



# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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ONE DOLLAR



## A BIRD IN THE SAND



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

North Coast Beach Ranger Ken Murphy shows an area of the beach that would work as a snowy plover nesting area at Fort Stevens State Park. Sparse grass, dry sand and scattered pieces of driftwood make for an optimum breeding ground for the birds.

## Cutter Steadfast commander relieved of post, for now

Announcement cites loss of confidence in abilities to lead

By DERRICK DePLEDGE  
The Daily Astorian

The commander of the U.S. Coast Guard's Astoria-based Cutter Steadfast was temporarily relieved of his post Monday due to the loss of confidence in his abilities to lead. Cmdr. John Bitterman, who took helm of the Steadfast last July, was reassigned to Coast Guard Sector Columbia River in Warrenton pending an investigation, according to Lt. Donnie Brzuska of the Coast Guard's Pacific Area Command in Alameda, Calif.

Brzuska declined to describe what led to the loss of confidence in Bitterman.

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## Buckmaster to serve on fish commission

Gov. Kate Brown fills long-vacant North Coast seat

By HILLARY BORRUD  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown announced Wednesday the appointment of Astoria resident Bruce Buckmaster to a long-vacant seat on the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The announcement means northwest Oregon will once again have a voice on the commission, after former Gov. John Kitzhaber waited more than two years to fill the position representing Oregon's 1st Congressional District.

"I think I can represent this district well for the community of sport and commercial fishing," Buckmaster said. "I have a long history of working on issues."

Buckmaster was among the 96 appointees to state boards and commissions that Brown announced in a press release Wednesday. A hearing on Brown's executive appointees is scheduled for May 14 at the Senate

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Submitted photo  
Astorian Bruce Buckmaster holds a chinook salmon he caught on a fly rod in remote Alaska in 2011. He released the fish.

## Fort Stevens invites endangered bird to nest

Clatsop Spit is prime western snowy plover nesting ground

By KYLE SPURR  
The Daily Astorian

FORT STEVENS STATE PARK — The dry, open sand beach near the Clatsop Spit is considered ideal nesting grounds for the endangered western snowy plover, a seabird the size of a sparrow.

Last year, Oregon park officials designated a half-mile portion of the beach as a "Western Snowy Plover Management Area" in an attempt to entice the endangered seabird to nest at the site.

No snowy plovers have nested at Clatsop Spit since. However, park officials recently rejoiced after a pair were seen nesting at the Nehalem Spit at Nehalem Bay State Park.

Oregon Parks and Recreation Wildlife Biologist Vanessa Blackstone spotted the pair April 3.

She said the last documented sighting of snowy plover nests at the Nehalem and Clatsop spits was in 1984. Since then, only single snowy plovers have been seen incidentally at Clatsop Spit, and have not stayed to nest.



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

A sign marks the shorebird conservation area near the South Jetty at Fort Stevens State Park.

The vast majority of snowy plovers in Oregon, about 300, are seen along the Southern Coast.

Before the Nehalem Spit sighting, Blackstone said, there was a gap in nesting from Florence up to Washington beaches at Leadbetter Point, Midway Beach and Graveyard Spit.

The Nehalem Spit sighting bodes wells for potential nesting at Clatsop Spit and the Necanicum

Spit at the Gearhart Ocean State Recreation Area, another location designed for snowy plover conservation, officials said.

"To this point, Oregon has had the most success in bringing back the population in the south," Oregon State Parks Ranger Ken Murphy said. "Some of those birds have been coming back and nesting multiple times and visiting other sites."

### Why the Spit?

What makes the Clatsop Spit beach area appealing to the snowy plovers is the dry sand above the tide line with no vegetation cover other than scattered driftwood, Murphy said.

Snowy plovers, a state and federally protected species, often crouch in depressions in the sand or

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## Wildlife groups sue Corps over cormorants

Permit allows Corps to kill birds on East Sand Island

By KATIE WILSON  
EO Media Group

COLUMBIA RIVER — A permit the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers needed to proceed with its plan to kill thousands of double-crested cormorants nesting on the Lower Columbia River's East Sand Island is now in place — and so is the first lawsuit.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a depredation permit April 13. The permit, valid through Jan. 31, 2016, will allow contractors to kill 3,489 double-crested cormorants and 5,879 nests, 105 Brandt's cormorants and 10 pelagic cormorants in 2015.

On April 20, the Audubon Society



Daily Astorian file

The Army Corps of Engineers proposes to kill thousands of the double-crested cormorants nesting on Sand Island near the mouth of the Columbia River because the birds eat too many young salmon and steelhead.

of Portland, along with four other nonprofit or volunteer-led organizations, filed a complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief against the Corps, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, which is authorized by the Fish and Wildlife Service to kill the allowed number of birds and eggs.

The Wildlife Center of the North Coast, a private volunteer-based nonprofit, recently joined the lawsuit.

Audubon argues cormorants are being blamed for damage to salmon runs that is actually caused by dams, and that the Corps' management plan would cause the Western population of double-crested cormorants to dip below "sustainable levels" as defined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service itself.

With the lawsuit filed, the Audubon Society of Portland will seek an injunction to put a halt this year to the Corps' plans to cut the nesting population on the island almost in half by 2018.

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