

Port tries new tactics against sea lions

Air dancers, railing go up Thursday

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Plan to be around the East End Mooring Basin Thursday morning?

Watch the Port of Astoria try to freak out hundreds of California sea lions by inflating several air dancers. The experiment is scheduled for 9 a.m.

It's the latest effort by the agency to rid its docks of hundreds — sometimes thousands — of lounging, federally protected sea lions drawn into the Columbia River to forage fish runs. The large marine mammals have attracted thousands of tourists, while causing substantial damage to the Port's docks, losing the agency moorages and creating a palpable animosity with the fishing community because of their predation on endangered salmon runs.

The Port has tried beach balls and electrified mats. A fiberglass orca parade float drew in media outlets from around the world and hundreds of people to the basin on a warm June evening to watch it capsize before getting towed into a spot in the basin, flanked by sea lions.

Nobody expects the air dancers to be a permanent solution, said Executive Director Jim Knight, but they will help the Port understand the sea lion's behavior, and only cost \$200 to \$300.



Photo courtesy of 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.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Sea lions and seals rest on the docks of the East End Mooring Basin.

docks, thousands are expected to forage in the Columbia as the marine food web in California collapses.

Permanent solution?

While the air dancers wave, student welders from Knappa High School will test the prototype of the 22-inch-high dock railing they have been fabricating for the Port as a more long-term solution. The aluminum pipes span up to 6 feet long, the ends bending down and bolting into the dock. Halfway between the rail and the dock runs a line of colored race flags, which along with surveying tape have so far proven one of the most effective sea lion deterrents.

Similar railings have been

used up and down the West Coast, and Knight said Knappa's are modeled after what the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says is 100 percent effective. He said NOAA had quoted the Port about \$500,000 to install pipe on all the docks. But Permit and Project Manager Robert Evert said the piping to do all the docks will cost less than \$15,000, including a \$2,000 donation from Tim Hill, owner of J&H Boatworks and Columbia Steel Supply.

Although the animals could be expelled from the

Federally protected

Sea lions were protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972, when their population was as low as 10,000. Current estimates have the population at more than 300,000 along the West Coast, which have some believing the animal has reached its carrying capacity, as evidenced by thousands of pups starving on California beaches. Wildlife biologists expect continued mass die-offs and strandings of juvenile sea lions amid El Niño conditions.

Gearhart gives barn owner more time

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

Clatsop County Circuit Court Judge Cindee Matyas extended a stipulated injunction at the Gearhart barn used for parties and special events.

The extension will keep the Pacific Way property off limits for commercial use until owner Shannon Smith provides Gearhart with plans to obtain a valid certificate of occupancy.

And with a new attorney, Smith hopes to reconcile with the city. Smith, the owner of Neacoxie Barn, a former livery stable turned into a party space, is now represented by Dean Alterman of Folawn, Alterman & Richardson of Portland.

"She and I had a very productive meeting with the city two weeks ago," Alterman said Tuesday. "We are looking forward to working with the city to get the situation squared away."

The injunction's March 1 extension follows a long and tangled legal path.

Smith repeatedly challenged the city's demand for a conditional use permit and rented out the barn for weddings, family reunions and other special events. Without toilets, sanitary facilities and safety measures, the city cited the barn for a string of building and zoning violations.

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

An additional \$5,000 administrative penalty is pending, the ninth state building code violation delivered by the city to the barn for holding events without an occupancy permit, Gearhart's City Administrator Chad Sweet said.

A hearing on that matter is scheduled in Gearhart City Hall in late April, Sweet said.

The stipulated agreement between the city and Smith was delivered New Year's Eve.

The March 1 extension gives Smith two more months to satisfy city requirements, Sweet said. Any commercial event at the barn would face a full injunction through the Circuit Court.

Alterman said Smith's next steps will probably include submitting building plans and filing for permits to bring the event space up to code.

"More than that I can't tell you because I don't know myself," Alterman said. "It's the sort of thing where the building and the zoning code are not quite in sync. They

weren't designed to work with unusual and unique properties such as this one."

Alterman said he is assuming Smith will observe the terms of the stipulated injunction prior

to its expiration May 1.

"There are a number of different ways we might find agreement with the city," Alterman said. "We're just not sure which ones they are yet."

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 3. Right-click an open space in the player (to the left of the stop button, for example), point to Enhancements, and then click Graphic equalizer.
 4. Click Turn on, and make desired changes.
 5. To hide the settings, click Close.



REBECCA SEDLAK
Coast Weekend Editor



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Q: How do I get a story about my event in Coast Weekend?

A: We plan what our feature stories will be, anywhere from two to six weeks in advance, so let us know early if you have something going on that you think would make a good feature. For smaller stories, the deadline for getting press releases and photos to us is noon Wednesday, one week before the next Thursday's publication. Email your information to rsedlak@dailyastorian.com or call 503-325-3211, ext. 217. Be sure to include a contact name, email and phone number. If you just want to post an event on the online calendar, you can go to coastweekend.com/calendar and follow the instructions.