

Washington state man arrested after car chase

Allegedly exceeded speeds of 100 mph during 15-minute chase

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

A Buckley, Washington, man allegedly led police on a roughly 15-minute, high-speed car chase from Gearhart to Astoria

on Sunday morning. After spotting a potential seat belt violation, a Clatsop County sheriff's deputy attempted to stop a silver Pontiac Grand Am on U.S. Highway 101. Ricardo Allen Lopez, 24, then allegedly sped north on the highway with a female passenger.

The car allegedly exceeded speeds of 100 mph, and the deputy stopped the pursuit within a few seconds.



Ricardo Allen Lopez

An Oregon State Police trooper then caught up with the car in Astoria near the New Youngs Bay Bridge. The car eventually made a hasty right turn onto Bond Street and pulled into the Pig 'N Pancake parking lot.

Police arrested Lopez without further incident. He was charged with attempting to elude police with a vehicle and reckless driving.

State agency wants to boost dam inspection authority

Several changes considered by state regulators

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Laws governing dam safety in Oregon have become outdated, prompting state regulators to seek upgraded authority to inspect and order repairs to the structures.

In the next legislative session, the Oregon Water Resources Department plans to ask lawmakers to revise dam safety statutes that were originally written nearly 90 years ago.

The ability to enter property without a warrant to conduct dam inspections is one request the agency is considering, said Racquel Rancier, senior policy coordinator for the department.

About a dozen dams in Oregon haven't been inspected in recent years because the landowners denied entry to their property, said Keith Mills, the department's dam safety engineer.

Oregon has jurisdiction over dams that are at least 10 feet high and store more than 9.2 acre-feet of water, he said. The state inspects 969 such structures, while the federal government inspects 285 dams.

More than 25 percent of state- and federally-inspected dams in Oregon are rated as high or significant hazards,



An excavator and a motorboat are used to break a log jam in April 2013 above the Three Mile Dam on the Umatilla River north of Hermiston.

which is based on their potential to cause lost life and property damage, rather than physical condition.

Following are other dam safety laws under consideration:

- Landowners may be required to obtain state permission to modify or remove dams under the supervision of an engineer, to ensure such changes are done safely.

- The agency may impose a requirement for people building lagoons — such as those storing manure or wastewater — to submit their final designs before starting construction. The department now lacks authority for structures that

don't involve water rights.

Currently, the state must automatically schedule an administrative hearing when dam repairs are needed, which the agency considers a time-consuming process that could endanger public safety.

The agency may instead require the dam owner to get an engineering analysis of the structure without scheduling a hearing, or to hold a hearing only if the owner objects to the repair plans.

Under another proposal, the agency may order the immediate correction of unsafe conditions at potentially hazardous dams by reducing water levels, opening valves or taking simi-

lar actions.

"That is something we can't currently do if we know it needs to be done," Rancier said.

Imposing civil penalties for dam safety problems would provide an intermediary approach to induce needed repairs, rather than the only current option of imposing an order, she said.

"They really only provide a hammer," Rancier said of current laws.

At this point, these ideas are only in draft form and will be refined based on feedback, she said.

NORTHWEST BRIEFS

Multnomah Falls viewing platform back open after fire

PORTLAND — Multnomah Falls' lower viewing platform has opened to the public for the first time in over six months.

The Oregonian reported the platform opened on Monday. The viewing platform, which sits at the base of the falls, was closed in September by the Eagle Creek Fire.

The blaze swept through the Columbia River Gorge and covered nearly 49,000 acres.

Firefighters protected the 1925 lodge from the flames, and it reopened in November.

Many gorge destinations, including most trails in the burned area, were closed. Authorities haven't set a timeline for when the trail to the falls' upper viewing platform will reopen.

The upper platform remains intact.

Washington Gov. Inslee signs package of voter-access bills

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Gov. Jay Inslee on Monday signed a package of bills aimed at increasing voter access in Washington state, including a measure to preregister 16- and 17-year-olds and another that allows in-person voter registration to occur the same day of an election.

"I'm proud of our state for making it easier to vote, not harder," Inslee told the crowd of students and other supporters at Foster High School in Tukwila, Washington, where the bill signing ceremony was held.

Under one of the measures, starting on July 1, 2019, people can preregister to vote starting at age 16, though they won't be added to the list of registered voters until the next election at which they'll be 18.

Washington state barge company fined over fertilizer spills

VANCOUVER, Wash. — The state Department of Ecology has fined a Vancouver barge company \$18,000 for spilling 40,000 gallons of fertilizer in the Columbia and Snake rivers in April.

The Columbian reported Monday that state investigators found two of Tidewater Barge Lines Inc.'s steel tank barges weren't adequately maintained and allowed urea ammonium nitrate — a liquid fertilizer known to be corrosive to steel — to spill on three separate occasions.

The company is required to prevent future spills and submit to the department an annual comprehensive corrosion management plan for its barges.

Tidewater has 30 days to pay the fine or appeal to the state's Pollution Control Hearings Board.

Attempts to contact the company for comment were unsuccessful.

— Associated Press

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