



A seagull takes flight near Del Ray Beach Recreation Site.

Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Beach traffic: 75 percent of Clatsop County beaches are off-limits to cars

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"It's a very small group of people who complain," Bergin said. "How are families going to get down there with their strollers and little kids? Elderly and handicapped people like to drive that section of the beach. These people are trying to encroach on that. They own these homes along the beach and want their own private little walking space. It's not going to happen."

A right or a privilege?

The Oregon Coast consists of smaller beaches that are often secluded in the margins between the Pacific Ocean and steep, prominent headlands.

The Warrenton-to-Gearhart route and some areas around Pacific City and Lincoln City are open for cars, along with Sand Lake Dunes Recreational Area, where off-road vehicles are permitted in some stretches.

Cars and trucks are allowed at any time in the 10-mile stretch between Peter Iredale Road south to the beach ramp at Gearhart, including the Sunset Beach State Recreation Site, the west trailhead to the Fort to Sea Trail. A 25 mph speed limit is in effect along the shore.

State law grants the Parks and Recreation Department authority "to take action to protect ocean shore resources,

to protect public health and safety, to provide security, to avoid user conflicts, or for other reasons deemed necessary."

Beach driving is considered almost a right among long-time residents, Wing said.

Environmental concerns

Neal Maine, a wildlife photographer, pointed to the hazards to birds caused by drivers.

"I don't think there's anybody patrolling the beaches," Maine said. "It turns into a race track, turning around, spinning, spinning. Let's have access to a phone number so on busy weekends there's a patrol officer there continuously, and they're making their presence known."

Drivers like to cause birds to fly or roost flocks while the birds are storing up valuable energy for migrations. "The main issue on our beaches is the continued action of shorebirds that is caused by cars," Maine said. "They're picking out invertebrates out of the sand when they only have a limited amount of time. These are calories they need on the way to get to the Arctic to get to the nesting cycle."

Maine said he would like to see a new management plan with a police enforcement component.

"Camping's prohibited — but it's easy to go to the beach and find 100 tents," he said.

"The same with the driving. On the highway we have patrols, but on the beach it's very limited. State Parks has no vehicles to patrol it. They don't plan on patrolling it. They don't have the resources to patrol it. They farm it out to a default program with the county sheriff, which is not adequate for continuous monitoring."

Legislation opposed

State legislation introduced in the 1990s limiting beach access for vehicles along the 10-mile roadway was highly unpopular in Clatsop County and vigorously opposed at the time.

In 1995, the Gearhart City Council, backed by a petition signed by hundreds of residents, sent a letter to the state Legislature opposing the bill, which ultimately died in committee.

Today, 75 percent of Clatsop County beaches are off-limits to cars, according to Wing, including Cannon Beach, where only permitted vehicles — for people with disabilities, boating or collecting driftwood, among other uses — are allowed along the beach. Access is at Tolovana Wayside.

Enforcement

Chris Havel, the associate director of the Parks and Recreation Department, said most people "run afoul of rules unintentionally," and it's faster and

more effective to get people on track with a quick talk. Enforcement for speeding or other violations along the beach fall to the Sheriff's Office or Oregon State Police.

"A lot of people go around in a circle, around and around, making 'cookies,'" Wing said. "It's not the right thing to do, but it's something that people don't realize they shouldn't do. It's a beach, not a playground."

Former Arizona state trooper Teresa McKee began work in July as reserve deputy, replacing retired deputy John Wood. She's already made a big difference, Bergin said, recovering stolen bicycles and issuing citations for drug and alcohol offenses.

Most citations are written to drivers for reckless driving, Bergin said. Other tickets may be issued for illegal camping, trash or fireworks. "We don't write a lot of tickets," he said. "But if we don't get compliance, there will be a citation issued."

Despite concerns from homeowners, the beach road should remain open, he said. "Ninety-nine percent of the time people pick up their garbage and obey all the rules," he said. "It's that 1 percent that goes down there and causes a problem or two. Why should everyone else have to suffer for that 1 percent? We will continue to enforce the laws and do the right thing to keep that Clatsop County beach open."

Salmon: 'We want the EPA ... to look at all the sources of temperature'

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2000 and 2003, their conclusion was that it's really the dams and flow that are controlling most of the temperature issues in the Columbia," he said.

The lawsuit aims to force federal environmental regulators to determine "total maximum daily load" for the rivers, which would set a limit on water temperatures in order to protect salmon. The EPA and other agencies would then have to operate under those guidelines when regulating the river.

Johnson said a plan to manage river temperatures

could include changes to dam operations and removal of what he called obsolete dams on the lower Snake River.

"I think this is really about whether, looking down the road 50 years from now, do we want to be teaching our children and grandchildren to catch salmon in the Columbia or explaining to them what salmon were?" Johnson said.

The EPA did not immediately provide an explanation for why the regulatory process was initially shelved. A spokesperson said it was the agency's policy not to comment on pending litigation.

