

BEACH BREACH

Water ratings could indicate infrastructure problems

By **DANI PALMER**
EO Media Group

Part 1 of two parts

CANNON BEACH — High bacteria readings are leading the Ecola Creek Watershed Council and Surfrider Foundation to believe something is seriously wrong with Cannon Beach's wastewater infrastructure. The cause, and if there is even a problem, however, is uncertain. Are this year's high readings a result of failing systems, human activity, storms or something else?

Field coordinator for Surfrider's Blue Water Task Force Ryan Cruse appeared before the City Council earlier in the month. He and others asked the city to conduct a complete review to study potential flaws in sewage and wastewater systems.

The Surfrider Foundation has documented a history of sporadic high readings, mainly at Gower Street and Chisana Creek.

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Katherine Lacaze/EO Media Group

Surfrider Foundation's Oregon Field Coordinator Ryan Cruse, right, shows Haystack Rock Awareness Program Education Coordinator, and recent North Coast Blue Water Task Force volunteer, Melissa Keyser how to record data while gathering ocean water samples during a training held in Cannon Beach in June. The Blue Water Task Force tests water quality at six sites in four locations on the Oregon North Coast and provides the data to the public.

Bye, bye, Eastern Oregon. Hello, New Idaho

La Grande man pushes for eastern counties to join Idaho

By **JADE McDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Residents in Eastern Oregon and Washington have discussed breaking away from their more liberal neighbors to form a new state for years, but a new twist has been added to the conversation: Why form a new state when the rural counties could just join Idaho instead?

Ken Parsons, a 72-year-old farmer from La Grande, said the idea was floated offhand by someone else in a letter to the editor in the La Grande Observer. After thinking about it for a couple of months and discussing it with friends, Parsons said he has decided to try to get input from neighboring residents, including Umatilla and Morrow counties.

"It's an intriguing idea," he said.

As Parsons sees it, rural Oregon and Washington residents who are tired of being outvoted by the population centers in Portland and Seattle would be better understood by politicians from the more rural, conservative Idaho. Legislators born and raised in the most urban parts of their state "don't have any idea," he said, of how environmental lobbyists often hurts farmers, hunters and others in more rural parts of the state.

"The environmental regulations that come out of Salem make it almost impossible to do my work," he said.

Dr. Jeffrey Dense, a political science professor at Eastern Oregon University, called the logistics of trying to create a new, larger Idaho "largely insurmountable."

"Given the inability of Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., to effectuate this type of large scale-change, disgruntled citizens would be better off to get involved with politics instead of complaining about the state of affairs," he said in an email.

Not since 1863

A state boundary hasn't been redrawn in the United States since West Virginia was carved out of Virginia in 1863. The idea of seceding from one state to the other is hardly new, however, and various efforts have landed on ballots and on the floor of state legislatures across the country.

Occasionally, those efforts have even come close to fruition. In 2002 the U.S. House of Representatives voted unanimously to allow state legislators to adjust the Nevada-Utah state boundary. The move would have been a minor one, but it would have allowed the economically struggling city of Wendover, Utah, to join the casino-rich city of West Wendover, Nevada, and get rid of what residents called an invisible "Berlin Wall" in the community creating poor infrastructure and schools on one side of the state line and abundant services on the other. The bill ended up dying in the U.S. Senate, however, after Nevada Sen. Harry Reid opposed it.

Shifts in population

According to 2014 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Idaho has 1,634,464 residents. That would rise to 3,680,297 people if all 17 Oregon counties east of Hood River County and the 20 Washington counties east of King County jumped ship.

Oregon, meanwhile, would go from 3,970,239 residents to 3,471,709 and Washington would drop from 7,061,530 residents to 5,514,227.

How that would affect each state's representation in Washington, D.C., would depend on how other states' populations changed at the same time.

The 435 seats in the House of Representatives are apportioned every 10 years based on population counts in

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Solutions to water woes are not cheap

The Associated Press

Part of an occasional series

In most places across the country, the promise of clean, cheap, readily available water has been taken for granted, but that has begun to change. Farm runoff has polluted municipal water sources, drought has taken its toll on reservoirs and wells, and the aging underground networks of pipes that carry water to homes and businesses rupture all too frequently. Just as with crumbling bridges or congested highways, the solutions don't come cheap.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency projects it will cost \$384 billion over 20 years just to maintain the nation's existing drinking water infrastructure. Replacing pipes, treatment plants and other infrastructure as well as expanding drinking water systems to handle population growth could cost as much as \$1 trillion. Without that investment, industry groups warn of a future with more infrastructure failures that will disrupt service, transportation and commerce.



