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Courtesy of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Tucker Jones counts sturgeon on the Columbia River.

Caviar or dinosaur fish dish?

As caviar prices zoom, sturgeon poachers hit Pacific NW

By CASSANDRA PROFITA
Oregon Public Broadcasting

There's no good reason for a live, 8-foot sturgeon to be tied by the tail and tethered to the shore of the Columbia River, in the Pacific Northwest.

But this is how poachers steal the giant fish: They keep the sturgeon alive and hidden underwater while they look for black-market buyers.

Wildlife officers say the high value of caviar is driving poachers to these inventive tactics. They've also found sturgeon carcasses floating in the river — their bellies slit open after poachers harvested their eggs.

Catching the culprits is hard, officers say: It often requires night patrols and undercover stings.

"Sturgeon poaching is not something that's done in the middle of the day when it's sunny," says Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Sgt. Jeff Wickersham. "It's very hard to detect."

Detecting poachers has become a bigger part of wildlife police work in Washington and Oregon. Global sturgeon populations are collapsing — most notably in Russia, where caviar is known as

Contributed by Oregon State Police
Enforcement officers pose with a sturgeon illegally caught by poachers. The officers' faces are obscured because they were working undercover on a sting that was code-named Operation Broodstock.

Contributed by Collin Golden
Mitch Hicks patrols the Columbia River above Bonneville Dam.

black gold. That's fueling a market for illegal caviar and driving poachers to the Columbia River.

"The hottest commodity from an oversize fish is not the flesh, though that has a market value for sure. It's the caviar," says Mike Cenci, deputy chief of enforcement for the WDFW. "We know as long as that resource is around, it's going to attract poachers and traffickers."

To protect breeding fish, which are few and far between, fishing rules restrict people from taking sturgeon over 5 feet long.

It takes female sturgeon about 20 years to start producing eggs — by which point, they're about 6 feet long. The eggs are crucial to the species' future, but they're also a delicacy, prized as some of the world's finest caviar.

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Bridge Vista path set

Councilors reject attempt to close off development over the river

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

Brushing aside emotional appeals to do more to protect views of the Astoria Bridge and Columbia River, the Astoria City Council agreed Monday to place new development restrictions in Uniontown but preserve the region's history as a working waterfront.

The Bridge Vista phase of the city's Riverfront Vision Plan would restrict development over the river near the bridge and just west of Second Street, where new buildings could be no higher than the riverbank.

But new projects over other portions of the river in Uniontown could feature buildings up to 35 feet high and 150 feet wide with 40-foot corridors in between to preserve views. On shore, buildings of up to 45 feet high would be allowed with stepbacks to soften the impact.

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Man tries to arrest mayor, police chief

'Criminals! You're all criminals!'

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

A man disrupted an Astoria City Council meeting Monday night and tried to make citizen's arrests of Mayor Arline LaMear and Police Chief Brad Johnston before Johnston was able to wrestle him to the ground.

In a bizarre scene at City Hall, Zachary Seidel, 29, who lives in Astoria, refused to stop talking when LaMear informed him he was speaking about the wrong agenda item as the City Council opened a public hearing on the Riverfront Vision Plan.

Seidel told LaMear she was under citizen's arrest. As he tried to explain why, the mayor interrupted him.

"Would you please be quiet," Seidel said.

"I will not be quiet," LaMear said sternly, slamming down her gavel. "You are asked to leave."

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Panhandling creates plight for Seaside police

R.J. MARX — The Daily Astorian
Edgel, a partially disabled Vietnam vet, seeks assistance in Seaside. "I don't try to get by, I just try to get we need for the week in a day," he said. "If I get $20, it'll let us last two or three days. They cut our food stamps from $260 to $202."

Law enforcement grapples with quandary between freedom, local ordinances

By KATHERINE LACAZE
EO Media Group

SEASIDE — Panhandling. It has a persistent presence in Seaside, let alone larger metropolitan areas, and it's an issue that forces law enforcement agencies to try to balance local ordinances with civil rights claims.

"It's been an ongoing thing in every community," Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said. In cities across the country, one is not hard pressed to find individuals holding signs and asking for some form of assistance, whether it is money, food, work or other items.

In Seaside, panhandlers are most prevalent near the Safeway entrance on Roosevelt

Drive or in the core downtown area, especially during the summer months.

The Seaside Police Department could not provide concrete numbers on how many incidents of panhandling have been reported or responded to. Ham said they don't have a code in their system to identify calls or situations pertaining specifically to begging or panhandling, but rather identify them as general code violations, which include other incidents, as well.

The department does get numerous calls reporting panhandlers on a regular basis — enough, Ham said, "that it doesn't surprise me you're doing a story on it."

The begging law

Begging is listed as an offense against public peace and safety in the city's General Offenses Ordinance.

"No person shall beg or solicit alms or other gratuities upon the streets or in any public place in the city," the ordinance states.

See PANHANDLERS, Page 12A

The Daily Astorian
Zachary Seidel, 29, was arrested Monday night after disrupting an Astoria City Council meeting.