

Capital Bureau

Legislators have less than two weeks to finish and vote on a transportation package. The plan includes new taxes and fees and increases in other taxes and fees to fund maintenance and improvements to roads, bridges, transit and sidewalks.

Transportation: ‘There is bipartisan consensus’

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The agreement addresses issues that had previously threatened to undermine the future of the transportation plan. The plan still addresses about eight to 10 years of needs, according to the Govern-

nor’s Office.

Those included the overall amount of taxes and spending in the package, what the money went toward and cost controls on the state’s low-carbon fuels standard, Brown said.

“In terms of the low-car-

bon fuels standard, that is being institutionalized to bring stability and certainty to the system. I think there is a consensus amongst stakeholders. You’ll see the consensus approach as the bill draft comes out,” the governor said.

Brown declined to say how the overall amount of the package has changed but said she is excited “about the significant investment we will be making in public transit.”

“Suffice it to say there is bipartisan consensus on the levels,” she added.

Butterflies: Early blue violets are crucial to life cycle

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This is the end point of a process called “augmentation” — an ongoing effort to reintroduce the threatened silverspot butterfly to areas the species disappeared by 1980 by releasing caterpillars at specific sites across the state.

Last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it will release hundreds of caterpillars at two new sites this summer and next: the Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge in southern Tillamook County and the Saddle Mountain area in central Clatsop County.

Decline

The small reddish-orange butterflies with their distinctive silver spots were once found on coastal grasslands from Northern California to southern Washington, but development, changes to the forest and invasive weeds and grasses reduced the silverspots’ preferred habitat. The decline is linked primarily to a lack of early blue violets, “normally the only plant on which the Oregon silverspot can successfully feed and develop as larva,” according to Fish and Wildlife.

These plants are crucial throughout a silverspot’s life cycle. Their presence stimulates the female butterflies to lay eggs in the first place. Later, young caterpillars feast on the leaves.

By 1980, the butterflies had vanished from at least 11 different localities. That same year, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Oregon silverspot as a threatened species. In Clatsop County, the butterflies were noted at Clatsop Plains, but the population has gone down since this discovery.

No one has ever documented a silverspot at the Nestucca Bay site, but this area is within the butterfly’s historical range, according to Fish and Wildlife. Why silverspots abandoned Saddle Mountain is mystery. The violets are still there, and thriving. The butterflies are not. They haven’t been seen there since the 1970s.

Nestucca will be the first of the two sites to get this new influx of caterpillars. Next summer, it will be Saddle Mountain’s turn. If these sites are successful, as biologists expect they will be, they will bring the overall population that much closer to recovery. Currently, silverspots are established at five sites; the ultimate recovery goal is 10 self-sustaining populations.

