

Small town laments loss of football season due to hazing

Hazing took place at a camp at Camp Rilea

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

PHILOMATH — The scoreboard at the edge of Philomath High School's football field is dark. The stands are empty. This year, there are no varsity games that brought together many of the town's 4,500 people.

Hazing inflicted by upperclassmen on 11 freshman players at a conditioning camp at Camp Rilea in Warrenton has led to the season's cancellation, investigations by authorities and the school district, and calls for healing and for the tradition to stop.

Studies show more than half of college students in sports teams, clubs and organizations have experienced hazing. Many were hazed in high school. Just last week in California, three varsity high school football players were charged in a separate incident.

Breaking the cycle is difficult, but Philomath is tackling the issue head on.

"The school district is paying attention to both what happened and what could prevent this from happening again," Superintendent Melissa Goff told The Associated Press. "We're paying very close attention to the mental health needs of our students and how we,



LEFT: Rhonda Lewis speaks during an interview at the C D & J cafe in Philomath. One of the town's biggest events is Friday night football games, but football season has been canceled at the high school in the midst of a hazing episode. RIGHT: Philomath High School football scoreboard is shown in Philomath.



AP Photos/Andrew Selsky

as a community, can pull together."

Small town

Philomath is a small, sleepy town. Traffic barrels past shuttered businesses on Main Street, a highway heading into the Coastal Range to the west. Corvallis, home to Oregon State University, lies 3 miles to the east.

The town formed around Philomath College, which existed from 1865 to 1929. Its name is Greek for "lover of learning."

Philomath has little in the way of entertainment, and several people said the loss of the football season will be a blow.

"It's a little bitty town, and there's not much else to do, so there was usually a pretty big turnout there," said

Rhonda Lewis, a waitress at the C D & J Cafe, on Main Street. "I don't know what's going to happen now."

Pastors representing seven churches have made themselves available "to listen, pray for and offer counseling to local students, parents and school district personnel," said Jim Hall, senior pastor of Living Faith Community Church. They've had conversations with a broad spectrum of townspeople, Hall said.

Investigations

The school district contracted an independent investigator, Goff said. That inquiry is ongoing. The Oregon State Police also investigated, because the incident happened at a state-owned camp.

Benton County District Attorney John Haroldson

said 11 freshman players had intimate parts of their bodies targeted during an initiation.

In court Thursday, one of six upperclassmen charged with misdemeanors pleaded guilty to harassment. As part of his sentence, he will speak out against hazing and stand up for the victims.

Haroldson, who advocated for the term, said victims are being blamed for the football season's cancellation and some students' expulsions, and instead should be recognized for their courage.

The hazing existed for years, "instilled as part of the institution," and had gotten worse, Haroldson said.

"The coaches didn't stop it," he told Circuit Court Judge Locke A. Williams. "They chose not to stop it or couldn't stop it."

The judge noted hazing isn't isolated to Philomath and said there must be an "understanding that this is a practice that cannot continue."

A 22-year-old volunteer assistant coach stands charged in Clatsop County where the hazing occurred. All the coaches are on leave, Goff said.

Canceled season

The decision was made to cancel the varsity season after other athletes and coaches evaluated the readiness of eligible players. The junior varsity season remains on track.

Brittany Dryden, manager of Wilson's NAPA Auto Parts store, feels the cancellation is "a little harsh."

"I understand people make

mistakes ... but I don't see why we have to punish the whole football team, and punish other people that weren't involved, had nothing to do with it," Dryden said. "It's just not fair to those kids."

Goff has a rebuttal: "High school football in Philomath is important, but it is not as important as our kids."

Hazing might be part of human nature, and "it definitely goes back to ancient Greece and Rome," said Susan Lipkins, a psychologist and an expert on hazing.

Victims take the experience to college and the military, primed to be hazed again and again, Lipkins said in a telephone interview from Port Washington, New York.

Over time, they often become perpetrators, feeling they "have the right to do unto others what was done to them," Lipkins said.

Ending the cycle requires breaking the silence.

Philomath seems to be handling its case right so far, Lipkins said. To prevent hazing, schools must encourage victims to come forward, using clearly established methods like the internet and even reporting abuse anonymously so they aren't labeled wimps.

But few high schools and colleges follow through on promises to eliminate hazing, Lipkins noted.

"They react," she said. "They don't prepare for it and don't have a system in place in any meaningful way."

Refuges: Volunteers play a key role

Continued from Page 1A

budget to move law enforcement officers to preserves scattered in remote locations across the West, said David Houghton, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. Many refuges are patrolled by a single officer who covers several states.

Some refuge managers have since sent their law enforcement officers to additional training or updated security plans.

