

Marina: Task force to complete a census of commercial boats

Continued from Page 1A

The responders establish a threat to the environment, such as the red diesel sheen seen Sunday emanating from the Western Skies, before dipping into the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund. The annual \$50 million fund, accessible by organizations like the Coast Guard and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is paid for by a tax of 5 cents per barrel on imported and domestic oil, along with revenue raised from fines, and pays for cleanup of spills when the owner is unable or unwilling to.

After cleanup

After the cleanup is complete, Bennett said, the Coast Guard's jurisdiction ends. It's up to the Warrenton Marina what happens next with the Western Skies.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's vessel search, the 70-year-old, wood-hulled Western Skies was last registered to Michael Riddell in 2004. Jane Sweet, a harbor master in Warrenton, said the vessel has been at the Warrenton Marina since at least 2010.

Commercial fisherman Jeff Painter, who owned the Western Skies for 20 years and sold it in the late 1990s, said it was sad to see the vessel in such a poor state. Painter said the boat was growing old, and he decided to upgrade to a steel-hulled vessel to fish more aggressively. He sold the boat to Philip A. Johnson, the last owner before Riddell.

With busted woodwork, rusting equipment and chip-



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Pollution-control equipment deployed by the U.S. Coast Guard could be seen earlier in the week surrounding the wreck of the Western Skies fishing vessel at the Warrenton Marina. The boat sank over the weekend and was leaking diesel into the water.

ping paint, the Western Skies had clearly seen better days. But as opposed to the stories of tying off and dumping vessels in the dead of night, Sweet said Riddell had been making payments until 2015, when he stopped answering phone calls and disappeared.

"It's usually a health or financial issue," Sweet said of why boats get abandoned. "Oftentimes, they go beyond the point of where it's practical to repair."

About two years ago, she said, the marina started requiring proof of ownership and insurance for people bringing boats in. The voluntary practice has become more common at marinas, where staff are responsible for catching troubled boats before they come in.

"We've cleaned up a lot,"

Sweet said, estimating nine boats of concern like the Western Skies, none of them taken in since the rule changes.

Sweet said the marina needs to figure out whether it can refloat the Western Skies, get quotes on removal and salvage, take those to the city administration and look for funding options to help remove the vessel.

Taking stock of the fleet

Rachel Graham, the policy and environmental section manager for the Oregon State Marine Board, said a marina like Warrenton will try to find the owner of a vessel that sinks, and if not, call the marine board.

"Hypothetically, if Warrenton wanted some money, we could look at having them do the work, and then reimburs-

ing some of the expenses," she said.

The agency spends up to \$150,000 per biennium on the removal of sunken vessels both recreational and commercial, including 75 percent of the cost of salvaging a commercial vessel. The state also runs a vessel turn-in program for owners who can't afford to properly dispose of an old boat. But while smaller recreational boats average \$4,000 to \$6,000 in disposal costs, she said, commercial vessels can run into the tens of thousands because of their size and hazardous materials.

Most of the abandoned commercial vessels are former fishing boats, Graham said, and all wood-hulled, with metal hulls more valuable to scrappers.

The state's recently formed



A small sheen of diesel could be seen on the surface of the water near the hull of the Western Skies earlier in the week at the Warrenton Marina. The fishing vessel sank over the weekend and pollution-control measures were deployed by the U.S. Coast Guard to prevent the spill from spreading.



Debris and pollution control measures can be seen in the water surrounding the wreck of the Western Skies fishing vessel which sank on Sunday at the Warrenton Marina.

Abandoned and Derelict Commercial Vessel Task Force hopes to complete a census of commercial boats up and down the Oregon Coast in the next few months.

Graham said the marine board, which gets funding

from registration fees on recreational boats, sees itself as more of a facilitator on the commercial side, but wants to understand the financial needs for disposal of commercial vessels over the next 50 years.

Dock: 'The fishermen have been very patient with this process'

Continued from Page 1A

Seafood, who was serving as mayor when work began.

"I think the exciting thing was they had an Urban Renewal Agency advisory task force that was really in tune with the desires of the fishermen and the community," he said. "It really came organically from the community that this is what was needed."

Balensifer noted that the improvements, including a new harbor master office and bathroom facilities, as well as the dock and gangways, come at a perfect time. Pacific Coast Seafood is rebuilding its processing plant in Warrenton following a fire in 2013. When that plant reopens this fall or winter, the marina could become even busier, he said.