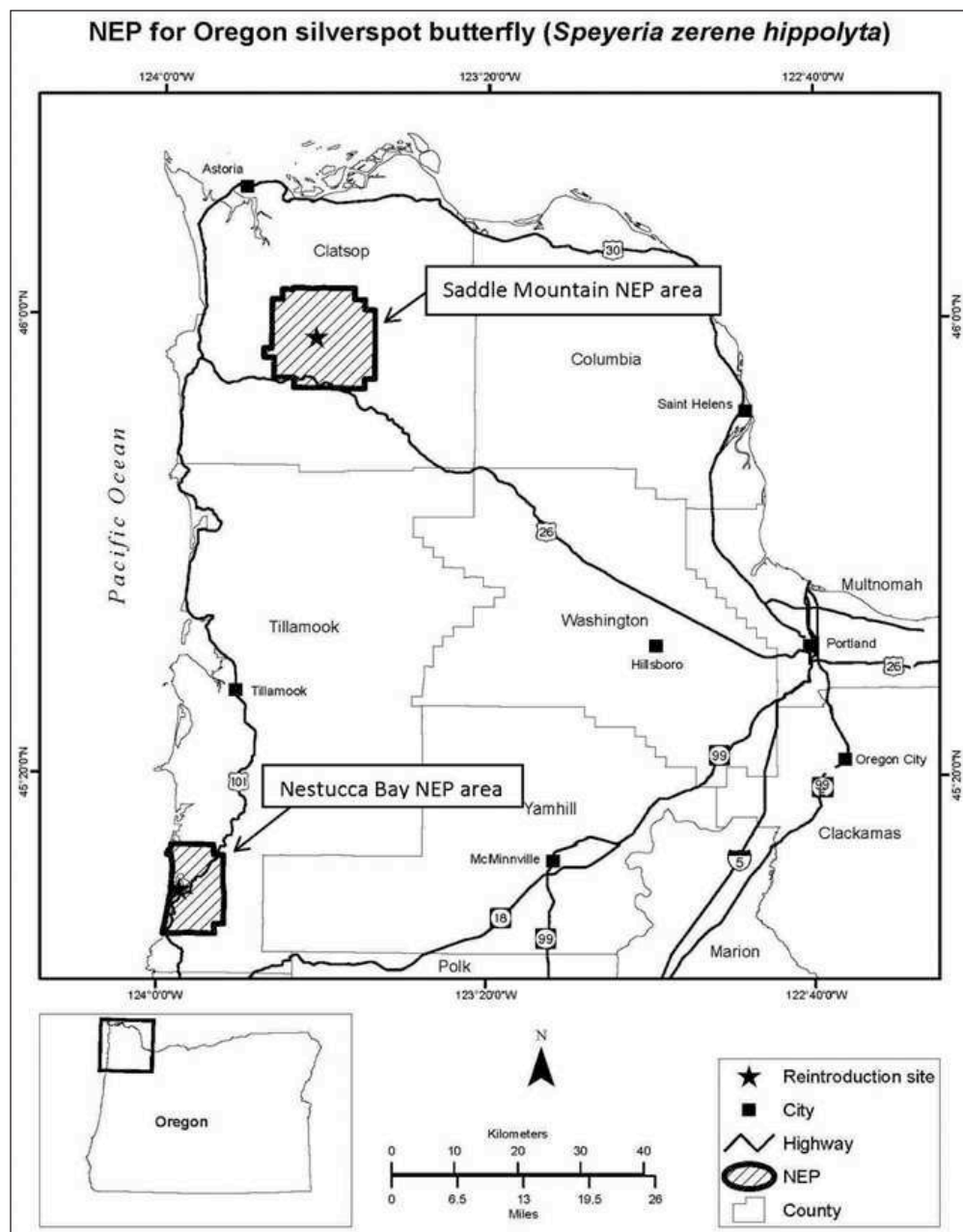
Abraham Lincoln’s beard

The caterpillars that biol-

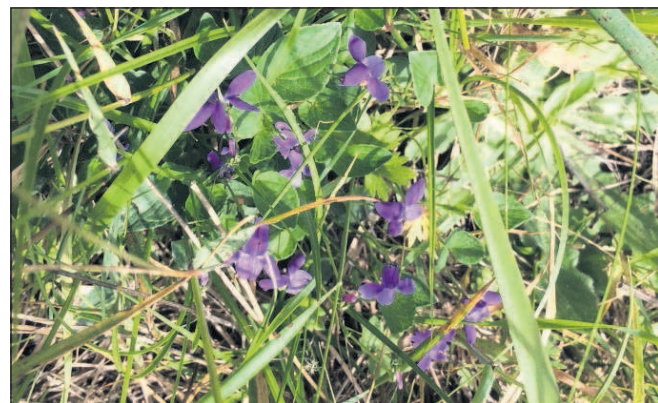
ogists, such as Walker, will release this summer come from labs at Seattle’s Wood-

land Park Zoo and Portland’s Oregon Zoo.

Scientists collect female



The Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge and Saddle Mountain National Estuary Program study areas.



North Coast Land Conservancy

Early blue violets grow wild in the Clatsop Plains. The violets are critical to the survival of silverspot butterfly caterpillars.



Silverspot butterfly

butterflies from the large wild population at Mount Hebo in Tillamook County’s Siuslaw National Forest and bring them to labs at the zoos. Here technicians coax the females into laying eggs. When larvae hatch from these eggs, they are so small you could put them next to a penny and they wouldn’t even be as long as Abraham Lincoln’s beard, Walker said. By the time they are released, however, the caterpillars are about an inch long.

Adapted to the environment, biologists are optimistic that caterpillars at Saddle Mountain and Nestucca will succeed, but they also know not all the caterpillars will live long enough to become adult butterflies.

“We don’t expect them all to survive,” Walker said. But, she added, “Probably one of their functions within the ecosystem is to be food for other things.”

Biologists expect to release approximately 3,000 caterpillars this summer; most will go to the Nestucca restoration site. Some will seed established sites and the rest will go back to areas where their mothers were collected.

Plant: ‘You start dreaming about pulling these things’

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Taking root

The land conservancy first began to notice the plant at its Circle Creek property, a habitat reserve south of Seaside near the Necanicum River.

