

Elk: Police field 10 elk-related calls a month

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remains available in the budget, said Chris Clatterbuck, chief of resource management at the park.

“We’ve seen two different herds in the park, and we’re not sure of the fidelity of the herd: Does it split apart in two and go back to one? Are these two separate entities?” Clatterbuck said. “These conversations have been going on in Warrenton for a while. It’s one of the reasons we wanted to do this project.

“These could be totally different elk than are in downtown Warrenton.”

They just don’t know for sure.

Elk arithmetic

Here is the math, according to Police Chief Mathew Workman: The city encompasses around 18 square miles, and you can’t hunt there. Fort Stevens State Park is right next door. It’s huge. You can’t hunt there, either. Then there’s the military base, Camp Rilea, a little farther down the highway. Also huge and also a place you can’t hunt.

Conclusion: “There’s a lot of area where elk can live and thrive and not have to worry about human predators,” he said.

Scattered around these refuges are neighborhoods, businesses and farmland. It’s difficult to manage elk numbers in such a landscape, said Herman Biederbeck, a wildlife biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Warrenton police field an average of 10 elk-related calls a month, Workman estimated. While there hasn’t been an increase in elk-related calls, he does believe the herd is growing, and it worries him.

He often gets calls from people who have seen a herd by the road and want an officer to come down and park nearby to alert oncoming motorists before the elk cross.

“Any kind of accident with them is usually substantial and can result in some type of injury,” Workman said.

He is also worried about the temptation mature elk present to poachers. He has watched young male elk grow up into real trophy bulls, and he remembers when an old buck with a “beautiful rack” was killed by poachers in Fort Stevens.

Reports of aggressive elk during the mating season are not uncommon, but in 2015 Workman and his officers responded to several calls about unusually aggressive elk. Police later linked the aggression to people feeding the animals.

In the city’s code, feeding wildlife other than songbirds or squirrels now comes with penalties as high as \$250 per offense.

Still, Workman said, “As many problems as they cause for locals, the tourists and people



A cat, far left, keeps a close eye on an elk grazing in a yard in Hammond.



An elk herd moving through Hammond came close to roads, causing several vehicles to slow down.

visiting love them.”

Many times traffic calls that include elk in the narrative actually have to do with motorists who pull over to photograph a grazing herd.

More data needed

Exact elk population numbers are difficult to come by in Clatsop County. Warrenton’s elk fall into a larger management category the state refers to as the Saddle Mountain management unit — geography that encompasses habitat from Saddle Mountain and Jewell Meadows to Astoria and Hammond.

More specifically, the Warrenton elk are the herds that frequent the Clatsop Plains area, which stretches down between the coastline and U.S. Highway 101 from the south shores of the Columbia River to about Seaside. Over the years, the plains have disappeared under a blanket of development.

Biederbeck guesses Warrenton residents are seeing a combination of factors collide. As development continues, habitat shrinks. Elk may gather in larger numbers in remaining habitat or move to new locations. Meanwhile, there are minimal cougar and bear populations, no serious disease issues, no wolves. Hunting by humans in a populous area is “a difficult proposition at best.”

“Some of the natural limiting factors are basically gone,” Biederbeck said.

In Gearhart, people have seen an undeniable increase in the local elk population in the past five years. Where there used to be around 30 elk, there are now closer to 80 on average. State biologists aren’t entirely sure where those extra elk came from, but theorize they might have come from the north, pushed south by development.

If Lewis and Clark National Historical Park is able to get GPS collars on elk, staff will be able to hone data they have been collecting since 2008 about the herds in and around the park, and begin matching fact to speculation.

While early data gathered through regular elk pellet surveys inside the park and driving surveys points to a recent decline in elk use around the park, as communities talk about solutions, Clatterbuck says there needs to be more information about elk-related property damage and accidents. Such information could help identify problem intersections or areas.

“There’s cause for concern and there are issues — gardens being eaten and yards being trampled,” said Carla Cole, natural resources project manager at Lewis and Clark who has helped with many pellet studies in the park. “But what is the problem and what will solve the problem?”

For the park, built around a replica of Fort Clatsop where the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and their Corps of Discovery spent the winter in 1805, there is also the issue of history. The story of the explorers and Fort Clatsop is just as much a story about elk: their meat and their skins.

Elk continue to be an important food source for scavengers from coyotes to small rodents. They are part of a tradition of hunting in the region. They disperse seeds as they tromp through the forest and other animals use the game trails they create.

“We want to make sure to detect any changes (in the herds), to make sure they still have a presence here,” Clatterbuck said.

Jail: Two past bond measures have failed

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“We’ve got to get it through to voters. That’s really the most important part of this,” said Scott Lee, the board’s chairman. “I think we’ve got a really good plan.”

History is not in their favor. Two previous bond measures to improve the jail — including a \$14 million bond in 2012 — have failed.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, will need full support from commissioners in order to help the county acquire the deferred maintenance offset from the state, Sheriff Tom Bergin said.

“She really does not, and I totally and completely understand this, she doesn’t want to spend any political capital unless we have buy-in from commissioners,” Bergin said. “If we get the state buying in, if we get the county buying in, the people are going to look at this and say, ‘Hey, you know what, this is something we’ve needed for a long time.’”

Inmates at the jail are released each week due to overcrowding. Since the county began exploring options for a potential relocation last year, Bergin has repeatedly expressed his desire for a 200-bed facility.