Power problems

The recently replaced F dock sits at the northern end of the basin where larger vessels tie up. It had been in particularly bad shape when work began.

The new dock, however, is so new, built to all current codes, that a number of fishermen have found their vessels are incompatible with the electrical systems.

John Jensen of Marine Boatworks has been busy hunting for isolation transformers to solve this problem.

"The boats work on all the other docks (in the marina), they just won't work on this one," he said.

It's not an issue unique to the Warrenton Marina, Jensen says. As other marinas across the country improve decades-old infrastructure, boats may

not have the updates to match.

But access to onshore power is crucial, especially for the larger commercial vessels that will rest at F Dock. Many rely on bilge pumps to stay afloat.

The transformers Jensen finally found, and bought in bulk from a company on the East Coast, will make vessels compatible with the new dock. Jensen got the transformers at a discount, a perk he plans to pass on to fishermen. Vessel owner and commercial fisherman Troy Blix estimates the cost of buying and installing a transformer could run from \$600 to \$700 per boat.

Future projects

The dock replacement and gangway construction wraps up long-term restoration work at the marina, for now.

Sweet plans to continue

with small improvements here and there as funding becomes available. The most recent work will likely come in under budget, city staffers believe, but they are still tallying up the costs and did not have a final number available by press time.

"It's important that we pro-

vide a safe spot for our commercial fishermen to tie up their boats," Balensifer said. The project took longer than the city had anticipated, but "The fishermen have been very patient with this process."

"I'm proud to say (the marina) looks a world of different from when I was a kid."

Besides, he added, "If we're going to charge for services, people have a reason to expect quality infrastructure."

Now the city and the Urban Renewal Agency plan to focus on projects in the rest of the district, especially the downtown area, said City Manager Linda Engbretson.

Johnson: Challenged prosecutors to organize, fight back against progressives

Continued from Page 1A

Both bills await the signature of Gov. Kate Brown, who already has voiced her support.

Johnson spoke at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center to prosecutors gathered for a dinner reception, part of the Oregon District Attorneys Association's three-day summer conference.

"If the safety and justice crowd keeps winning, there will be no safety, and there will be no justice — especially for the poorer classes who are often preyed upon by criminals," Johnson said. "To progressives, a victim and a criminal are moral equals."

Johnson, D-Scappoose, was the sole Senate Democrat to vote against the racial profiling bill and one of two to vote against the bill addressing women in prison.

"We're looking the other way when drug addicts commit first-degree theft and identity theft," she said. "And the victims? They're paying for these treatment programs and wraparound services."

While most Democrats and some Republicans across the country have conceded the war on drugs has failed, Johnson offered an alternative theory.

"Actually, it's been quite successful in the hands of the progressives," she said.

'What kind of world are we headed for when district attorneys are expected to act like defense attorneys?'

Sen. Betsy Johnson

"They have used it to create one campaign after another to push their agenda."

Poke at House leadership

Johnson also excoriated Williamson, D-Portland, on several occasions during her nearly 20-minute speech for staunchly supporting both bills.

Johnson said her support for the bills was politically motivated and that, as a former defense attorney, the majority leader is not motivated to fight for crime victims.

Johnson, known for being more practical than ideological, has a lengthy history of being thorny to fellow Democrats. She has blocked a number of bills by siding with Republicans and even considered switching to the Independent Party of Oregon in 2015.

She also has backed prosecutors throughout her time in the Legislature. In her speech, she praised Kevin Neely, a lobbyist for district attorneys

who fought against the drug bills.

Prior to her speech Wednesday night, the district attorney's association surprised her with its Policy-maker of the Year award.

"She is the Oregon Legislature's most vocal and supportive advocate of prosecutors," said Rick Wesenberg, the Douglas County district attorney and the association's president.

Johnson challenged prosecutors to organize and fight back against progressives, who she says have put them "on the ropes." She suggested sending out press releases to local constituents when they believe certain bills passed in the Legislature may make it more difficult to punish crimes.

"What kind of world are we headed for when district attorneys are expected to act like defense attorneys?" Johnson said. "Who will stand up for victims? Not Jennifer Williamson and the Oregon Legislature."

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