When land stewards and volunteers encountered policeman’s helmet on the property, they pulled the plant up by the roots before it could spread seeds. The seeds are only viable for up to 18 months and regular pulling can easily eliminate policeman’s helmet from an area. But not this time.

“It just kept coming back every year and it was getting worse and they couldn’t really figure out why,” said Melyssa Graeper, the Necanicum Watershed Council coordinator.

Then they considered the plant’s unique characteristics. Like many invasive plants, policeman’s helmet is irritatingly resilient. Its seed pods can eject seeds up to 20 feet and these seeds don’t have to land in dirt. They can float down waterways until they find soil.

The policeman’s helmet had to be coming from somewhere upstream, the land conservancy concluded. And if the plants were taking root at Circle Creek, they were likely becoming a problem along streambanks and properties upstream, too.

The Land Conservancy works on property it owns. The Necanicum Watershed Council, by contrast, works with landowners on private property. To nip the growing problem of policeman’s helmet in the literal bud, the two groups joined forces.

Pretty flowers

Policeman’s helmet is here because it is pretty.

Native to the Himalayas, it was introduced to North America as an ornamental garden plant. But Graeper would much prefer it if you planted something else.

Consider columbine, she says, a native perennial that flourishes in the North Coast’s cool, wet climate and produces intricate, brightly colored flowers.

Policeman’s helmet chokes out native plants, filling up empty spaces or trampling what’s already there. Native pollinators — think hummingbirds and honey bees — don’t like it. In addition to reducing plant and animal diversity, policeman’s helmet also increases the risk of streambank erosion, according to the land conservancy.

The effects of policeman’s

helmet can be alarming and discouraging, said Reich, but compared to other invasive weeds Clatsop County deals with, it can be much less of a headache to address.

Hope and caution

Japanese knotweed is also prevalent here; the best way to deal with it is by using herbicides. The billowing, enormous, yellow-blossomed Scotch broom is another scourge. It is nearly impossible to pull older plants by hand and seeds can persist in the soil for decades. Children not yet born will be carrying on Graeper and Reich’s work to eradicate these noxious weeds.

Policeman’s helmet is simpler. It is easy — even fun, say volunteers — to pull the plants out, and the seeds, though highly mobile in the right environment, don’t last as long.

Regular land conservancy volunteer Jeff Roehm was out on Wednesday afternoon pulling policeman’s helmet with his teenage grandson. He was working in an area that took him six hours to clear last year; yesterday it only took him 10 minutes. To see that kind of progress is motivating, he said.

Roehm, who was born in Seaside and lives in Portland, is committed to the cause of maintaining Circle Creek as natural reserve filled with native plants.

“You start dreaming about pulling these things,” he said about policeman’s helmet.

All of this gives Graeper and Reich hope that after three years, the Necanicum River could be free, or nearly free, of policeman’s helmet.

“We could really get in front of the control of this plant,” Reich said. “It’s really more possible to have an effect.”

Constant vigilance is necessary, though, they caution.

Recently, a patch of policeman’s helmet was spotted growing merrily on the side of U.S. Highway 26.

Graeper theorizes a boat trailer might be responsible. Volunteers recorded thriving policeman helmet plants all over a boat ramp near the Teevin & Fischer Quarry outside Seaside.

Perhaps, when a fisherman backed his trailer down the ramp, some policeman’s helmet seeds stuck in the mud ended up clumped between tire treads. Maybe, on his way home after a day on the water, the fisherman pulled over to check the trailer or take a bathroom break. Maybe, Graeper says, those seeds dropped from the mud and found another place to spread.

YMCA: Building is a work in progress

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Weber’s sister, Anna Weber. The studio’s handiwork can be seen in signs and design elements for businesses around Astoria, from the painted sign for Reach Break Brewing on Duane Street to a 10-foot dimensional sign curving around the front corner of Carruthers Restaurant on Commercial Street.

Up until 1989, the building was virtually intact. That fall, though, most of the original windows and lintel details

were removed.

“It is our goal to restore the entire facade to its original stature,” Noel Weber said. “It helps that we have historic photographs, original blueprints and a few remaining architectural sections as reference.”

The YMCA is a work in progress, with more work on the interior and exterior coming down the road. Ultimately, the Webers hope to open the building up for workshops and a sign shop, among other plans.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Noel Weber hopes to restore the former YMCA building in downtown Astoria.