

# Port prepares to boost video surveillance along waterfront

By EDWARD STRATTON

The Daily Astorian

The Port of Astoria Commission has approved spending \$115,000 to improve video surveillance.

The contract with Watch-Point Video includes nearly 40 additional cameras along the central waterfront and the Port's two marinas on the west and east end of Astoria, including new license-plate readers and improvements to the Port's existing cameras. The contract also includes new servers to store footage and equipment to wirelessly transfer footage to the Port's central office.

The Port has experienced issues with theft on the central waterfront and cameras too outdated to see license plates or the make and model of vehicles. The new cameras will allow the Port to read license plates and potentially use facial recognition technology.

The improved surveillance is being paid for by a \$285,000 security grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, including approximately \$70,000 in previous Pier 1 lighting upgrades that covered a 25 percent local match. The agency will spend the rest of the grant on fencing, equipment to scan worker

credentials and improved electrical infrastructure, said Matt McGrath, the Port's director of operations.

The Port Commission has also approved spending up to \$60,000 to replace wooden pilings along the west side of Pier 1, where seafood processors take in product from boats, once the in-water work window reopens in November.

The Port doesn't go out for bids on such piling replacements because locally based Bergerson Construction always comes back the cheapest, McGrath said, adding the Port is looking at five-year piling replacement contracts

to make the process more competitive.

The Port Commission approved a contract for nearly \$14,000 to repair two dock fingers in an area of the west-end marina recently dredged by the Port of Ilwaco, Washington. The marina had not been dredged for more than 10 years, McGrath said, and the docks had snapped.

The Port also declared surplus a water evaporator the agency used to remove water from a boat wash station on the Pier 3 boatyard. The system was too expensive to operate, McGrath said, but is worth about \$10,000 to \$15,000.



AP Photo/Gregory Bull

A gray whale off the California coast.

## Gray whale sightings up off Northwest coast

By JES BURNS  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

and Washington state right now.

Gray whale sightings are up on the Oregon and Washington state coast in recent weeks.

Counts at Oregon's Whale Watching Center at Depoe Bay have been between five and 10 per day, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, although many more pass the along the coast undetected.

Park ranger Luke Parsons says the actual number of whales passing by on their way from Baja to feeding grounds in the Arctic is relatively typical for this time of year.

"What is unusual is how nice the weather has been. And this has led to many people coming out to the coast and being able to see a lot more of these animals than we're really used to in March," he said.

But it may not just be the weather.

An American Cetacean Society project in Los Angeles has been tracking the migration for 35 years. Director Alisa Schulman-Janiger says there was a pulse of whales that passed Los Angeles a few weeks back, heading north to feeding grounds in the Arctic.

"Our northbound counts are very high. We're well above our northbound average," she said.

And that means those whales are passing Oregon

"It doesn't surprise me you're seeing a nice big bump in northbound grays," Schulman-Janiger said.

In addition, Schulman-Janiger says West Coast gray whales experienced a baby boom over the past six years, and the population has increased significantly.

Overall though, it's difficult to pinpoint exactly what's happening with gray whales off the West Coast.

Scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration do annual calf counts off California. Other tracking projects rely on citizen scientists and trained volunteers that count the whales from shore.

But the whales don't always travel near the coast, and often rough oceans and bad weather can make them difficult to spot.

Gray whales are expected to be passing near the Oregon and Washington state coast until June. Mothers with calves generally pass later in the spring.

Parsons, the ranger, said he's also been seeing humpbacks and recently spent a morning tracking a pod of orcas off Oregon's coast.

Staff at Cape Disappointment State Park in Washington state are reporting high numbers of gray whale sightings, as well.

Oregon's spring Whale Watch Week programs run from Saturday through March 31.

## Sea lions feast on fish in survival war

By GILLIAN FLACCUS  
Associated Press

NEWPORT — The 700-pound sea lion blinked in the sun, sniffed the sea air and then lazily shifted to the edge of the truck bed and plopped onto the beach below.

Freed from the cage that carried him to the ocean, the massive marine mammal shuffled into the surf, looked left, looked right and then started swimming north as a collective groan went up from wildlife officials who watched from the shore.

After two days spent trapping and relocating the animal designated #U253, he was headed back to where he started — a river 130 miles from the Pacific Ocean that has become an all-you-can-eat fish buffet for hungry sea lions.

"I think he's saying, 'Ah, crap! I've got to swim all the way back!'" said Bryan Wright, an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife scientist.

It's a frustrating dance between California sea lions and Oregon wildlife managers that's become all too familiar in recent months. The state is trying to evict dozens of the federally protected animals from an inland river where they feast on salmon and steelhead that are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The bizarre survival war has intensified recently as the sea lion population rebounds and fish populations decline in the Pacific Northwest.

The sea lions breed each summer off Southern California and northern Mexico, then the males cruise up the Pacific Coast to forage. Hunted for their thick fur, the mammals' numbers dropped dramatically but have rebounded from 30,000 in the late 1960s to about 300,000 today due to the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act.

With their numbers growing, the dog-faced pinnipeds are venturing ever farther inland on the watery highways of the Columbia River and its tributaries in Oregon and Washington state — and their appetite is having disastrous consequences, scientists say.



AP Photo/Don Ryan

#U253 leaps out of a cage toward the beach and the Pacific Ocean as Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife scientist Bryan Wright holds the gate open in Newport. Five days later, the sea lion was back at Willamette Falls, hungry for more fish.

In Oregon, the sea lions are intercepting protected fish on their way to spawning grounds above Willamette Falls, a horseshoe-shaped waterfall about 25 miles south of Portland. Last winter, a record-low 512 wild winter steelhead completed the journey, said Shaun Clements, the state wildlife agency's senior policy adviser.

Less than 30 years ago, that number was more than 15,000, according to state numbers.

"We're estimating that there's a 90 percent probability that one of the populations in the Willamette River could go extinct if sea lion predation continues unchecked," he said. "Of all the adults that are returning to the falls here, a quarter of them are getting eaten."

Clements estimates the sea lions also are eating about 9 percent of the spring Chinook salmon, a species prized by Native American tribes still allowed to fish for them.

Oregon wildlife managers say sea lions are beginning to move into even smaller tributaries where they had never been seen before and where some of the healthiest stocks of the threatened fish exist. The mammals also have been spotted in small rivers in Washington state that are home to fragile fish populations.

California sea lions are not listed under the Endangered Species Act, but killing them requires special authorization under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which was changed to address the issue of fish predation.

Biologists this spring started trapping the sea lions in the Willamette River and releasing them at the coast. They also have applied with the federal government to kill the worst offenders to protect the fish runs.

Native tribes, which have fished for salmon and steelhead for generations, support limited sea lion kills because of the cultural value of the fish, said Doug Hatch, a senior fisheries scientist with the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission.

"You're pitting this protected population that has been fully recovered against these Endangered Species Act-listed fish," Hatch said. "We think it's an easy choice."

If U.S. officials grant the request, the trap-and-kill program would expand a similar and highly controversial effort on another major Pacific Northwest river. Oregon and Washington state wildlife managers are allowed to kill up to 93 sea lions trapped each year at Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River under certain conditions.

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