DLR Group, which performed a \$51,000 feasibility study, initially presented designs for a \$12 million, 140-bed facility as well as a \$28 million, 200-bed capacity jail. County staff and the sheriff’s office then asked architects to draw alternative designs that would close the price gap.

A number of rooms in the latest design have not been slated for a specific purpose. The design includes expanded services for educational programs, treatment services and recreation opportunities compared to the Duane Street jail. Bergin acknowledged that some residents have complained about the potential service expansions.

“It’s probably one of our biggest priorities. I come across as kind of a hard guy, a redneck or whatever, but I believe in rehabilitation. Incarceration is important, but rehabilitation is far more important,” the sheriff said. “It’s the whole picture. It’s not, ‘Just make them go out and break rocks anymore’ like it was in the ‘Cool Hand Luke’ days. It’s still some place that I hope that people don’t want to go, but it’s also a place that, once they’re there, I hope they can get some help.”

At the end of the discussion, commissioners and Moore tentatively agreed to include the relocation proposal on the March 14 meeting agenda. Voters would then have the final decision.

“Nobody likes a jail. I don’t want to have a big jail, but it’s something that’s a necessary evil, unfortunately, in our society,” Bergin said. “But I will try my best to get the word out.”

Parks: ‘What we need for these sites isn’t feasible’

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are still many more questions that need to be answered, said City Manager Brett Estes. City Councilor Tom Brownson pointed out there could be significant costs just to bring the property to a point where it is ready for sale.

Post Office Park, on 15th Street between Exchange Street and Franklin Avenue, is off the list. The city just entered into a five-year agreement with neighboring bed-and-breakfast owners to care for the park. A variety of historic designations complicate any plans to sell the site,

which had little redevelopment potential to begin with, staff said.

Nemlowill asked Parks and Recreation Department Director Angela Cosby what would be the best possible thing to come out of the council’s discussion.

“What we need for these sites isn’t feasible,” Cosby said. “It hasn’t been for a long time and we don’t have an easy path for that to become feasible in the near future.”

During budget talks last year, the city discussed possibly selling underused parks with development potential to

ease the burden on an overextended, unsustainable department. Estes brought on Rosemary Johnson, a retired city planner, as a consultant to dig further into the properties.

Cosby told councilors that selling a single site was unlikely to have much of an impact on the park’s finances overall.

“One site, probably not,” she said. “But I think all these small changes can really start adding up to be something.”

In the big picture, the park adoptions are also small things, she said, but they add up to create a larger impact.

The City Council was

concerned about letting go of land only to regret the choice later. In her detailed memo to the council, Johnson noted that both Birch Field and the customs house site could be good places to locate a stormwater treatment facility.

The state does not yet require Astoria to test, evaluate and remove contaminants from its stormwater, but the city is in the middle of separating its combined sewer overflow. When that project is

done, Public Works Director Jeff Harrington said the state Department of Environmental Quality could come back and require the city to come up with a plan to address the higher amounts of stormwater that will be going into the Columbia River and Youngs Bay.

A site like Birch Field could be used as a wetland treatment or bioswale for stormwater treatment — an option one Alderbrook resi-

dent said the neighborhood would prefer over housing.

Other properties that could be turned into treatment facilities exist in Astoria, Harrington said. It isn’t clear how critical Birch Field or the custom house site would be in the end, though Birch Field appears to be a good option. Nor is it known what the state may require. Standards change often. “We just don’t know what the future holds,” he said.

Warrenton: ‘If we don’t at least attempt this, it’s just going to mean a lot more modulars’

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on whether to go after a bond measure, Jeffery said.

The district last went out for a bond measure in 2002, asking for \$5.2 million to help repair crumbling infrastructure at Warrenton Grade School and Warrenton High School. The bond had a 21-year maturity and was estimated to cost \$1.17 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The debt, now equal to 66 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, is coming off the books in about five years.

Residents recently approved a bond increase of

9 cents to 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value to help sustain the Warrenton Community Library. But the facilities committee’s proposed bond measure for a new master campus purchase and middle school is estimated to cost \$2.49 per \$1,000 with a 25-year maturity.

The district’s enrollment has grown 20 percent over the past decade as the housing stock in Warrenton has increased, topping 1,000 students for the first time last school year. Jeffery has previously estimated enrollment will eventually peak at 1,159 students in the 2024-25 school year.

The district recently took out a \$2 million full faith and credit bond — similar to a loan — to add classroom space over the next five years while figuring out a long-term solution. Several modular classrooms have been added outside the grade school to alleviate immediate overcrowding, and the district will need to add more over the next 18 years regardless of the bond decision, Jeffery said.

“If we don’t at least attempt this, it’s just going to mean a lot more modulars,” he said, adding that the district eventually won’t be able to keep up with projected enrollment.

Assistance League is a non-profit, all volunteer organization whose philanthropic programs promote the well-being and self-esteem of children and teens throughout Clatsop County. Their celebrated Accessorize Sale is on hiatus until 2019 but Assistance League will be hosting a pop-up shop at Vintage Hardware for the month of February. The fun shop will feature luxury accessories for the self and home and all proceeds go directly to their programs that clothe and support children in need in our community.

Accessorize POP-UP SALE

“Help Clothe Kids”

Feb. 8th - Mar. 7th, Vintage Hardware
1162 Marine Drive, Astoria, Oregon

For more information contact
ASSISTANCELEAGUECPO.ORG
or CALL 503.738.0313

Pop Up Shop will have bins for community members to drop off new Children Books for ALCP Duffel Bag Program for Foster Children