

Tiny homes: ‘Builders are threatening to leave the state.’

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“I think folks are trying to make something happen,” he said. “As we’re getting closer to it, we’re just asking, ‘Did you think of this?’”

With interest in tiny homes growing, John Morgan, the executive director of The Chinook Institute for Civic Leadership, organized a symposium to address some of the issues.

“Over the course of this last year, I kept getting peppered with questions about tiny houses,” Morgan said. “One of the things that became evident to me was there wasn’t a lot of good knowledge about what tiny houses even are.”

While the symposium’s purpose was to help cities and other interested agencies understand land use and the affordable housing crisis,



The tiny home project in Cannon Beach is on hold.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Morgan said confusion about building code changes quickly became the theme.

Sarah Stebbins, state chap-

ter leader of the American Tiny House Association, said no longer classifying tiny homes as RVs has had “huge” effects.

“Well over half of the tiny homes being constructed are on wheels. Builders are threatening to leave the state. Some

have done so,” Stebbins said. “Let’s say you are in the process of building a tiny house on wheels. Because your house is no longer considered an RV, you will not be able to get the same RV financing or insurance.”

Dan Bryant, project director for SquareOne Villages in Eugene, is one tiny home activist and manager feeling the impact of other changes.

His project came out of a need to address a growing homelessness issue in Eugene in 2012. His organization, which now manages three tiny home communities, was largely supportive of the new state law because it helped create safety and building standards conducive for homes less than 400 square feet.

But recent changes from state building and fire officials

don’t allow sleeping lofts in tiny homes due to fire safety concerns. Bryant argues such changes are too restrictive and affect overall affordability. He and other tiny home advocates are pushing for the codes concerning lofts to be amended next legislative session.

Eliminating lofts as an option reduces the number of people who can be housed, affecting the homes affordability, he said.

“When you look at it in those terms, there is a true human cost,” Bryant said.

While several aspects about tiny homes remain in flux, city councilors in Cannon Beach still believe the small units could help with the housing crunch.

“It’s not a solution,” Mayor Sam Steidel said. “It’s a tool in the toolbox.”

Cougars: Coastal zone was long thought to be poor habitat for them

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consistent across the state. Despite the six cougar killings this year, Broman noted the state has many more reports of cougar sightings and interactions that didn’t end with a dead cougar.

Wildlife biologist Jeremy Thompson said the behavior of the cougar in The Dalles was “extremely odd.” The animal didn’t appear to be afraid of people or at all wary of its increasingly urban environment as it wandered into the downtown business district and the hotel.

“A lot of the time (decisions to euthanize) have to be made pretty quickly,” Broman said. He added, “No one likes to have to remove cougars lethally.”

Oregon’s cougar management plan, updated last year, noted an increase in the number of sightings and conflicts with cougars in urban areas

and specifically in the coastal management zone, a large area that includes the northern section of the Cascade Mountain Range, the Portland, Salem and Eugene metroplexes and the rural North Coast.

With its mix of urban and rural areas, rough terrain and relatively limited prey, the coastal zone was long thought to be poor habitat for cougars and the last place to expect a population boom.

The first two cougars the Alsea biologists collared were a mother-son pair.

A trapper had called the district office to report that a foothold trap he had set for bobcat and coyotes had snagged a young cougar instead. The district staff sensed a unique opportunity.

They went out, darted the 8- to 10-month old male cougar, put a collar on him and released him. They gave him a week to rest up and then went back out to get mom, using

information transmitted from his collar.

“He’s going to separate from mom here in six to eight months and as soon as he does that, we’re going to try to capture him again and adjust his collar because he’s going to be growing quick,” Kirchner said. “It’ll be interesting to see how far he goes.”

The young cougar will face some competition for territory. There are dominant males in that area he will have to contend with, Kirchner said.

So far, the older males the district collared have a range of around 50 square miles — relatively smaller than research from colleagues in Eastern Oregon. One male’s range is at 80 square miles, which compares to what researchers have seen in Eastern Oregon. A female cougar’s range has been recorded at closer to 15 square miles. It’s too early to say if these are constant ranges, or only seasonal.

Elk: ‘This has become a serious safety issue for our community’

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“The herd have become quite placid with cars and people,” Brown wrote. “The City of Gearhart would like to request more information on how best to protect the citizens’ safety and what can be done to ensure no one is injured or killed by these animals.”

“This has become a serious safety issue for our community,” he added. “Also, many property owners have reported that elk have caused extensive damage to vegetation, structures, exterior wiring and equipment which presents a danger to the elk as well.”

Gov. Kate Brown, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici and Johnson received copies of the letter. Johnson says the issue is among her top priorities.

Public opinion on the elk is divided in Gearhart, but



John Dudley

This elk dines on some Gearhart shrubbery.

elk off the greens.

Balsenifer said Warrenton hopes to also host Biederbeck soon to provide people with basic information about how to live with the elk and discourage them from routinely visiting gardens and properties. Warrenton does not deal with nearly as many elk as Gearhart. The City Commission also passed a law to make it illegal to feed wildlife other than songbirds and squirrels after some elk, used to treats from humans, became aggressive.

There are several theories for the elk herds’ increased presence in the two towns: Development has encroached on areas they used to roam; forests have become more difficult for the animals to traverse following massive windstorms; few predators or diseases to keep herd numbers in check; and the ready availability of food and safety from hunters.

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