

Aerial spraying rattles coastal residents

Concerns raised about pesticides used by timber companies

By LYRA FONTAINE
The Daily Astorian

ARCH CAPE — Nancy Webster became concerned about aerial spraying after smelling pesticides in the air near her Rockaway Beach home. “That began the growing concern of what’s happening with our drinking water and our air,” Webster said, adding that the spraying could affect birds, fish, soil and more. “This is happening up and down the coast.”

Webster, a member of the Rockaway Beach Citizens for Watershed Protection, is pushing for more timely public notifications, since currently, “the notification is seeing a helicopter.” The group also seeks an end to aerial spraying on the Oregon Coast.

At Short Sand Beach in Oswald West State Park, local activists and area surfers gathered in late September to raise awareness about pesticides that would be sprayed on harvested forest land nearby.

According to the citizens group, Weyerhaeuser recently clearcut parcels of forestland, including several bordering Oswald West State Park, Arch Cape and Neahkahnie Mountain. Weyerhaeuser completed the aerial spraying on the harvested forest land near Oswald West on Wednesday, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Herbicide for regrowth

Timber companies are required to notify the Oregon Department of Forestry of planned operations, said Tillamook District Forest Katherine Skinner.

“At this point, there is no required notification of general citizens,” Skinner said. “In this particular issue in Oswald West State Park, Weyerhaeuser has notified adjacent landowners.”

Skinner said some timber companies in Tillamook County voluntarily give residents a shorter notice of planned spraying.

Weyerhaeuser went through proper notification channels before spraying, said Park Manager Ben Cox, with Oregon State Parks. When planting after harvesting forest, Weyerhaeuser may use herbicides to control weeds, brush and invasive species that compete with tree seedlings for sunlight, nutrients and water, Weyerhaeuser Public Affairs Manager Greg Miller said in an email. The Oregon Forest Practices Act requires replanting within two years after harvest and the seedlings must be “free-to-grow” within six years.

“Without herbicide use, reforestation may be unsuccessful, thus we would be out of compliance with state reforestation laws,” Miller wrote. “Once tree seedlings are established, herbicides are rarely used again in the same forest cycle, except along road right of ways.”

The pesticides help the trees get a head start before the competing species and prepares the site for tree replanting this winter, Skinner said.

Weyerhaeuser notified the Oregon Department of Forestry and applied herbicides in compliance with state and federal regulations and law, Miller said. The public has access to notifications online through the state department’s Forest Activity Electronic Reporting and Notification System. In addition, Weyerhaeuser communicated to the adjacent parks department about the chemical application and posted a range of dates for operation at locations with potential public access.

“We also went beyond forest practice requirements by leaving an untreated buffer along the shared state park property boundary,” Miller wrote.

Notification needed
The notification system is a “step toward better notification,” but Webster said it isn’t enough and that spraying could occur within a time frame as large as six months.

With modern technology, timber companies could send out an electronic notice before the helicopter takes off, she said, and other timber companies have posted two-week notices after receiving phone calls from residents.

“The big problem with the aerial spraying is you can’t get real-time notifications,” said Jane Anderson, a Garibaldi resident. “People need to know

that this is happening. They may tell you they’re going to do it in six months. If you’d like to leave the area to protect yourself, you’d have no idea when that would be.”

Anderson and her husband found out about aerial spraying while hiking through the woods several years ago.

“We saw fliers on trees and we were surprised,” Anderson said. “We had no idea that was happening.”

While the citizens group voiced concerns about chemicals drifting into Oswald West and Short Sand beach, forester Skinner said there was a “low risk” that chemicals would drift

from the treated area, because the application is done at a low elevation and the chemicals cannot be sprayed in the wind.

The group would like state legislators to change Oregon’s forest practices law.

“I felt really good about reaching out and educating people,” Webster said. “We believe it’s a public health issue.”

“The main focus is to let folks know what’s happening in their forest,” Anderson said. “Hopefully we’ll be able to put enough pressure on our legislators so that they will decide aerial spraying is a risky practice.”



Submitted Photo
Jane Anderson of Garibaldi, Vivi Tallman of Manzanita and Nancy Webster of Rockaway Beach at Oswald West State Park.

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