

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## Difficult spot

*Linn County's timber lawsuit has more than one outcome*

Linn County Commissioner Roger Nyquist has put the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners into a difficult spot. While Linn County's lawsuit against the state of Oregon promises a big payday for the state's timber counties, it is unclear whether that ultimately would be a good or bad thing for this county or for all of Oregon.

Clatsop County is the big kahuna of Oregon's state forests. Only Tillamook County has more state forest acreage, but Clatsop's forests produce the most revenue. The Clatsop State Forest is a major component of the county's budget, and it feeds school districts and smaller special districts.

Our county resides in the heart of the North American Temperate Rainforest. The combination of soils and climate make it God's tree farm. As such, our timberland — public and private — will be a significant element in a carbon strategy.

In an interview last week, Clatsop County Commission Chairman Scott Lee suggested our county might do just as well with its forest lands

managed by what's called a TIMO (timber investment management organization). TIMOs have the freedom to manage a forest for as long a harvest cycle as one wants.

In the immediate future, however, our county commission must reckon with Linn County's lawsuit. Speaking to the *Albany Democrat-Herald*, Chairman Lee said: "This is a tough one. My concern is that any lawsuits that could tie up my (county's) revenue stream from the state forest are problematic. This could bring lawsuits from environmental groups, too."

Like so many things these days, a purported jackpot could become a problem for this county. The commission must game out the possible outcomes.

## Art is part of who we are

As we reported Friday, Astoria's art scene is strong, diversified and thriving. In fact, much the same may be said of the art sector throughout the Columbia-Pacific region, with many positive consequences for other aspects of our economy and for society as a whole.

"Today in Astoria we see a revitalized economy and a young entrepreneurial spirit unmoored from fear and convention," contributing writer Darren Orange noted,

The Art Council of Clatsop County, the Peninsula Arts Association, Astoria Visual Arts, the Fiber Arts Academy and other groups are all busy. ArtinAstoria.com is a networking tool for creative people living in the Columbia estuary counties. All this is an exciting outward sign of the fact that individual artists are finding inspiration and support here.

There is a substantial reward for communities that encourage visual and performing artists, along with writers, software designers and others who explore the forefronts of the human intellect. It has been well-established that all these creative individuals

exert a strong influence on how a place is perceived by residents and visitors.

This creativity — both in terms of actual work products and the sense that a place is on the leading edge of culture — translates into fundamental gains for everyone who lives here.

Non-artists and local governments should do all we can to facilitate artistic growth in our communities. "Creatives are complex and unique individuals, like wild animals they need our support, resources, and space to grow," Orange said in his overview last week. Support can consist of recognition via grants and awards; exhibition and performance opportunities, creative workspace; and sales and financial compensation.

There are plenty of examples around the U.S. of places that nurture strong art communities. We should set out to learn what they do best.

Art in all its forms is already a big part of who we are here at the mouth of the Columbia River and adjoining seashores. In the 21st century it may come to define our communities as profoundly as salmon fishing once did.



R.J. Marx/EO Media Group  
 Alisa Dunlap, regional business manager for Pacific Power, and Sheila Holden, regional community manager of Pacific Power, aim to keep the lights on in Seaside.

## At mercy of Mother Nature and balloons

### SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

BY R.J. MARX



Last Sunday, we saw the first of the elk entering our property.

The lead elk was like a scout, poking through the brush near the Neacoxie Creek.

You could hear the "whoosh" of the herd long before you could really see them, conjuring up visions of the prehistoric world. Would mastodons be next?

Enticed by the large, grassy neighboring lot, the herd emerged from the narrow path and woods by the creek and began staking their positions. At first they stood assembled in a lineup, one after the other taking some kind of preordained position in various corners of the lot. The smaller animals came first out of the woods, and the rows filled out. In a corner of the group, two young bulls frolicked and playfully butted heads. Then from the woods emerged the majestic elders, with mottled skin and huge racks, proud creatures flanked by their harem and offspring.

"What's that one doing?" my wife, the Jersey girl, asked.

Streetside, a circle of elk were crowding around the wooden utility pole. The pole was held upright by metal wires, covered with a protective yellow covering. The elk began chewing on the protective shell. They began pulling at the wires. They gnawed at the wood pole. They scraped and pulled and burrowed.

"Should I call the power company?" she asked.

"N-no," I said, mesmerized, standing at the window. "I think it's only a guide wire."

Still, the animals kept working, until others in the group folded their legs and settled down like an audience at symphony hall.

Short-circuit  
 The day before I'd heard Pacific Power's Sheila Holden at the Seaside Downtown Development Association breakfast at the Pig 'N Pancake.

"What can we do at Pacific Power to be a better partner with the community?" Holden asked. "What are some of the things that are important to the people, the businesses in the community? We want to not only make the community better, but the businesses better."  
 A hand shot up.  
 "Has there been something done to the substation to cover the top so we don't have another Fourth of July?" Jeff Ter Har asked.  
 He was referring to last year,



R.J. Marx/EO Media Group  
 Suspension lines in Lewis and Clark carry power to the North Coast.

### How powerful we are. Yet how powerless, as well.

when Seaside's Independence Day celebration was brought to a sudden halt after an outage.

Seaside, Gearhart and parts of Warrenton were without power from about 4:40 p.m. to 10:20 p.m. as Pacific Power crews replaced damaged equipment. A balloon, officials later announced, caused a main substation transformer to short-circuit near Seaside Factory Outlet Center.

"Balloons may seem like small things," Pacific Power Safety Manager Gene Morris said at the time. "But when escaped balloons touch power lines or substations, even the smallest amount of metal content material can conduct electricity."

When a balloon "gets in there in the wrong spot, it just basically short circuits the transmitting of the electricity," Pacific Power spokesman Tom Gauntt added.

"I knew that would come up," Holden said, six months later. "Mylargate. No, we don't cover the tops of our substations."

Pacific Power even holds events with balloons, Holden confessed. "But they are not Mylar."

Of mice and mylar  
 These seemingly harmless, festive party items cause, according to SafeElectricity.org, "hundreds of thousands" of power outages, including the one in Seaside.

In California, under the "Balloon Law," Mylar balloons have been

prohibited since 1990. Even with the ban, foil-lined party balloons cause 100 to 150 outages a year, according to Pacific Gas & Electric. In 2008, a California legislator introduced a bill to ban those, too. Florists and party planners objected, and successfully lobbied for its defeat.

Even kites have been known to bring down power systems.

A New York Times opinion writer in 2013 chronicled outages caused by animals after reading about a squirrel that electrocuted itself on a power line in Tampa, Florida, cutting electricity to 700 customers. He came up with 50 power outages caused by squirrels in 24 states.

In March, an animal about the size of a raccoon got into a substation in southeast Bend and caused fuses to blow, knocking out power to more than 8,600 customers and blacking out homes, stores and traffic lights for three hours.

Twenty-one buildings in Tulsa, Oklahoma, — including the Oklahoma State University Medical Center — were affected by a rodent-caused power outage in October, after a rat or mouse crawled into a transformer's switch gear.

Less than a month ago, a squirrel knocked out power to 1,800 customers in Sunnyside, Washington.

Seeing the elk working so diligently at the wire in our backyard reminded me of the random qualities of nature. A bitter northeast wind. Animals on a ridge path. A children's balloon.

How powerful we are. Yet how powerless, as well.

R.J. Marx is *The Daily Astorian's* South County reporter and editor of the *Seaside Signal* and *Cannon Beach Gazette*.