

Sea lions: 'This is far bigger than Clatsop County'

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Other commissioners cautioned Hunsinger that while the Port should take the lead on expelling sea lions from Port docks, the agency does not want to become financially or legally liable by taking charge of combating predation. Port Commission Chairman Robert Mushen said the fishing community could form a much more effective lobby, with support from the Port.

"This is far bigger than Clatsop County," Campbell said, noting that sea lions are showing up on docks from California to Alaska. "Everybody who likes to eat a salmon should be involved in this."

The Port Commission reached a consensus to have Hunsinger continue his organizing role and report back to the commission.

The Port has estimated more than \$100,000 in damage to its docks from sea lions. McIntyre said sea lions at her harbor have destroyed entire docks and are continually plaguing her staff, who suffer in silence with a lack of federal funding to help with deterrents.

"I think we are going to



Sea lions lounge at Moss Landing Harbor in California.

have to manually thin the herd," McIntyre said, echoing the sentiments of Hunsinger and others who say the sea lion population has gotten out of control.

Population growth

When the pinnipeds were listed under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act

in 1972, the population was estimated at less than 10,000. NOAA now estimates the population is more than 300,000, even after the significant die-offs of starving pups along the California coastline.

Male foraging sea lions have sought refuge in the Columbia River, coming in increasing numbers to feed on strong salm-

on and smelt runs and other fish.

McIntyre said she, along with the entire California Association of Harbor Masters and Port Captains, would support joining an effort like the Port's sea lion committee. If Oregon and California ports band together, she said, they have a better chance of lobbying for help against the animals.



Thiemo Schuff/Wikimedia Commons

The Port of Astoria will try inflatable air dancers to scare sea lions off the docks at the East End Mooring Basin.

Party barn: Smith has racked up more than \$30,000 in fines

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So far, Smith has racked up more than \$30,000 in fines, and more are pending.

However, in November, Municipal Court Judge John Orr ruled that Gearhart's zoning code did not prohibit the types of activities conducted at the barn.

Gearhart's zoning ordinance spells out only seven permitted uses by a property owner, but finds "no reference, permission, restriction nor regulation whatsoever for parties, wedding parties, large group gatherings, family reunions, class reunions and the like," Orr said in his ruling.

Two \$500 zone code citations were dismissed and pending citations were withdrawn by the city.

But safety violations issued by Building Official Jim Brien under the city's municipal and state building codes of more than \$30,000 remained, delivered after six events held at Neacoxie Barn last year.

In December, the City Council, acting as an appeals body, upheld the penalties citing Smith's lack of a certificate of occupancy allowing her to hold events. Councilors then reduced that fine by half, to \$15,000.

An additional \$5,000 — for use of the barn in November — awaits

City Council review.

Along with local zone and municipal code actions, Gearhart officials filed a motion in Clatsop County Circuit Court to close the barn from commercial use until health and safety violations were addressed and a certificate of occupancy delivered.

Citing Judge Orr's Gearhart ruling, Smith had asked the Circuit Court to drop Gearhart's request.

Despite the ruling, the barn or livery stable requires a valid certificate of occupancy and Smith's request to dismiss the injunction hearing was denied.

Smith and the city embarked on negotiations late last month.

In a late December letter, Smith's lawyer Dan Kearns requested a delay based on "hopefully fruitful settlement discussions."

Kearns asked the Circuit Court for a "60-day cooling off period where the parties would meet and confer and attempt to resolve this dispute."

Since that time, the city and Smith have been in discussions for an agreement to give Smith more time to present plans to bring the barn up to code.

"She's buying some time for herself and we're allowing this pause to give her that opportunity," Sweet said.



File Photo

Shannon Smith's livery as it stood in the 1930s. Smith has been trying for several years to renovate the facility and use it for an events center.

Seabirds: 'You feel needed out there'

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Saranpaa, the director of the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, as part of the library lecture series and in conjunction with the Haystack Rock Awareness Program. All the birds making the trip from the 100-acre refuge in Olney had been rehabilitated by staff and volunteers.

Annually, the nonprofit Wildlife Center rescues an average of 2,000 animals, mostly seabirds, but also mammals like bobcats and fawns.

"We specialize in seabirds," said Saranpaa. "Cannon Beach is one of our biggest contributors, as far as seabirds go."

In 2015, some 700 injured birds were taken in after calls in Cannon Beach.

Generally the center is charged with rescues, fixing broken bones, curing infections and raising orphaned animals.

Legacy of Sharnelle Fee

Saranpaa began volunteering at the center at age 16. Before Sharnelle Fee's death late last summer, the center's late founder and director handed the reigns to Saranpaa, now 23.

"You feel needed out there," Saranpaa said of what endears him to the Wildlife Center.

Saranpaa was joined at the lecture by Sue Stacy, a special education teacher in Seaside who has volunteered at the Wildlife Center for four years.

Together, Stacy and Saranpaa introduced four species of birds, which milled about in cages on the library floor.

The first, named "Grandpa," on account of his bushy, white eyebrows, was a rhinoceros auklet, a member of the puffin family.

"They are pelagic birds," Stacy said. "That means they live primarily out at sea. You would not normally see them, though they do come ashore for mating purposes." Even so, spotting a rhinoceros auklet can be difficult.

