

Buoy 10: Deaths in 2001 triggered stronger patrol

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A couple years ago, Hilburger said, one fisherman avoided by a foot getting run over by a barge being towed downriver. "He wasn't even aware of the danger, and that's what's scary," Hilburger said. "The only two people on board who had life jackets were the two kids. It wouldn't have done them much good."

On the docks

"Next weekend, this place will be organized chaos," said Corey Deck, an auxiliariarist watching over the boat ramp at Hammond Marina.

Each Friday, Saturday and Sunday morning, Deck and about 12 other auxiliariarists station themselves at local boat launches on either side of the lower Columbia. There rests the bulk of the auxiliary's preventative efforts to keep boaters safe, providing information on safe boating and scanning for potential issues before people ever enter the river.

"When people get fish fever, sometimes the sense is in the back seat," Deck said, shortly after noting one angler driving his draining boat back to the parking lot, after backing it into the marina without putting in his boat plugs.

Recently, Deck said, the Warrenton Police Department



U.S. Coast Guard auxiliariarists say that the Warrenton Police Department posting an officer, in this case Robert Wirth, on scene helps defuse any potential conflicts.

Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

started placing officers on the boat ramp at the Hammond Marina, which he added immediately improves how people carry themselves when launching. Police Chief Matt Workman said placing an officer there and facilitating traffic helps reduce the number of chippy arguments between fishers.

Some of the auxiliariarists are also commercial vessel safety inspectors in addition to working during Buoy 10. They offer free inspections of commercial vessels, Wood said, but because of budget constraints can't extend the service to the pro-

digium number of "six pack" charter boats taking up to six fishers apiece.

Some auxiliariarists also share their opinions that life jackets, currently required only for people 12 and younger, should be required for everyone, along with VHF radios.

Reserve unit

"They're a force multiplier for us," said Capt. Daniel Travers, commander of Sector Columbia River, of the job the auxiliary does for the active duty Coast Guard.

With his units often occupied with searches and rescues,

Travers said the auxiliary, along with all the other state, county and local agencies, play an important role in keeping fishermen safe and the waterway clear for ship traffic.

He estimated about 160 active-duty Coast Guardsmen, along with the auxiliary, patrol Buoy 10, along with county sheriff's offices, state police and local agencies from both sides of the river.

The Coast Guard's strengthened Buoy 10 operation is partially a response to 2001, when seven people died during the fishery. Since then, fatalities have been reduced to at most one in a given year, but usually none.

By the halfway point of Hilburger's patrol Saturday, as he is pulling into the Warrenton marina, a report comes over the radio of a vessel taking on water. By the end of the weekend, the Coast Guard had responded to 19 cases, mostly minor except for two capsizings, six people in the water and 12 searches and rescues. The people in the water were rescued by fellow fishermen and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Last weekend was only the beginning. Travers, Workman and the auxiliariarists all expect Buoy 10 to heat up over the next few weekends.

Gearhart: Motion to waive fee charge passed by a 3-2 vote

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"They want to get their house back legally on their property," Connell said. "They believe it was a surveyor's error and nothing more than that. This piece would be the beginning to correct the rest of the properties on Ocean Avenue between D and E and get everybody squared."

A similar street vacation occurred in 1999, when the city vacated a 10-foot portion of D Street east of South Ocean Avenue for one block, Connell said.

Neighbors attending the meeting, including South Ocean Avenue and Marion Avenue property owners, said they supported the street vacation.

City Councilor John Duncan pointed to potential concerns. With the street vacation, a park-

land dedication by a previous owner could be considered void, and heirs to the previous owners could seek that property back, now valued at \$3 million.

In addition, since state laws say the city must retain a supply of 20 years of buildable lots, the street vacation could block potential development mandated by law.

"We went through work that said we had about 20 years' supply right now," Duncan said. "Based on the number of permits that have gone out, we're approaching 20. How many years at 20 years does it take to use up the 200 lots we have right now? Ten years."

Retaining an easement
Duncan proposed retaining an easement over the property

being vacated by the city, which would protect the city should sidewalk or street improvements be required. "I can support a vacation if we keep an easement that allows existing home structures to stay in place," he said. "I can't support vacating that without retaining that easement."

City Councilor Dan Jesse supported the street vacation. "It's helping a whole block of property owners," he said.

Councilor Sue Lorain said the city received land because of the error.

"Without all the science, without the 'what if,' what I heard happening was somebody screwed up the surveying way back when," she said. "The city lucked out. We got 10 feet of land we really shouldn't have gotten because of this mess-up. I



Carole Connell



John Duncan



Dianne Widdop

don't think we should go laughing, 'Look what we got.' I think they deserve to keep that 10 feet, as long as they are working with the rest of the neighborhood."

Mayor Dianne Widdop called it "a major screw-up." "These people deserve to have the right to sell their property if they so desire and give clear title," she said.

Fee waiver

Councilors approved the street vacation and easement unanimously, which triggered the second part of the request, a waiver of the street vacation fee. Based on assessed value of the Ocean Avenue land, the fee was determined to be at least \$86,000 and possibly much more.

Councilors Duncan and Jesse

said they were concerned that a fee waiver could set a precedent for future applicants.

"They're getting a lot of high-dollar property for nothing," Duncan said. "Do we have to do this for all our citizens? Give all of our citizens \$100-plus thousand dollars?"

"I take exception, I don't think these folks have come up with a story," said Lorain. "Maybe in the future someone will 'come up with a story,' but this group is one of the most prepared I've seen. I don't think they should have to pay for something we're controlling."

The motion to waive the fee charge passed by a 3-2 vote, with Lorain, Jesse and Widdop voting on its behalf. Councilors Duncan and Kerry Smith voted against the proposal.

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