Brown: Golfer hopes to emulate longtime Mayor Kent Smith's calmness

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each other," he said. "One of the things I'm most proud of through my years on the Planning Commission is that we went from having a dysfunctional relationship with the council to having a great relationship with the council."

Brown left the commission in 2012 but remained involved in city politics. During public hearings on vacation rentals, he provided testimony urging an adherence to values promoted in the comprehensive plan.

Gearhart's proposed short-term rental ordinance — requiring registration, 24-hour notification and limiting transfer of short-term rental permits — is a compromise that reduces the number of vacation rentals while protecting the rights of rental property owners. "The part-time and the full-time people — we're all part of the same community," Brown said. "But we all recognize times have changed with the internet."

The ordinance is expected to become law in October.

"What I've admired about it is that we've gotten to hear both sides," Brown said. "The

city has done a great job of listening and giving people the opportunity to speak, trying to come up with a solution that's a compromise."

Issues in the city's next four years include a transportation master plan, a new firehouse, a parks master plan, and efforts to bridge the divide between residents on the east side of U.S. Highway 101 and the west.

Emergency preparedness should not only focus on tsunamis and earthquakes, Brown said, but all natural disasters.

"We have to be prepared," he said. "We have to be updated on the facts. We don't want to live in fear — but we have to be prepared."

Brown said he grew up at a time when longtime Mayor Kent Smith presided over the community. He admired Smith's calm demeanor and listening skills and hopes to emulate those qualities. "He always gave everyone a chance to speak at the meeting," Brown said. "He was always calm about it, and that's how I feel about it. My mantra would be 'calm waters.'"

"Hey, we're all in this together," he added. "We have to communicate."

In Mexico, high avocado prices fuel deforestation

By MARK STEVENSON
Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Americans' love for avocados and rising prices for the highly exportable fruit are fueling the deforestation of central Mexico's pine forests as farmers rapidly expand their orchards to feed demand.

Avocado trees flourish at about the same altitude and climate as the pine and fir forests in the mountains of Michoacan, the state that produces most of Mexico's avocados. That has led farmers to wage a cat-and-mouse campaign to avoid authorities, thinning out the forests, planting young avocado trees under the forest canopy, and then gradually cutting back the forest as the trees grow to give them more sunlight.

"Even where they aren't visibly cutting down forest, there are avocados growing underneath (the pine boughs), and sooner or later they'll cut down the pines completely," said Mario Tapia Vargas, a researcher at Mexico's National Institute for Forestry, Farming and Fisheries Research.

Given that Michoacan's forests contain much of the wintering grounds of the monarch butterfly, the deforestation is more than just an academic issue. Authorities have already detected small avocado plots in the monarchs' reserve where farmers have cut down pine forest.

Worse, Tapia Vargas said, a mature avocado orchard uses almost twice as much water



AP Photo/Nick Wagner

Avocados are displayed for sale in a large market in Mexico City.

as fairly dense forest, meaning less water reaches Michoacan's legendary crystalline mountain streams on which the forests and animals depend.

Greenpeace Mexico says people are likely to suffer, too. "Beyond the displacement of forests and the effects on water retention, the high use of agricultural chemicals and the large volumes of wood needed to pack and ship avocados are other factors that could have negative effects on the area's environment and the well-being of its inhabitants," Greenpeace said in a statement.

The two-lane rural roads that cut through the mountains are choked with lines of heavy trucks carrying avocados out and pickers in to the orchards.

But it is hard to argue farmers out of the economic logic of growing avocados.

"Avocado farming is very attractive, because of the prices being the way they are," Tapia Vargas said.

Avocado prices jumped from

peso lost 16 percent of its value against the dollar over the past year, making exports cheaper for the U.S. customers. Mexican farmers can make much higher profits growing avocados than from most other crops.

It is the enormous U.S. appetite for avocados that has driven the expansion. Between 2001 and 2010, avocado production in Michoacan tripled, but exports rose 10 times, according to a report published in 2012 by Tapia Vargas' institute.

The report suggested the expansion caused loss of forest land of about 1,700 acres (690 hectares) a year from 2000 through 2010.



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Lead: Results will help determine cause of high lead concentrations

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Samples were taken from EPA guidelines for fountains and food prep faucets, Ely said. Some control samples, not from drinking or cooking faucets, were also taken.

Some water taps at Seaside Heights Elementary with lead levels approaching the limit of 20 parts per billion have been shut down and retested. The district will receive results in the coming months that will help determine the cause of high lead concentrations.

"We decided anything above 10 was high enough that we should look to see if something should be done," Ely said. The district may replace the fixtures or seek a cleaner water supply.

After high lead volumes discovered in some Portland Public Schools drinking water was disclosed this spring, Oregon officials recommended statewide testing of school drinking water.

"We made a decision to test early," Ely said. "We would still be waiting for results if we hadn't."

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