

Needle exchange program gains steam

‘Messengers’ have swapped 3,100 needles

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

A 92-year-old woman strolled along the Astoria Riverwalk on Thursday, carrying a bag of groceries from Safeway. Along the way, she passed Public Health Director Michael McNickle, Public Health Nurse Sheri Salber and Kerry Strickland — founder of Jordan’s Hope for Recovery.

They were conducting a needle exchange for drug users at the end of 32nd Street behind the grocery store. She approached them and asked why they were there. When she heard, she told the story of her own son’s death from a drug overdose. Following the conversation, she continued walking. But she then turned around, returned and handed them a \$10 donation.

After an initial stumble, Clatsop County’s race to exchange as many clean needles for used ones as possible is gaining momentum.

Thursday’s event was the third in a weekly, six-month pilot program to deter the spread of disease from dirty needles. Advocates have pointed to the number of needles collected — taking them out of public areas — as the main indicator of success for the program. But law enforcement officials — including Sheriff Tom Bergin and District Attorney Josh Marquis — have been skeptical as to its effectiveness and worry about a potential snowball effect of drug policies that enable abuse.

The first event earlier this month yielded no used needles. The second brought in about 100. On Thursday, about 3,000 were collected.

“It’s staggering to me,” said Debbie Morrow, a member of the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization Board of Directors, who has advocated for the program. “We think we’re a small, rural community and don’t have these abuse issues, but

See **NEEDLES**, Page 4A

Federal grant helps coast prep for a tsunami

Model for communities, river traffic

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

A federal grant will help model the effect a tsunami would have on coastal communities and commercial traffic in the Columbia River.

The \$354,241 from the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program is aimed at projects to help prepare the coast for a disaster. Oregon has received \$4.6 million from the grant program since 2009.

“We wanted to figure out what the impact of a maximum tsunami would have as it travels up and inundates the Columbia,” said Jonathan Allan, a coastal geomorphologist with the state Department of Geology and Mineral Industries.

The project is meant to help understand the interaction between tsunamis, tides and river flows.

“That will help us figure out where ships should evacuate,” Allan said. “If you’re in the estuary, your best option might be to evacuate upriver in a local event. You won’t have time to go out to sea.”

The state finished tsunami run-up models for the Oregon Coast in 2013. The

new grant funding will allow researchers to put the data into a more useful format for coastal communities, showing the public how quickly waves will arrive at different coastlines and estuaries.

“We need that information to figure out how quickly it’s going to take people to evacuate from their homes to high ground,” Allan said. “From the wave arrival times, we can extrapolate how long it will take to reach safety.”

Researchers are also trying to account for potentially failing bridges and other infrastructure and the impact it will have on people’s courses and evacuation times, Allan said.

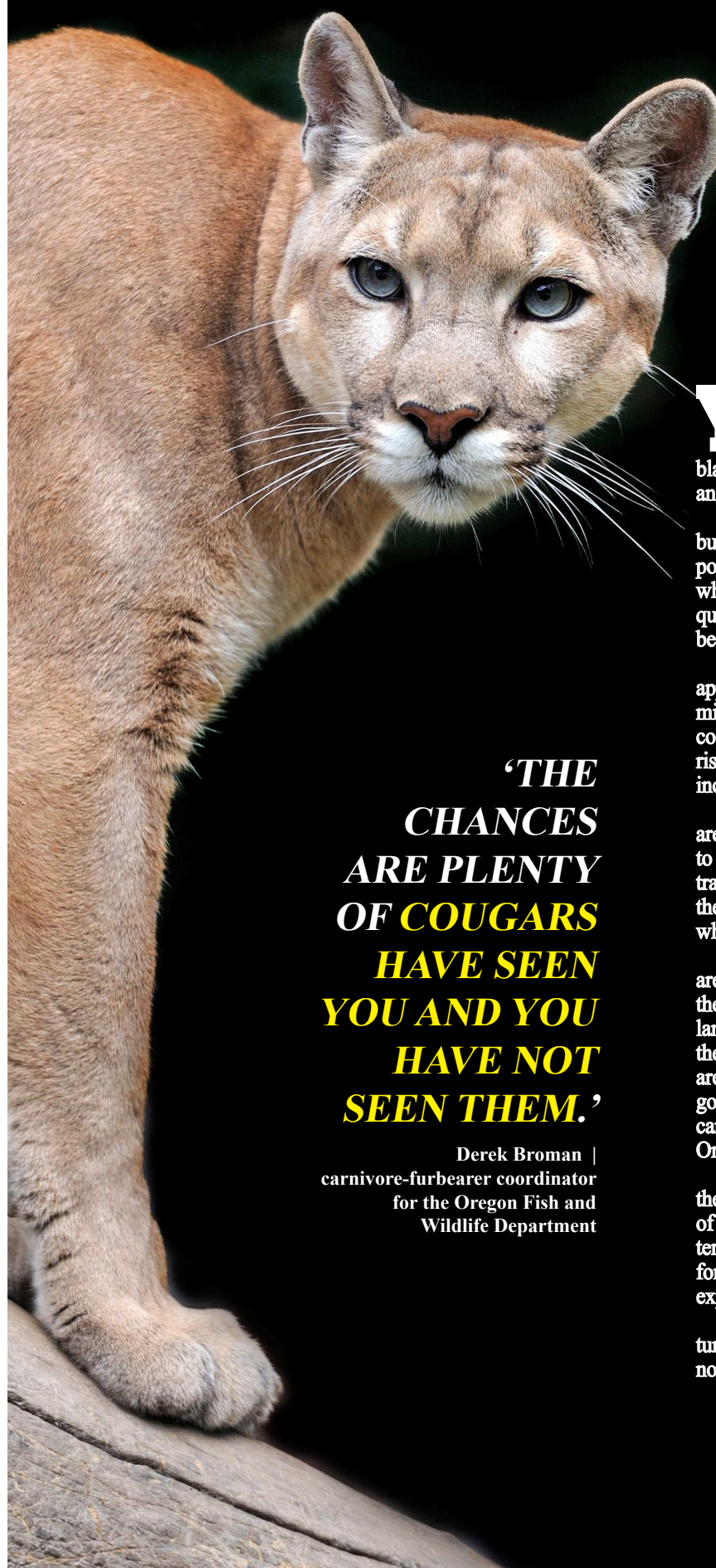
Previous grants have funded signs on U.S. Highway 101 telling people when they are entering or leaving a tsunami hazard zone, along with evacuation maps in areas with high foot traffic. Clatsop and Tillamook counties already have the signs. The new funding is meant for Lincoln and Lane counties, Allan said, with the hope of more than 300 signs along the Oregon Coast by 2020.

