

# Going Coastal

Controversies rage in Oregon's coastal communities.



The Board of County Commissioners didn't meet during the second week of July, so our family scheduled our annual vacation for this week. One of my wife's relatives suggested Club Med, but our family opted for Club Mud – the soggy Oregon coast. Our past trips to the coast had always been pleasant and tranquil, if a little wet.

This time, the coast was neither tranquil nor wet. The sun was hot, and we found some coastal communities embroiled in controversy.

In Florence we saw several lawn signs protesting the construction of a new casino on tribal land near the city. The local reception for the casino couldn't be worse if the developers had hired Joe Pesci to handle their PR. Last week, the City Council voted to exclude the tribal land in question from the city's urban growth boundary, so the casino can't hook up with the city's water and sewer systems. One casino opponent told me that Oregon shouldn't become the "Nevada of the Northwest," and I certainly agree with that sentiment, although the issue of tribal sovereignty is a complex one.

At the sand dunes south of Florence, riders of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are mad that alcohol was banned throughout the dunes in May. When the commissioners heard a presentation about the accidents attributable to alcohol at the dunes, I was startled: Who'da thunk that alcohol and ATVs don't mix? It seemed like a winning combination to me, but you learn something every day in this business. My 3-year-old son, who can't pronounce the word "dune," refers to these ATVs as "doom buggies." He's a pretty perceptive kid.

Farther down the road in Coos County, gun control is a contentious issue. I saw bumper stickers proclaiming *Charlton Heston is my president* and *This truck insured by Smith and Wesson*. Former Coos County Sheriff Michael E. Cook suggested Coos commissioners should pass an ordinance requiring every household to own a gun. This proposal was rejected, in part because of concerns about how police would enforce the ordinance. How would you like that job?

In Charleston, I visited with a waitress at a seafood restaurant who explained that local fishers are frustrated with fishing quotas. A recent report by the Pew Commission showed that fisheries are depleting rapidly. Groundfish landings off the Oregon Coast have declined by 77 percent since 1990. Experts are discussing the possibility of "dead zones" off the coast in a few decades if present trends continue. Last month, when the National Marine Fisheries Service appointed a panel to study the vitality of coastal fisheries, representatives of the fishing industry filled 25 of the 31 vacancies. In other news, 25 foxes have been appointed to serve on the Henhouse Commission.

At our hotel in Bandon, we saw a sign in our room asking us to take off our shoes so we wouldn't track in tar. The beaches looked clean to me, but I know that the South Coast communities are still angry about the oil spilled by the New Carissa. And wrecked tankers aren't the only source of oil pollution. Every eight months, 11 million gallons of oil – the same amount spilled by the tanker Exxon Valdez in Alaska in 1989 – drains from land pollution into the oceans. At this rate, Spongebob Squarepants will be saturated with oil by the year 2004.

Our family returned home by Friday so we could attend the Oregon Country Fair. I knew I couldn't miss this year's fair when Joe Harwood of the *R-G* described it as a mecca for "freaks, geeks [and] lawyers" (I qualified in all three categories, but they refused to give me a discount at the gate). Congratulations to the fair's organizers for another great event. I hope that 20 years from now, the only "dead zone" in Oregon will be on the main stage at the County Fair, where the band Wake the Dead covers *Scarlet Begonias*.

*Tom Lininger is the county commissioner for the East Lane District.*

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