America's crumbling infrastructure

Despite the need, the largest federal aid program for improving the nation's drinking water system has more than \$1 billion sitting unspent in government accounts, according to a review of data by The Associated Press shows. That is largely the result of project delays, poor management by some states and structural problems.

Adding to the concerns over a lack of investment, many parts of the country simply don't have enough water. Between the West and pockets of the Southeast, 71 million people are now affected by drought, according to federal calculations. And in a recent survey by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 40 of 50 state water managers said they anticipate supply shortages in at least part of their states over the next decade.

Cities bear the rising cost of keeping water safe to drink

By **JOHN SEEWER**
Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio — Standing at the edge of the Great Lakes, the world's largest surface source of fresh water, this city of 280,000 seems immune to the water-supply problems that bedevil other parts of the country. But even here, the promise of an endless tap can be a mirage.

Algae blooms in Lake Erie, fed by agriculture runoff and overflowing sewers, have become so toxic that they shut down Toledo's water system in 2014 for two days. The city is considering spending millions of dollars to avoid a repeat.

Similar concerns about water quality are playing out elsewhere. Farm fertilizers, discarded pharmaceuticals, industrial chemicals and even saltwater from rising oceans are seeping into many of the aquifers, reservoirs and rivers that supply Americans with drinking water.

Combating these growing threats means cities and towns must tap new water sources, upgrade aging treatment plants and install miles of pipeline, at tremendous cost.

Consider tiny Pretty Prairie, Kansas, less than an hour's drive west of Wichita, where the water tower and cast-iron pipes need to be replaced and state regulators are calling for a new treatment plant to remove nitrates from farm fertilizers. The fixes could cost the town's 310 water customers \$15,000 each.

Emily Webb never gave a second

thought to the town's water until she became pregnant almost two years ago. That's when she learned through a notice in the mail that the water could cause what's known as "blue baby" syndrome, which interferes with the blood's ability to carry oxygen.

"It just kind of scared me," she said. "Now we don't drink it at all."

Instead, she and her husband stock up on well water from her parents' home and buy bottled water even though health officials say the risk is limited to infants. When it comes time to buy their first home, she said, they will look somewhere else.

Pretty Prairie's leaders hope to find a less expensive solution. They say the cost of a new treatment plant would drive people away and threaten the farm town's survival.

Across the country, small towns and big cities alike are debating how much they can afford to spend to make contaminated water fit for drinking.

Cash-strapped cities worry that an unfair share of the costs are being pushed onto poor residents. Rural water systems say they can't expect the few people they serve to pay for multimillion-dollar projects.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors, in a report released this summer, found spending by local governments on all water-supply projects nearly doubled to \$19 billion between 2000 and 2012. Despite a slowdown in recent years, it remained at an

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WHAT DOES AMERICA USE ITS WATER FOR?

Online interactive at <http://bit.ly/1h4Rxbb>

Gearhart's Neacoxie Barn storm still brewing

Shannon Smith slapped with \$30,000 in fines

By **R.J. MARX**
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — The owner of Neacoxie Barn in Gearhart is in more trouble with local officials.

While a decision awaits in Municipal Court on Shannon Smith's not guilty plea for hosting special events without a permit, Smith was slapped with a series of civil administrative penalties from the city that total more than \$30,000.

Six \$5,000 tickets have been issued this summer by Jim Brien, the city's building official. Tickets for using the barn without an occupancy permit were issued Sept. 17 and Sept. 19, added to four tickets delivered this summer as

Smith continues to hold events.

Smith also received two zoning code violations of \$500 each for the mid-September events. The tickets were delivered by Gearhart Police Chief Jeff Bowman personally, City Manager Chad Sweet said.

"Last year she only used tents, she didn't use the inside of the barn," Sweet said. "This year she used the barn, which doesn't have an occupancy permit, six times."

'She just carried on'

This year's \$30,000 worth of administrative fines are in addition to two additional administrative fines Smith has received since 2012, Sweet said. The first \$5,000 fine was reduced by the City Council to \$1 after Smith said she would follow city rules. The second fine, issued in 2014, was contested after Smith and her attorney stated barn functions were all personal or family events, which

would be permitted for a private homeowner. "We backed off," Sweet said.

"This year she continued to have events," he added. "She never issued us a document saying they were friends and family, she just carried on, so we issued her civil administrative penalties for using the inside of the barn."

Legal briefs pending

Meanwhile, Judge John Orr is waiting for legal briefs from both the city and Smith or her attorney. He considered arguments from the city alleging Smith continues to host special events and gatherings despite a lack of an active conditional use permit allowing commercial activities. After Smith was ticketed for using her barn for two weddings held this summer, she contested the \$500 citations, pleading not guilty to the charges and bringing the case to Municipal Court for hearing.

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