

Dolphin: ‘Most likely it was sick’

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“There wasn’t anything we could do for him,” Tiffany Boothe of the Seaside Aquarium said. Boothe said responders don’t know yet if the cut caused the dolphin’s death.

“Most likely it was sick. When a cetacean is on the beach, there’s usually a reason. Most of the time they’re sick,” she said.

Boothe is part of the Oregon Marine Mammal Stranding Network, a coalition of scientists and volunteers who help with rescue and recovery of stranded ocean mammals and research the causes of strandings. She and her aquarium colleague Keith Chandler coordinate

responses to beached whales, dolphins, sea lions, seals and other marine mammals on the northern Oregon and southern Washington coasts.

Northern right whale dolphins are social animals that often travel in packs of 100 or more members, according to the NOAA website. Worldwide, there are about 68,000 of the animals. They are protected under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, and since the 1970s, there have been international efforts to protect this and other dolphin species. However, northern right whale dolphins are still sometimes accidentally caught in gillnets, driftnets and purse seines, and are sometimes deliberately taken in Japan.

Northern right whale dolphins inhabit the “deep, cold temperate waters of the north Pacific Ocean” off the coasts of northern Baja California, the West Coast, Alaska, Russia and Japan, according to NOAA. In the U.S., Boothe said, the species tends to concentrate in the waters off the coast of central California.

“It’s a very unique animal for us to have in this area. They tend to stay in warmer waters. But there is warm-water current that runs off the Oregon Coast that sometimes gets pushed up north,” Boothe said. “That’s when you’ll see them in our area.”

Leonetti said this dolphin was about 5 feet long, and

weighed about 90 pounds — a bit small for males, which usually range in size from about 6 to 10 feet. Boothe and Leonetti did not know the dolphin’s age.

Researchers at Portland State University collected the dolphin’s body on Monday. They will do a necropsy at their lab, Boothe said. The Portland State biologists will study the animal’s stomach contents for clues about his diet, check for signs of illness and injury, and check for parasites, traces of heavy metals and other threats to cetacean health.

“A lot of it is to see what’s going on generally with the animals in our area, and why the animal died, if we can figure it out,” Boothe explained.

Coin: It could be worth between \$350 to \$1,000

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found in cleanups in Cannon Beach.

Buried treasure

The opening of North Holladay Drive to renovation was a treasure hunter’s dream.

When bulldozers ripped up the street earlier this year, a secret city was revealed, “like it must have been in the early days,” is how Seaside City Manager Mark Winstanley described it.

For a treasure hunter, it was fertile soil.

“Immediately I was like, ‘Oh my God!’” Wolslagel said.

Employees advised him the street was off limits during work hours for his safety and the safety of others, but he was welcome to return after 6 p.m. and weekends.

“I started swinging,” Wolslagel said, referring to the use of his Garrett AT Pro Detector, the same one used on the National Geographic Channel’s “Diggers.”

Wolslagel quickly found — well, nothing is quick for hunters — buffalo head nickels and Mercury dimes.

He scraped through dirt and uncovered Indian war buttons, a 1903 Barber quarter.

“I kept swinging, Indian heads — Indian heads all over the place,” he said.

Wolslagel worked “as

much as he could” his first time out, and came back again the next day.

“I’m walking up the streets and kept walking and pulling all kinds of dimes out,” he said.

His big catch was the gold coin, a shiny glint about an inch in the dirt that set the detector singing.

Last call

In the next few days, the city of Seaside will asphalt North Holladay Drive and the street will be sealed up once again.

In the meantime, Wolslagel and Sillett are out hitting the street.

They won’t have much time, as the city expects to be laying down curbs this week and paving the streets by Memorial Day weekend.

They’d prefer the North Holladay Drive renovation to remain on the down low.

“I don’t want anyone to know — people would go crazy,” Wolslagel said. “People from Portland and everywhere.”