"People are paying attention to that whole dynamic. I only have one law enforcement officer here and she covers the entire range of refuges, and she's by herself," said Michelle Potter, who manages seven refuges and three other habitats in and around Long Island, New York. "I worry about safety."

Local refuges

Nearby, the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer is part of the Willapa Complex, which includes the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and Lewis and Clark National Wildlife Refuge.

All together, the refuges protects approximately 56,000 acres of important habitat for birds such as migratory waterfowl, endangered species such as the Columbian white-tailed deer, and fish such as salmon and sturgeon, according Megan Nagel, National Wildlife Refuge System's regional public affairs officer.

As for staffing, "At the refuges, we work with what we have," she said.

She points to conservation actions to restore habitat that wildlife depend on, including stream restoration for salmon and other aquatic species, coastal dune and beach restoration for threatened snowy plover and streaked horned larks and estuary restoration in Willapa Bay.

Nagel says volunteers are a key part of the mix.

"Environmental education is an important part of what we do at the refuges, and volunteers are an important part of our success. They play an especially important role in our environmental and interpretation programs," she said. "For example, the Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge work with us to run the fourth-grade education program in Pacific County (Washington). Together, we work with teachers to provide kids the opportunity to learn about wildlife in the classroom and at the refuge."



Sam Beebe/Wikimedia Commons

Willapa National Wildlife Refuge is one of three refuges in our area.

Tight budget

Vanessa Kauffman, a spokesman for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, declined to comment on the study but did acknowledge a tight budget in a phone interview with the AP. The agency oversees the refuge system.

"The budget determines the staff, and if you have attrition and you have a shortened budget, you're not going to be able to replace staff," said Kauffman. "We do what we can."

The refuges, as well as 178 other federally protected areas dedicated to waterfowl habitat and wetland preservation, attract 47.5 million visitors a year for bird-watching, hunting, fishing and educational activities, but their primary mission is the preservation of critical habitat for fragile species. Many, but not all, are in remote areas.

Because they are focused on wildlife preservation, refuges are less well known by the public than their flashier, selfie-friendly cousins at the National Park Service, yet they have expanded rapidly in recent years as funding has shrunk.

Since 2010, the overall refuge budget dropped by \$17 million to \$486 million while the system added more than 700 million acres, said Houghton.

Much of that expansion comes from the addition of two

massive marine monuments, including one designated in the Atlantic Ocean last week by President Barack Obama that includes 5,000 square miles of underwater canyons and mountains off the New England coast.

Meanwhile, existing refuges are struggling to complete their mission with a staff so pared down that some can't keep on volunteers because there's no one to manage them.

In Rhode Island, for example, a refuge complex cut educational programs for schoolchildren by 20 percent, lost its visitor center manager and hasn't been able to treat huge swaths of land for invasive species.

Charlie Vandemoer oversees five refuges in Rhode Island but has security from only one officer who also patrols refuges in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

He relies on more than 23,000 volunteer hours a year to get the most critical work done and recently sent his solitary law enforcement officer for additional training.

"If it wasn't for volunteers, they'd have to shut the doors," said Marvin Plenart, a retired manager in Portland who used to oversee the Western region. "It's pathetic, is what it is."



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Attention Hunters & Forest Recreationists

The Lewis & Clark Timberlands managed by Greenwood Resources in Clatsop County will again open for motorized recreational access this fall.

Public access is allowed from one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset. Camping, campfires, off-road driving, ATVs and motorcycles are prohibited. All access is subject to change.

Gates open from Oct. 1, through Nov. 25, 2016

- L&C Camp Gates (71/75)
- 400 Line (72)
- 300 Line (73)
- Klootchky Park (39)
- Sugarloaf (24)
- Charlie Cr. (26)
- Clatsop Fir XO (25)
- Tidewater (49)
- Snow Point (54)
- Elk Mtn. W (98/99)
- L&C ML at Saddle Mtn. Park Rd East/West (56/57)
- Fisher ML (83)
- Twilight Gates (110/113/114)
- Bear Cr. 300 (80)
- Elk Mtn. East (53)

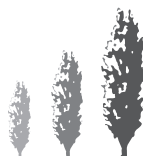
Any gate that may be open but is not listed above could be closed at any time, as unlisted gates are open for active Lewis & Clark Timberlands operations only.

Please report any illegal or suspicious activity to the Sheriff's Office at 503.325.2061 or the Oregon State Police at 1.800.452.7888

TO REPORT A FIRE OR EMERGENCY CALL 911 Road maps showing gate locations are available at our Gearhart office. Current access information is available on the Recreational Hotline at 503.738.6351, ext.2.

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