“Oregon’s vision is for coastal residents and visitors to be fully prepared for and resilient to Cascadia Subduction Zone tsunamis,” State Geologist Brad Avey said in a news release. “This federal grant funding is critical in continuing our progress toward that vision.”



A federal grant will help model the impact of a tsunami on the Oregon Coast.

COUGAR COUNTRY



Sightings of the predator have gone up on the coast

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

Yellow signs at trailheads in Ecola and Fort Stevens state parks feature a drawing of a cougar and a blank space to write the date whenever the animal is spotted.

Most years these spaces remain empty, but state wildlife managers say cougar populations appear to be increasing elsewhere along the Oregon Coast, raising questions about what is and what could become cougar country.

An updated cougar management plan, approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in mid-October, found that the coast management zone has reported a rise in cougar sightings, as well as an increase in conflicts with the big cats.

Now, state biologists based in Newport are beginning the first-ever coastal effort to attach GPS collars to adult cougars and track their movements to see just how far these predators wander, what they eat and where they might be going next.

The coast management zone is a large area that includes the northern section of the Cascade Mountain Range, the Portland, Salem and Eugene metroplexes and the rural North Coast. For years these areas were written off, not considered good cougar habitat, said Derek Broman, carnivore-furbearer coordinator for the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department.

Sure, the animals were present, but they existed in a fragmented region, a mix of urban and rural where the lush, rough terrain and relatively limited prey made for poor habitat. It was the last place to expect a population boom.

“Those might have been some premature assumptions,” Broman said. “They’re not holding true.”

See **COUGARS**, Page 7A

‘THE CHANCES ARE PLENTY OF COUGARS HAVE SEEN YOU AND YOU HAVE NOT SEEN THEM.’

Derek Broman | carnivore-furbearer coordinator for the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department

State senator says sexual harassment common at Capitol



Anna Reed/Statesman-Journal

State Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, who accused Republican Sen. Jeff Kruse of inappropriate touching, said Monday she heard accounts from other women in the state Capitol of such behavior by men.

Gelser accused colleague of inappropriately touching her

By ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

SALEM — A female state senator who accused a male colleague of inappropriate touching said Monday she’s heard accounts from other women in the state Capitol of such behavior by men and insisted “the culture needs to change.”

Sen. Sara Gelser said the

accounts were relayed to her over the weekend, after a senator who was accused of making unwelcome moves on Gelser was punished on Friday.

Gelser told Oregon Public Radio’s “Think Out Loud” program that the women told her about various offensive behavior.

“It can be anything from being touched too long, having a hand on your thigh either above or below your skirt, and what someone believes is just a friendly way, that hand around the shoulder and the fingers beneath your shirt ... or someone that is talking to you so close that your ear is wet when you step away,” she said.

Women have been touched “under the dais at a committee hearing, and, you know, it’s happened on the floor of our chambers, and that is not appropriate,” Gelser added.

The complaints in Oregon were brought to light after Senate Republican spokesman Jonathan Lockwood said a week ago on Twitter that Gov. Kate Brown and Gelser had received cash linked to Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, who recently was accused of sexually harassing and abusing many women over decades. Lockwood asked if Brown and Gelser returned the money.

See **GELSER**, Page 4A