As for the gold piece, “There will be a lot of hunters wanting to see it,” Sillett said. “Finding it is better than keeping it.”

Although Wolslagel beat him this time, the two treasure hunters plan to compare year-end tallies.

“He got me on this one,” Sillett said. “But I’m rocking on the gold rings.”

Beware: Company has 1.6 million customer contracts

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the category of home service agreements, which are not regulated by the state Department of Consumer and Business Services.

“If you look closely at it, they’re not using the word ‘insurance,’” said Jake Sunderland, public information officer for the state agency. “They’re not violating the insurance code in any way, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that we’re giving it the green stamp. We’re just saying it’s outside of our authority.”

What’s more, the companies are not working with regional utility providers, another common point of confusion.

“Customers call us asking if it’s something that the city promotes,” Sue Dohaniuk, operations supervisor in the Astoria Finance Department, said. “We have nothing to do with that.”

HomeServe USA, in particular, has a history of attracting bad press because of controversial marketing practices. Residents nationwide have alleged that the company has engaged in deception by sending out mailers that appeared to come from local governments or utility companies.

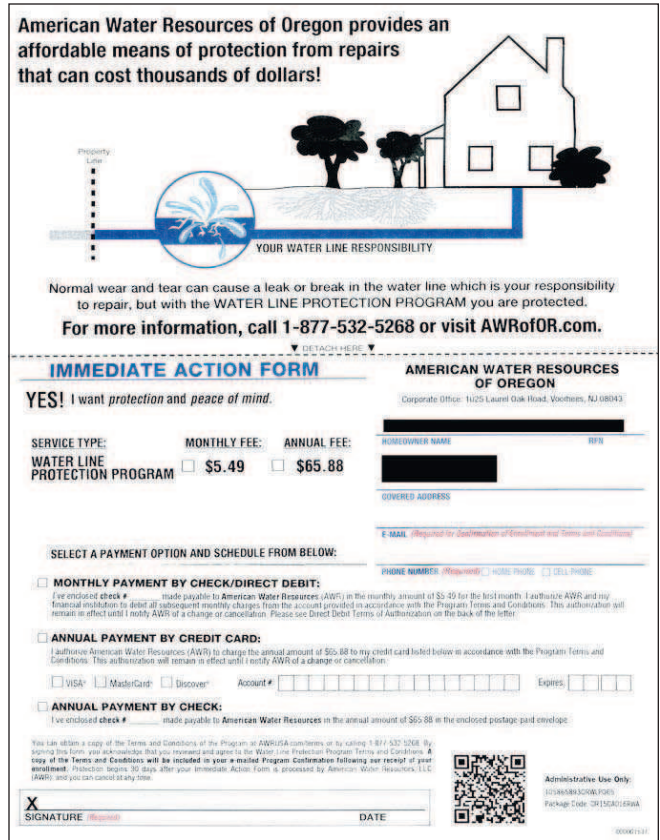
That said, the forms sent to North Coast communities this year haven’t crossed that line and make it clear that HomeServe USA is an independent company.

On the other hand

None of this suggests that the companies are peddling scams.

In addition to offering several thousand dollars’ worth of coverage, American Water Resources deploys its own trained contractors within service areas to do repair and replacement work, whereas HomeServe USA shops around for contractors on behalf of customers.

“It’s a product that some people might think is necessary and valuable to them, and that’s why it’s actually specifically defined in law — in case someone does feel



One of the mailers arriving at homes offering a “water line protection program.”

that’s appropriate for them,” Sunderland said.

American Water Resources and HomeServe USA — both of which have an A-plus rating with the Better Business Bureau — correctly point out that homeowners are financially responsible for water and sewer lines that run from the house to the meter.

“The city stops all responsibility at the meter,” Terry Ager, a water-quality technician for the city of Warrenton, said. “So, basically, it’s the customer’s responsibility from the meter to the home and throughout the house.”

