ocean advocates. Nichols said that people in northern California can apply the same concepts to their recovery.

Wallace J Nichols: That may seem unusual in the face of such loss to say well, you should give back, but getting out of yourself and your own loss and putting yourself in a position of service and purpose is one of the best ways to get through this kind of tra a. So the ocean needs us, and we need it and making that connection it's been a while and this is a really good idea and then taking somebody with you is a really good idea.

Liz Fox: And that's an example of the ocean doing right by us. Until next time, I'll be searching for all things positively ocean. For Ocean Currents Radio and KWMR, this is Liz Fox reporting from Bodega Bay, California.

MUSIC PLAYS