



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

144TH YEAR, NO. 109

DailyAstorian.com // WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016

ONE DOLLAR

TIMBER CLASH

A POSSIBLE \$300 MILLION AT STAKE FOR CLATSOP COUNTY



Photos by Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Logs are transferred from a truck Tuesday at the Hampton Lumber Mill in Warrenton. The mill processes logs from trees on state logging operations around the region.

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
For The Daily Astorian

On Monday, Clatsop County received something it has been expecting for weeks: formal notice of a \$1.4 billion class action lawsuit that includes 15 counties and dozens of local taxing districts.

By late January, the Board of Commissioners will need to decide whether or not to remain involved in a legal clash that could bring millions of dollars to the county — or could, as some fear, dangerously increase harvest on county forestland and hand over control of these lands to the private timber industry.

The lawsuit, filed by Linn County earlier this year and backed by the timber industry, alleges the state has failed to maximize revenue from the timber lands it manages on the counties' behalf.

Decades ago, Oregon's timber counties turned over ownership of their forestlands to the state. The understanding was that, in return, the state would maximize profits from timber harvests. However, a more recent forest management plan emphasized conservation measures and habitat improvements.

The Linn County lawsuit argues that, now, the state owes these timber-rich counties money. In Clatsop County's case, there's a possible \$300 million at stake.



Logs are prepared to be processed on Tuesday at the Hampton Lumber Mill in Warrenton.

A seat at the table

There are two regular public meetings scheduled between now and the Jan. 25 deadline when county commissioners must decide if they want to opt out of the lawsuit, one on Dec. 14 and another on Jan. 11. Clatsop County Manager Cameron Moore says it is unlikely the board will make any decision at the Dec. 14 meeting.

No matter what they decide, someone is guaranteed to be unhappy, county officials predict.

Also, in or out, it is likely county staff will have to dedicate time and resources to record retrieval as the lawsuit progresses and lawyers lay out their arguments, Moore said.

And there are benefits to remaining involved.

"If we're in the lawsuit, we are at the table," Moore explained.

Any settlement discussions with the state, any deals, any changes, Clatsop County would be present.

The county has an obligation to taxpayers to look closely at the lawsuit and examine potential impacts, both positive and negative, Moore said.

Who benefits?

The Linn County lawsuit is essentially a contract dispute, Moore said.

And, technically, county commissioners don't have to do anything. The county is named in the lawsuit and will remain unless commissioners opt out.

Some people who have been coming to county commission meetings consistently since the lawsuit was filed worry about what the suit could become and what it might mean if the courts

rule in the counties' favor.

Court filings show the lawsuit is backed by and, in large part, paid for by the timber industry. The Oregon Forest Industries Council, Stimson Lumber Co., the Sustainable Forest Fund and Hampton Tree Farm have all contributed money to cover the counties' legal fees. They created a litigation fund, described in court documents as a "special purpose entity that may receive donations from third parties."

Former county commissioner Helen Westbrook and others who have spoken up at commission meetings wonder: If the court decides that the state is in the wrong, will the various timber groups backing the lawsuit gain more control over state forestland? And would such a judgment open up these public lands to increased timber harvest? And who really wins in that scenario? Not the forest, the animals, the fish or the people of Clatsop County, they say.

Westbrook, at a meeting in October, said the evidence of the timber industry's involvement shows "what the suit is about and who stands to benefit the most."

"Please think about how this suit will most certainly impact future management of our forests," she urged.

Timber-rich

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, roughly 30

See **TIMBER**, Page 10A

After Castro, new hope for Cuba

Expatriate wants democratic shift

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

After fleeing Fidel Castro's Cuba in 1961 at 5, Manuel Suarez said he holds out hope for a democratic shift after the socialist revolutionary's death.

"I think, originally, he had a good idea about somehow or other getting rid of (Fulgencio) Batista, who was a dictator," said Suarez, who lives on the North Coast. "Unfortunately when he got into power, I think he changed his mind."

Suarez's memories of the Cuban Revolution are scant but powerful. He was the 13th of 14 children, his father a dean of engineering at Villanova University's Havana satellite campus when Castro swept into power in 1959.

"When Castro took over, he put my dad in jail, and three of my sisters," Suarez said. "The rest of us were under house arrest. They



Manuel Suarez

See **CUBA**, Page 10A

Deal reached in foster care suit

Children were housed in state offices, hotels

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

PORTLAND — The state Department of Human Services has agreed to stop temporarily housing foster children in hotels or offices except under certain circumstances.

The department is defending itself against a lawsuit filed by children's advocates challenging its practice of housing foster children in those settings.

The department and plaintiffs in the lawsuit reached an interim settlement agreement earlier this month.

The agreement, publicly announced Tuesday, states that effective Dec. 31, the state will cease placing children overnight in DHS offices unless there is no "available and safe hotel" within 30 miles or 30 minutes of the office.

See **FOSTER CARE**, Page 10A

A room with a brew

Pelican Brewing plans to renovate Cannon Beach hotel

By LYRA FONTAINE
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Now that Pelican Brewing Co. is up and running, the owners are turning their attention to the hotel property next door.

Co-owners Mary Jones and Jeff Schons plan to renovate the hotel. The brewpub and hotel are located on the same parcel, but need to be on separate lots in order to finance the renovation. Last week, the Planning Commission approved the preliminary

plan for a two-lot partition of the property at 1371 S. Hemlock St.

"It is our intention to renovate the hotel and to do that, we will need a source of borrowing," said Jones, the manager of Cannon Beach Holdings LLC. "To get the funding required to renovate, we need to have it on its own parcel to be identified as collateral for our loan. That is the reason for the partition."

Jones said they do not plan on expanding the seven-room hotel.

Both parcels meet the cri-

teria for the division request, Schons said.

"We operate a hotel in Pacific City, we understand the hotel business," he said. "We're excited about this hotel. ... We think it would be a great opportunity for the community to have a nice, well put-together little seven-room hotel right next to the Pelican. We see it as a long-term goal for Cannon Beach Holdings and a long-term opportunity for Pelican Brewing."

They are looking to renovate the hotel in one to three years, he said.



Submitted Photo

Pelican Brewing in Cannon Beach.

Criteria for evaluating the application included lot size, street access, off-street parking and more.

The Planning Commission discussed how the hotel could impact parking in the area, since Pelican Brewing has led to parking concerns.

Commissioner Lisa Kerr said the applicant met the cri-

teria, "whether we like the way the whole Pelican Brewing phenomenon has affected the parking in the area." The motel's 10 parking spaces "seems fair and reasonable," she added.

City Planner Mark Barnes said Pelican Brewing has expressed interest in helping to reduce parking issues.