In some states, the two companies are classified as insurance and do partner with municipalities.

The Better Business Bureau lists 156 customer complaints closed against American Water Resources — a New Jersey-based company owned by American Water — within the last three years, and 59 complaints closed within the last 12 months.

But the company also has 1.6 million customer contracts, Denise Venuti Free,

a company spokeswoman, said. Compared to the size and scope of the business, “I would say that that’s pretty good,” she said.

As for HomeServe USA — a Connecticut-based subsidiary of HomeServe PLC — the Better Business Bureau lists 221 complaints closed within the last three years, and 77 closed in last 12 months. That’s from a base of 2.3 million customers and 3 million service plans, according to Myles Meehan, HomeServe’s senior vice president of public relations.

“While we don’t like to have complaints from any of our customers, the number we have is relatively low,” he said.

Buyer beware

Sunderland encourages potential customers to do their homework and proceed with caution before purchasing a plan. Homeowners should know exactly what the companies cover, what they don’t and what conditions would void a contract.

American Water Resources, for example, will

not cover “pre-existing conditions,” like longstanding leaks, or claims arising from acts of nature like floods or hurricanes. The coverage is meant for the normal wear-and-tear associated with underground plumbing, such as tree-root invasion.

Property owners may also want to investigate whether their water and sewer lines need coverage at all, whether the piping is even likely to experience damage that will demand attention.

And, of course, it can be instructive to read through online user reviews and look into consumer complaints filed with the Oregon Department of Justice.

“I would just be ‘buyer beware’ on this,” Ager said. “I would definitely read the fine print.”

Barbara Aguirre, a Warrenton resident, read the mailers and thought it all sounded like a great idea. But something triggered her skepticism.

“There’s so many of us that could just sign on the dotted line and send money before we realize that we might have made a mistake,” she said.



Ryan Wolslagel holds a glass buoy he found along the beach in Gearhart.

R.J. Marx
The Daily Astorian

Forrester: ‘I’m confident that this next transition will be a success’

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As editor and publisher, Forrester introduced an array of features to the Astorian — such as In One Ear, Everyday People and Friday Extra — and related publications, including Coast Weekend and Our Coast magazine. The newspaper produced a number of special series under his leadership, including three examinations of child care in Clatsop County, three on the Port of Astoria, another titled “Teachers Talk About Teaching,” as well as others.

The company’s newspapers also collaborated on a yearlong series on climate change, which won one of three awards of merit in the Grantham Awards for environmental journalism in 2007. Another companywide series covered changing patterns in forest land ownership. Both efforts were initiated by Forrester.

In the 1990s, Forrester

committed the resources of The Daily Astorian and his extended family to restoration of the Liberty Theater. For about a decade, the Astorian absorbed the administrative costs of the nonprofit Liberty Restoration Inc.

The most recent innovation Forrester pushed is EO Media Group’s collaboration with the Pamplin Media Group that established a statehouse news bureau and Oregon Capital Insider, a digital newsletter.

“Steve has made an indelible mark on this newspaper and the greater Astoria community,” Perry said. “His community leadership helped restore the Liberty Theater and put Astoria on the map as a vibrant, historic city.”

The transition

Astorian Advertising Director Betty Smith said, “My entire career has been in working for family-owned compa-

nies, directly with the owners. I spent 20 years working for Nordstrom and watching their transfer to the fathers to the sons. I came to the beach and joined another family owned business with a legacy. I’m confident that this next transition will be a success.”

Forrester is one of three principal owners of EO Media Group. Others are his brother, Mike, and a cousin, Kathryn Brown, who is publisher of the East Oregonian.

“We know that a hallmark of healthy family-owned businesses is that they plan ahead for the retirements of key family members,” Brown said. “Our family began actively planning for success more than 20 years ago, and has managed smooth transitions as Steve’s parents, my grandmother and my mother retired over the years. I’m confident that we will manage well through this transition.”

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