

# Kitzhaber scandal, mass shooting top Oregon stories of 2015

By STEVEN DUBOIS  
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Gov. John Kitzhaber's unprecedented fourth term turned into an unprecedented short term, and his abrupt February resignation was selected Oregon's story of the year in the annual vote conducted by The Associated Press.

Every editor or news director who submitted a ballot of 10 top stories had the governor's downfall as either the biggest or second-biggest story of 2015. Those who didn't put Kitzhaber in the top spot chose the massacre at Umpqua Community College, which finished in second place, just ahead of the legalization of recreational pot.

Those were the only stories named on every ballot as editors went all over the map with their remaining picks. Reflecting the variety of opinions, the three stories that just missed the top 10 included the rollout of Common Core-aligned testing, the Portland Timbers winning the Major League Soccer championship and — of course! — the improbable stardom of the Portland International Airport carpet.

Here are 2015's top 10 stories:

## 1: GOVERNOR RESIGNS:

Just weeks after being sworn in for his fourth term, Gov. Kitzhaber surrendered to political pressure and quit over allegations his live-in fiancée, Cylvia Hayes, used their relationship to win contracts for her consulting business and failed to report the income on her taxes. Federal agents launched a criminal investigation in February, but no charges had been filed as 2015 drew to a close. Kitzhaber has denied wrongdoing. Secretary of State Kate Brown assumed Oregon's highest office after Kitzhaber ended his four-decade political career.

## 2: COLLEGE SHOOTING:

A 26-year-old gunman opened fire at Umpqua Community College, fatally shooting nine people before killing himself. The Oct. 1 attack shattered the Roseburg community and immediately reignited national debates about gun violence, school safety, mental health and media coverage. President Barack Obama lamented that mass shootings and the reaction to them have become "routine." He visited the timber town to meet privately with grieving families, ignoring protests from gun-rights activists.

## 3: MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION:



Don Ryan/AP Photo/File

Gov. John Kitzhaber kisses fiancée, Cylvia Hayes, in January after he is sworn in for an unprecedented fourth term as governor in Salem. Kitzhaber resigned in February after influence-peddling allegations.

by Oregon voters to approve recreational marijuana was last year's No. 1 story. The process of putting legalization into practice remained a major topic throughout 2015. The highlight day was Oct. 1, when medical pot dispensaries began selling to recreational users over 21. Some shops opened at midnight, giving away free food and T-shirts, and offering discounted marijuana.

**4: DROUGHT:** Last winter saw a dreadfully low snowpack, and the continuing dry weather led Gov. Brown to declare drought emergen-

cies for more than two dozen counties. Record December precipitation that triggered flooding and landslides eased the drought, with much of the rain and snow occurring after the ballots had been sent.

**5: HOUSES BURN:** Officials and rural homeowners feared a bad wildfire season because the land was so dry. Their fears were realized in many parts of the state as flames raged through parched forests and grasslands. A lightning-sparked blaze near John Day burned 172 square miles and destroyed more than 40 homes. No Oregon

wildfire since the Great Depression has destroyed more homes.

## 6: PUBLIC PENSIONS:

The Oregon Supreme Court ruled in April that some cuts to public-employee retirement benefits are unconstitutional, wiping out much of the savings lawmakers were trying to attain. The justices said workers were promised an annual inflation increase of up to 2 percent, and the Legislature couldn't scale it back retroactively. It was the second time in a decade the court rejected legislative efforts to curtail pension benefits already accrued.

## 7: GUNS-BACKGROUND CHECKS:

Oregon legislators approved a law requiring background checks for private gun transactions. The law requires gun buyers and sellers who aren't related to visit a licensed gun dealer who can run a background check. Republicans opposed the measure, saying it would burden gun owners who are committed to following the law without changing the behavior of people willing to break it.

## 8: OREGON DUCKS FOOTBALL:

Heisman winner Marcus Mariota led the University of Oregon to the first College Football Playoff national championship

game, but dreams of bringing a national title back to Eugene crumbled in a 42-20 loss to Ohio State. Mariota passed for two touchdowns, but the Ducks were held to their lowest point total of the season.

## 9: PORT OF PORTLAND:

Two major shipping companies stopped serving the Port of Portland amid labor turmoil. Hanjin and Hapag-Lloyd, which represented more than 90 percent of container traffic at the port, said their move was based on low productivity. Businesses that relied on the container terminal for international shipping are now paying more to send their goods to out-of-state ports via truck or rail.

## 10: DRILLING PROTEST:

Greenpeace activists rappelled off Portland's St. Johns Bridge this summer in a dramatic attempt to stop a Royal Dutch Shell icebreaker from leaving the city to join an Arctic drilling operation. The vessel eventually threaded its way past the dangling demonstrators. But late in September, Shell announced it was ending further exploration in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas because of disappointing results from an exploratory well.

## Housekeeper convicted for stealing from Astoria couple

By KYLE SPURR  
The Daily Astorian

The woman who stole from an Astoria couple after responding to their ad for a housekeeper on a local Facebook page was convicted Thursday in Clatsop County Circuit Court.

