

Crab control: Visits mainly happen during beginning of season



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Lt. Cmdr. G.B. Cathey points out something of interest on the waters off the Oregon Coast.

Continued from Page 1A

“We mostly do most of the pointing out and say, ‘You’ve got to go here,’” 1st Class Aviation Maintenance Technician Chris Porter said.

The crew’s visits are mainly concentrated at the beginning of crab season, when many of the valuable crustaceans are caught. Crab boats typically shift their attention every few days when returns begin to dwindle.

“It’s pretty random,” Young said.

Not as random was the timing of this year’s crab season opening. Low meat yields and price negotiations stalled the start of the season, which was scheduled to begin Dec. 1, until Jan. 22.

“There’s a difference year to year,” Young said. “It seems like they’re having a good season.”

The C-27 replaced the C-130 as the preferred aircraft for crab season flyovers a couple of years ago. After they sat idle in an Air Force hangar for five years, the Coast Guard purchased 14 of them. Air Station Sacramento — the only air station with fixed-wing aircraft on the mainland West Coast — houses six of the planes. The new toys come with perks and drawbacks.

“It allows us to fly at low elevations, but we have to be more careful about how offshore we go,” said Lt. Cmdr. G.B. Cathey, the pilot.

Cathey and his partner in the cockpit — Lt. Cmdr. Peter Igoe — recalled days out on the water in Coast Guard vessels, but they were in their element in the air on Thursday.

“I remember standing on a boat during a fishery, looking up at a patrol plane and saying, ‘That is where I want to be,’” Cathey said. “And here we are today.”

Pot summit: ‘It was a system designed for failure’

Continued from Page 1A

networks and sparking money laundering, violence and environmental woes.

The column came shortly after Attorney General Jeff Sessions last month rescinded an Obama administration memo that outlined the steps states with legalized cannabis could take to avoid scrutiny under federal law, where marijuana remains illegal.

“In sum, I have significant concerns about the state’s current regulatory framework and the resources allocated to policing marijuana in Oregon,” Williams wrote in *The Oregonian*, adding the summit and the state’s response to his concerns would “inform our federal enforcement strategy.”

The summit was attended by 14 other U.S. attorney’s offices, Gov. Kate Brown, the FBI and other federal agencies.

Darwin Roberts, a former federal prosecutor in Seattle who also worked on marijuana issues as a senior official in the Washington Attorney General’s Office, said he wasn’t surprised to see Williams’ concerns. But he added the Justice Department is in a tough spot: If it shuts down states’ marijuana programs, it will drive that activity back to the black market, where neither the feds nor state authorities have the resources to deal with it.

“The Justice Department clearly is unhappy that the states aren’t doing more to stop marijuana activity outside the state legal system,” Roberts said. “I suspect that for DOJ to allow the states to keep making money off legal marijuana, DOJ will want to see a real commitment of state tax dollars to law enforcement efforts against black market growing and trafficking heading out of state.”

There is general agreement that some marijuana from Oregon does wind up in other states where it isn’t legal. Still, it’s hard to say if pot smuggling has gotten worse in Oregon — where illicit pot farmers were thriving long before recreational legalization — or how much of the marijuana leaving the state filters out from the legal side.

In his column, Williams said law enforcement in 16 other states have reported seizing marijuana from Oregon and postal agents have intercepted more than 2,600 pounds of pot in outbound packages and over \$1.2 million in associated cash. Advocates dismiss the idea

that legalization has caused a spike in black markets sales. It’s just that now, because it’s legal, it’s much easier to track it back, they said.

“When I moved to Oregon in 1979, cannabis was a billion-dollar crop then, so the notion that this is somehow caused by legalization or by the medical program is something that’s misplaced,” said Leland Berger, an attorney who specializes in marijuana cases.

“When it’s intercepted out of state it’s easier to document where it came from, but I’m a little disappointed that it’s viewed as a new and huge problem.”

States that have legalized marijuana for recreational and medical use have taken varying approaches to satisfying federal law enforcement priorities, in an effort to pre-empt raids or even a Justice Department lawsuit that could undermine the newly regulated markets. They’ve also adjusted their approaches as their markets matured.

Oregon voters approved the sale of recreational marijuana in 2014, and it became legal the following year. The state has allowed medical marijuana since 1998.

It now has about 900 licensed recreational growers, with more than 1,100 licenses awaiting approval and no cap on the number of licenses it will grant. Another roughly 25,600 growers in the state produce cannabis for medical marijuana patients. More than 500 retailers are licensed to sell recreational weed, with nearly 250 applications pending.