"They make 20- or 30-foot-long tunnels," Stacy said, "and they only come



Andrew R. Tonry/For EO Media Group

The Wildlife Center's Josh Saranpaa with an American kestrel.

out at night. They are strong swimmers. They have a body design that allows them to dive deep and withstand pressure from the water."

Grandpa was brought to the center after suffering an eye injury. He now has only one eye and is no longer considered safe to be released into the wild.

Meet Nurdle

Also making the trip was a northern fulmar — not to be called a "seagull." This one suffered from maladies of the man-made variety.

"His name is Nurdle," said Saranpaa. "He's named Nurdle because these birds eat plastic in the environment called 'nurdles.'" Saranpaa passed around a jug of plastic pellets that had been removed from the birds' stomachs.

"For hundreds of years everything on the surface of the ocean was edible," Saranpaa said.

Not anymore. "Plastic fills them up," Saranpaa said. "It doesn't pass

through them and they don't throw it up. They feel full and they'll starve to death. If that doesn't kill them, the plastic will leach nutrients from their bodies and kill them that way."

And while the northern fulmar have trouble expelling the plastic they ingest, throwing up is something they're otherwise wont to do.

"Fulmars love to regurgitate," Saranpaa said. "Their defense is actually puking up on you. It is awful — this gross, yellow, chalky, chunky stuff." And while Nurdle didn't do it too often, other cages at the center have been marked with warnings: "I'm a spitter — look out!"

"In the wild there is a practical use for that defense against other birds," Saranpaa said. "When they throw up on a bird with waterproof feathers that help them float, they lose the waterproofing and can't swim. That bird will either become water-logged and drown or become hypothermic and die."

Nothing common about these murre

Also presented were a pair of common murre, who can be found on Haystack Rock.

"They do not have nests," said Stacy. "They lay their eggs right out on the rock."

"They are fairly monogamous," Stacy added. Even at the center, the birds couple up, the reason why two of them made the trip to the lecture together. They're more comfortable that way.

"I probably get more calls about murre than anything else," Saranpaa said. "We took in over 700 common murre in 2014 alone."

Many of the murre are injured after being wrapped up in fishing lines, or being battered in the surf after failing to achieve flight as youngsters.

Finally, there was Flynn, an American kestrel falcon. Flynn was brought in with a broken left wing, injured foot joint and a split beak. He still has trouble with the wing.

"American kestrels are the smallest of the North American falcons," Saranpaa said. "You'll see them, especially driving around country roads and fields. You won't see them on Haystack Rock."

Saranpaa also shared the challenges of running a nonprofit organization.

"Since we're a nonprofit we don't have the resources to fix every single fractured bone," he said.

About half the birds are returned to the wild.

Cost for care, he said, quickly adds up. While a bald eagle is in rehab, it needs a \$17 duck to eat every day. The center pays \$20,000 for fish alone. Large orders of mice also add up. Then there are the thousands upon thousands of gallons of water needed to fill, clean, and refill pools so that the seabirds can swim.

"We're funded by public donation," Saranpaa said, addressing the crowd specifically. A number of them would make donations before the evening was over.

Saranpaa also extended thanks to the city of Cannon Beach, which he said had regularly given annual grants of about \$5,000.

Text-to-911: 'It's a natural progression for centers to utilize the technology'

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All cellular carriers are being notified of the change. As of now, if someone tries to text 911 in Clatsop County, that caller will receive an automated message saying, "Please make a voice call to 911. There is no text service to 911 available at this time."

Public perception

Besides helping the hearing-impaired community — which represents 2.6 percent of Clatsop County's popula-

tion, Rusiecki said — receiving text messages meets the expectations of a generation that has grown accustomed to communicating by text. "We are always chasing or playing catch up to the technology," he said. "We are a little bit behind on that."

Public perception is that 911 centers across the country already accept text messages. The confusion came to the forefront during the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, when thousands of students attempted to text 911 to no avail.

In Oregon last year, there were more than 2,500 attempts to send text messages to 911.

For dispatch centers already accepting text messages, the most common uses relate to domestic violence, suicide attempts, kidnappings, home invasions and active shooters.

Astoria Police Deputy Chief Eric Halverson said there are some emergency situations where people do not have cell service to make a call, but can still get a text message to go through to dis-

patch. Being able to text helps law enforcement and emergency responders locate the person.

"It's a natural progression for centers to utilize the technology," Halverson said.

Balancing act

Rusiecki said giving text messages does come with drawbacks. People often use acronyms or abbreviations in texts that can be confusing. Dispatchers are asking the public to text as clearly and concisely as possible.

In addition, pinpointing the location of a text message is a little less accurate and there is no special priority over a call. Dispatchers also lose audio clues in the background that they usually glean from calls.

There is a balancing act between convenience for the public and overwhelming a dispatcher, Rusiecki said.

The possibilities are endless, he said, especially if photos and videos are able to be sent in the future. "It's going to be a change in the dynamics of the way we do

business," Rusiecki said.

Astoria Dispatch receives calls for Astoria Police, Warrenton Police, Clatsop County Sheriff's Office and area fire departments. Seaside Dispatch, which receives calls for South County agencies, plans to wait for the state's system to receive text messages.

All Oregon dispatch centers are planning public outreach to encourage people to call first when possible.

"Our message is still going to be 'voice first,'" Rusiecki said.