



PHOTOS BY EMILY GREEN

This photo shows the close proximity of the city's Rivergate Pump Station (at left), located at the corner of North Rivergate Boulevard and Time Oil Road, and the Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area. Note the "Wildlife Habitat Area" sign posted on the gate to the right. At nearly 2,000 acres, the natural area is the largest protected freshwater wetland within an American city.

HONEY BUCKET, from page 4

treatment system like that without prior approval," Parnell said.

If the hole had been cut in the screen to begin with, the permit would never have been approved, he said.

The alterations were made between the time city inspectors approved the permit and the time Honey Bucket began discharging wastewater.

Representatives from Northwest Cascade argued that the hole was cut to allow large "turds" to pass through the screen and that any other material would have been removed by employees. At some facilities, the company uses a Muffin Monster industrial sewage grinder to chop up large solids before they enter the sewer, but it doesn't have this machinery at its North Portland location.

Industrial sewage grinders that chop up large non-fecal debris for discharge – which are commonly used by municipalities and porta-potty companies – cost about \$100,000, according to a quote Street Roots requested from a manufacturer.

But Northwest Cascade might not be saving much in the way of costs. The city has fined the company \$90,000 for violations, plus \$3,592 for the cost of the pump fixes and inspections that required more than 80 labor hours.

The company has appealed the fine, first going through an administrative hearing in September, where the company's attorney, Steve Parkinson, pointed to the city's

premature theory that illegal dumping could be the cause of the clogs.

"We do know that there's, you know, homeless encampments immediately down the street from us, between us and the Rivergate pump station," he said, according to a transcript of the meeting. "I know that one of the theories put forward by the investigators that's in the record is it was, you know, homeless folks or other people dumping stuff down manholes."

Later during the hearing, Parkinson admitted, "I think it's fair to say that what a homeless person could dump down a manhole – just to be, you know, fair – they could find a Honey Bucket and open the Honey Bucket, and dump it there."

The bureau upheld the fines, and Northwest Cascade is continuing to fight them. A Nov. 2 appeal is scheduled before a hearings officer in the city auditor's office.

According to the appeal documents, Northwest Cascade is still clinging to the city's early theory that the cause of the blockages was illegal dumping.

"The City mischaracterizes Northwest Cascade's position that all of the debris was deposited by homeless people between April 5 and April 14th (the dates of the pump jams). While such material could have been dumped down manholes at this time – as acknowledged by the City – this material could have been dormant in manholes and was mobilized by the increased discharge volume starting on April 5, 2017," argues

the appeal.

One problem with this argument, city officials said, is that while the increased flow could have dislodged built-up debris when it began, it doesn't explain the eight subsequent clogs.

Additionally, for people to dump directly into the sewer between Honey Bucket and the pump station, they would need a large hook to remove one of the 50-pound circular steel manhole covers first, Parnell said. All manhole covers were in place when inspected, and there were no signs any had been removed.

Northwest Cascade is also arguing that the workers at its Honey Bucket facility "will testify that they never pushed any large debris through the slit."

"When (Honey Bucket) finally fixed their screen and fixed their septic tank and they discharged, it stopped. We no longer had any issues," Parnell said. "And to me, that's the definitive proof right there."

Should the city auditor's hearings officer side with the Bureau of Environmental Services, Northwest Cascade could file an appeal in circuit court.

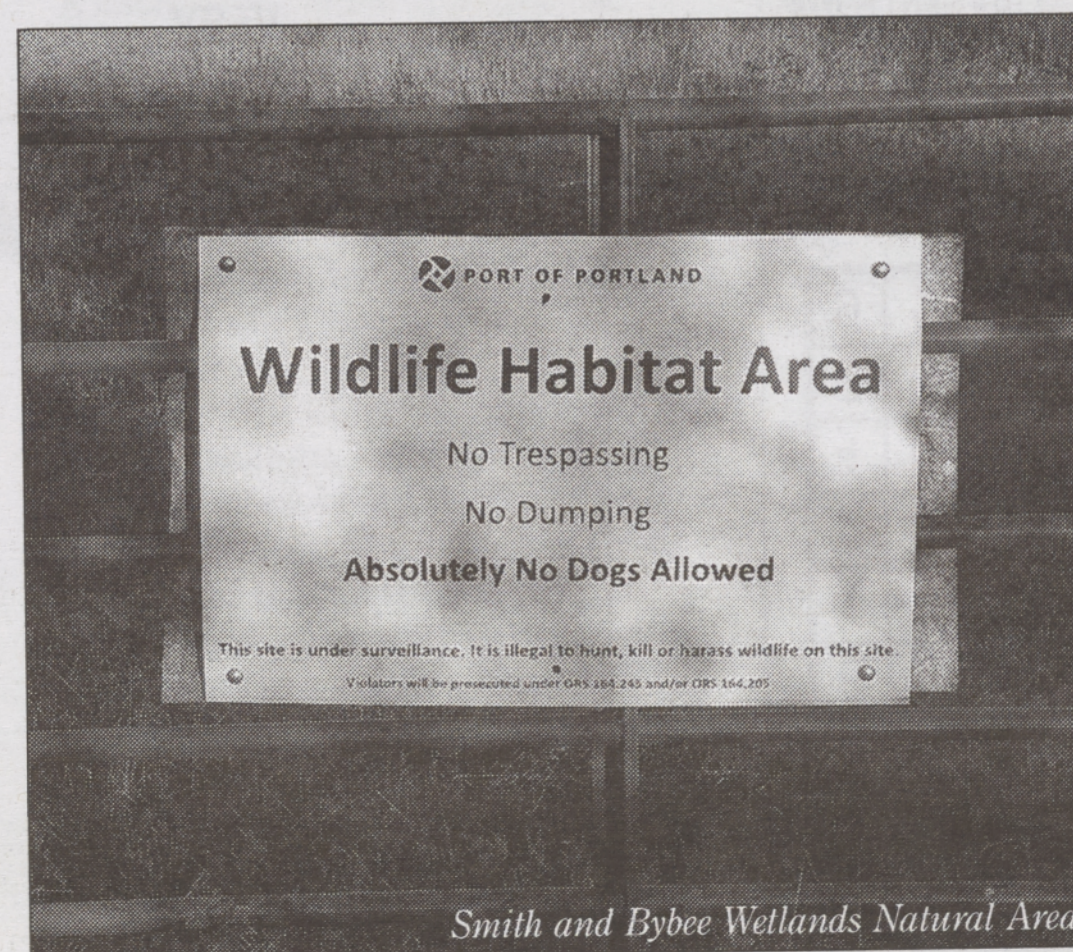
"They're just trying to grasp at straws," said Matt Criblez, an environmental compliance officer with the city. "It's a very large penalty."

Citing the ongoing appeal process, Northwest Cascade declined to comment for this story.

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Rivergate Pump Station



Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area