

Condit: His previous assignment was based in Virginia

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Busy station

Condit inherits a station that Capt. Daniel Travers, commander for Sector Columbia River, says has been “outstanding” under McGrew’s leadership — from the grounds to the crew. He will oversee a station poised near one of the world’s most dangerous crossings, the Columbia River bar. The area his crew must cover stretches beyond the river, though, extending south to Oregon’s Tillamook Head and north to Leadbetter Point.

The station responds to an average of 450 to 500 search and rescue cases a year, and, already, has responded to 204 cases so far this year. Last year was one of the busiest years in nearly a decade, McGrew said in an interview before the ceremony. In one of his last days at the station, Aug. 8, McGrew oversaw eight search and rescue calls in rapidly deteriorating weather conditions. Two boats capsized and many other vessels were sinking or disabled.

Condit’s previous assignment was based in Virginia at the Boat Forces and Cutter Operations Branch, Standardization and Doctrine Team. He moves here with his wife and five children.

McGrew, meanwhile, will attend the University of Washington’s School of Marine and Environmental Affairs in Seattle to pursue a master’s degree in marine affairs. The Coast Guard is sending him to school to specialize in fisheries, both enforcement and policy. He will likely take over a fisheries enforcement position in Seattle after he completes the two-year program.

Bossman and surfman

McGrew, who has been in command at Station Cape Dis-



Lt. Scott McGrew, left, and Lt. Tom Condit, center, walk along the ranks during a personnel inspection at the Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment Change of Command ceremony Monday.

appointment since 2012, is a rarity in the Coast Guard world: both a surfman and the commanding officer of a station.

Originally from Youngstown, Ohio, he enlisted with the Coast Guard during his senior year of high school and first served as a boatswain’s mate. From there, he became certified as a heavy weather coxswain based in Ohio then headed west to attend the National Motor Lifeboat School at Cape Disappointment and became a surfman, a title “reserved for the service’s most highly trained boat handlers,” according to USCG publications. “Surfman qualification is the pinnacle of professionalism at these units.”

Of the Coast Guard’s 188 boat stations, only 20 are located in areas where the conditions require surfmen and Cape Disappointment is known from

coast to coast — famous, or infamous, depending on your point of view.

“You can say the name to someone in Florida and they know where it is,” McGrew said.

Ready for action

He is proud of changes he and his crew implemented in how they responded to emergency situations. Under his leadership, people on duty focused on being underway instead of taking on myriad other tasks. If a call came in, they could leave quickly. McGrew also decided to put Coast Guard boats on the water during times and in places when it was more likely they would be needed, on busy fishing days, for instance, cutting down on the time it took to respond to calls.

Since that change, McGrew said Coast Guard crew have been right there when fishing

boat engines have died crossing the Columbia River bar, or when a boat has begun to take on water in heavy swells.

It will be hard to leave the station, the crew and the area, McGrew said. Of his time at Cape Disappointment, McGrew said he is most proud of the accomplishments of the people who worked with him at the station.

“I had a great group of people that I worked with here,” he said.

Under his leadership, members of the station were recognized in big ways for their hard work and expertise. This year, two Station Cape Disappointment crew members, BM1 Shane Abold and MK3 Konor Mercer, were recognized as, respectively, top coxswain and top engineer in the entire Coast Guard.



From left: Aaron Johnson, Christopher Morgan, Grant Artz and Robby Koopman, walk down from the Cape Disappointment lighthouse to present the flags during the Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment Change of Command ceremony Monday.



Capt. Daniel Travers, left, presents Lt. Scott McGrew, right, with the Coast Guard Commendation Medal during the Change of Command ceremony Monday.



Lt. Scott McGrew, left, and Capt. Daniel Travers, right, salute the flag during the National Anthem at the Change of Command ceremony Monday.

Drones: More people are buying them as prices continue to fall

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On Aug. 2, for the second time in three days, a commercial pilot reported a drone while approaching John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. On Sunday, four commercial flights between 2,000 and 3,000 feet in the air spotted a drone while prepping for landing at Newark Liberty International Airport. On Tuesday, as flames engulfed a Vietnamese restaurant in San Diego, the local fire department pleaded with drone operators to leave the area, tweeting, “You are interfering with fire operations.”

Falling prices, growing problem

A simple explanation for the growing number of encounters is that consumer drones are more common as prices fall. The Consumer Electronics Association predicts U.S. sales will reach 700,000 this year, up from 430,000 last year and 128,000 in 2013. The industry group estimates this year’s average sale price at \$149, down from \$160 last year and \$349 in 2013.

Twenty members of Congress from California asked

the Federal Aviation Administration last month to consider a requirement for drone makers to include technology that aims to prevent operators from interfering with first responders. One bill in the California Legislature would raise fines and introduce jail time for anyone who impedes firefighters, and another would grant immunity to first responders who destroy interfering drones.

Greg McNeal, a Pepperdine University law professor, likens worries about safety and ethical boundaries to concerns years ago about use of camera-enabled cellphones in locker rooms and other public places. Governments are wrestling with how to regulate a new consumer technology that can wreak havoc when misused.

Most operators who flew near wildfires were probably unaware of the dangers, said McNeal. Others are “straight reckless,” he said, perhaps motivated to get images that no one else has to sell them.

Drone dilemmas

The U.S. Forest Service reports potential drone sightings this year in eight wildfires in California, two in Washington state and one each in Colorado, Minnesota and Utah:

- A plane dropping retardant on a fire near San Bernardino, Calif., came within about 500 feet of a drone on June 24. Another pilot soon came within the same distance of a second drone, forcing the grounding of four firefighting aircraft for 2½ hours.

- A reconnaissance airplane in eastern Washington state spotted a drone on July 11. Pat McCabe, a U.S. Forest Service aviation supervisor seated next to the pilot, saw the drone land about three miles from the fire perimeter and get loaded into a gray or black SUV, whose driver sped away.

“The intelligence gathering stopped, and now our focus was on the drone,” said McCabe.

The sighting occurred as water- and retardant-dropping aircraft were scheduled to stop for the day. If it was earlier, McCabe said those planes and helicopters

would have been grounded.

- A drone appeared about 200 feet from the left wing of a reconnaissance aircraft near Milford, Calif., on June 29. The firefighter pilot, who was about 1,500 feet above ground, left the area and was ordered to return to base.

Under FAA guidelines, drone hobbyists should fly no higher than 400 feet, stay clear of stadiums and people, and avoid flying within five miles of airports. During wildfires and other emergencies, the FAA imposes temporary restrictions.

Software, including a prod-

uct from Pepperdine’s McNeal named AirMap, can alert operators to FAA-restricted areas. But, some firefighting officials say, wildfires spread so quickly and unpredictably that there may be a dangerous lag before flight restrictions are in place.

The prospect of public shaming may be the best deterrent, said Jon Resnick, spokesman for SZ DJI Technology Co., one of the largest consumer drone makers.

“Technology can only do so much,” he said. “At a certain point, common sense needs to take hold.”

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