Washington state launched recreational sales in 2014, the same year as Colorado. It started off with relatively low caps on the number of licensed retail marijuana stores and for the size of grow operations. Both measures were designed to prevent an oversupply of cannabis that might make its way into the black market.

As its industry grew, Washington merged its unregulated medical market with the strictly regulated recreational one. It now has more than 500 licensed retailers, though not all are operating, and nearly 1,200 licensed growers.

In Oregon, the medical and recreational marijuana industries still operate separately, although the number of medical pot dispensaries has dropped precipitously as retailers move toward the more lucrative recreational cannabis sales. Oregon did not cap the num-

ber of pot producers, virtually guaranteeing an overproduction problem, said Seth Crawford, a former Oregon State University professor who’s an expert on marijuana economics and cannabis policy. Crawford now runs an industrial hemp seed company.

Coupled with Oregon’s small population — 4 million people total — and its reputation as a prime cannabis-growing location on a par with Northern California, a surplus was predictable here, Crawford said. He estimated Oregon growers produce up to three times the amount of marijuana that the state can absorb legally each year.

“You created this huge industry that has nowhere to put its product,” Crawford said.

“If you were an investor and you had just dropped \$4 million into a (marijuana) grow and you had thousands of pounds of flower that was ready to go but you had nowhere to sell it... if you want any of your money back, the only thing you can do is sell it on the black market,” he said. “It was a system designed for failure.”

Oregon has begun taking steps to address diversion to the black market. The state will soon require medical marijuana growers to adopt a seed-to-sale tracking system that it uses for recreational marijuana. It is also allowing medical growers to sell some of their surplus to wholesalers for sale in recreational dispensaries as medical pot shops dry up.

At a recent meeting of a medical marijuana advisory commission, members identified the pot surplus leaving Oregon as its No. 1 priority. Lawmakers are also taking the issue seriously: A bill last year to allow the governor to enter into sales compacts with other marijuana states didn’t make it to a vote, but there is interest in reviving the idea.

Those in the industry in Oregon are cautiously optimistic about the summit.

“It’s a brand-new industry operating legally under state law and illegally under federal law — and that’s hard to balance. That’s one of the purposes of this summit. Let’s talk about it,” said Anthony Taylor, president of Compassionate Oregon, which advocates for medical marijuana patients.

“I think everybody realizes it’s a discussion that needs to happen.”

Associated Press writer Gene Johnson in Seattle contributed to this report.

DUIIs: Officers have to hunt for drunken drivers

Continued from Page 1A

paying overtime. When one officer handles a shift alone, DUII arrests, which are time-consuming, can slip.

“It makes it extremely hard, because they’re answering all the calls,” he said.

The police chief also credits the promotion of Sgt. Jim Pierce and the hiring of Officer Teresa McKee, who are experienced at drunken-driving enforcement. Other new officers have also joined the ranks over the past few years.

“You’ve got a lot of people that have a lot of fire and spark in them and go out there and are a little more aggressive,” Workman said.

Two officers left the police department during

an investigation into behavioral and workplace issues, but Workman does not link those problems to the low DUII arrest figures. The police chief also does not believe officers consciously let drunken drivers go.

“I think it is a serious thing,” Workman said of the crime.

City Commissioner Tom Dyer, a retired Oregon State Police trooper, is not concerned by the fluctuation in DUII arrests.

In his experience, police officers have to hunt for drunken drivers. “But that takes time,” he said. “Well, if you get a lot of calls, guess what? You don’t get a chance to look for them.”

Dyer believes publicly reporting the increase in

arrests can act as a deterrent. “When you get big numbers and it gets reported, people think twice about driving,” he said. “And a lot of times it will go down. Small towns, especially, you get that.”

District Attorney Josh Marquis said the county has a higher number of prosecutions for drunken driving than counties of similar size, mostly a reflection of the tourism industry.

While Marquis said no one in law enforcement hopes for more DUII arrests, he recognized the changes in Warrenton.

“I welcome what is clearly a heightened emphasis on DUII enforcement by Chief Workman and his force,” the district attorney said in an email.

3 WAYS TO GET YOUR COPY

our coast

M A G A Z I N E

• ORDER ONLINE •
www.DiscoverOurCoast.com/order

• STOP BY ONE OF OUR 3 LOCATIONS •
Astoria • 949 Exchange St.
Seaside • 1555 N. Roosevelt Dr.
Long Beach • 205 Boldstad Ave. E #2

• PICK UP A PHONE •
Call Holly Larkins at 503-325-3211, x272
Email: hlarkins@dailyastorian.com