Kourtney Marie Scott, 25, of Astoria, was sentenced to two years probation and 20 days in jail after pleading no contest to first-degree theft.

Scott was arrested in October following a police investigation into multiple thefts from the couple who hired her as a housekeeper from the Facebook page "Astoria Oregon Virtual Yard Sales."

The couple told police they noticed cash, jewelry, clothing and electronic items missing from their home and cars. They helped detectives conduct surveillance at their home.

Astoria Police Detective Thomas Litwin watched Scott break into the victims' car to take money. She was then arrested.

Detectives were able to recover some of the stolen items including jewelry which had been sold to a local jewelry shop. However, other jewelry, sold to a

different local shop, had already been melted down, according to police.

The amount of restitution Scott will owe is still being determined. It will be at least \$1,000.

The couple gave a statement during the court hearing Thursday, describing how they felt betrayed. It will take a while before they can trust someone again, they said.

Scott will get credit for the few days she already spent in jail. She is eligible to serve the remaining jail time alternatively, such as on home monitoring.

In addition, Judge Cindee Matyas ordered Scott to complete 40 hours of community service.

Police warn the public about hiring people from sites like the Facebook page.

The page, and others including "GoonieVille Buy & Sell," allow locals to offer goods and services for sale, though most pages have an informal policy that the pages should only be used to sell or try to find items. However, people routinely use the pages to post jobs and services and advertise their businesses.



Kourtney Marie Scott

## Chinook River lands eyed for conservation

### Cowlitz Tribe expands efforts to restore salmon

EO Media Group

CHINOOK, Wash. — A major land purchase on the inland side of Chinook will place 250 acres in permanent conservation status. This is part of more than \$1 million in grant-funded salmon habitat efforts recently announced for Pacific County by the Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board and the Puget Sound Partnership.

Elsewhere in the county, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe was granted more than \$180,000 for ongoing habitat restoration in the Grays River watershed. And the Pacific County Anglers were awarded \$382,354 to restore fish passage on Stringer Creek south of Menlo in north county.

### Chinook River

Lands along the Chinook River have been eyed for more than 20 years as offering the potential to restore tidal wetlands that juvenile salmon and other species heavily rely on for food and shelter.

Since white settlement began, an

estimated 68 to 70 percent of vegetated tidal wetlands have been lost in the Columbia River floodplain of which the Chinook River is a part, according to the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership. Loss of this habitat is cited by biologists as a key factor in long-term declines in salmon numbers.

Increasing the amount of these wetlands accessible to migrating salmon is a key goal for agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. The wildlife department has expanded its land holdings on the Chinook River in recent years and now owns 1,000 acres.

Now, aided with \$450,500 in state grants announced earlier this month and \$89,500 in federal funds, Vancouver-based Columbia Land Trust will buy a mile of fish habitat on the Chinook River from Chinook resident Brian Wirkkala and associated owners. More than 200 acres of the acquisition are wetlands.

"The acquisition will enable habitat restoration and support local and out-of-basin populations of fall Chinook, chum and coho salmon, and steelhead, all of which are listed as threatened with extinction under the federal Endangered Spe-

cies Act as well as listed eulachon (also called smelt)," according to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

When completed, the purchase will be one of Columbia Land Trust's larger acquisitions in Pacific County, where it already owns 45 parcels, according to the Pacific County Assessor's Office. It has major holdings in the Long Beach Peninsula's interior lakes region, acquisitions which were indirectly financed by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. On the Columbia estuary in Pacific County, the land trust already has significant holdings near the mouth of the Wallacut River in Ilwaco's Stringtown neighborhood, and near Knappton just off State Route 401.

### Cowlitz Tribe

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe has been taking an interest in salmon-restoration projects in the Columbia estuary in about the past two years in cooperation with Bonneville Power Administration, though this area is outside the tribe's traditional sphere of influence. Starting in 2014, the tribe managed habitat work in Clatsop County at the confluence of the Wallooskee and Youngs rivers.

## New highway signs honor Oregon veterans

The Daily Astorian

Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center in Warrenton will host a dedication ceremony at 11 a.m. Jan. 9 for the 338-mile Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway on U.S. Highway 101.

At the dedication, a new highway sign will be unveiled honoring veterans who served during the wars beginning 25 years ago.

A total of 67 signs are being installed on six Oregon highways. The six highways cover 2,040 miles.

One sign is already installed near the north end of U.S. Highway 101 in Warrenton.

Nine signs will be installed and dedicated early this year along the Oregon Coast between Astoria and Brookings. The border-to-border veterans memorial highway on U.S. Highway 101 is the first of its kind across the country.

Legislation for the six war veterans' highways was requested in 2008 by Bend Heroes Foundation.

The Bend Heroes Foundation managed the project in

cooperation with the state Legislature, veterans groups, sign sponsors and the state Department of Transportation.

All signs are funded by donations to Bend Heroes

Foundation. The foundation uses donations to pay the Department of Transportation \$900 to fabricate and install each sign on U.S. Highway 101.

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