



Neal Maine

A red-winged blackbird protects its territory from an elk in Clatsop County wetlands.

## Birds: Could help mark Earth Day

Continued from Page 1A

“Red-winged blackbirds have been in that habitat forever. It seemed to fit the character of Cannon Beach,” said Neal Maine, a wildlife photographer who serves on the 12 Days of Earth Day committee. “They are a part of the downtown, which is kind of rare to have a bird colony right in the central part of the community.”

The committee, which organizes a variety of environmental activities throughout April in honor of Earth Day, decided it wanted to propose the idea to the city as a formal way to honor the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a landmark federal law that protects dozens of species of birds. Adopting the bird officially would take a vote from the City Council. Dozens of cities have adopted similar designations around the country.

While negotiating which bird should be proposed for the title, the tufted puffin was considered. Cannon Beach is the home of the largest tufted puffin colony on the Oregon Coast, with several festivals and fundraisers held in their honor. Between that and

the wide array of puffin paraphernalia available downtown, the black, white and orange bird has become the town’s unofficial icon.

But there are many reasons the red-winged blackbird has an edge. Puffins are seasonal, nesting at Haystack Rock for only a few months of the year, and are not very accessible unless “you are strategic about seeing them,” Maine said.

Red-winged blackbirds are what people in the community see every day, and serve as a better representative of the area’s ecology, Maine said. Designating these birds would also be historically significant, as many of them live on the Little Pompey Wetland — a marsh named after the son of Sacagawea from the Lewis and Clark Expedition by Cannon Beach Elementary School fifth-graders more than 20 years ago.

“It’s the idea that every bird counts, even common ones like red-winged blackbirds,” Maine said. “We have a tendency to go for the rare and unusual. This is more about celebrating the ‘common.’”

Haystack Rock Awareness Program Director Melissa Keyser also serves on the

committee and said while her program is naturally partial to tufted puffins, she embraces the red-winged blackbird as an official bird.

“It’s the perfect bird to highlight because it is often overshadowed by the puffin,” Keyser said. “While the puffins are incredibly special and important, we also want to give credit to another species. When you are really immersed in the environment here the bird that you see is the red-winged blackbird. We could have gone with the puffin, but the blackbird was a little more indicative to this place.”

Puffin or otherwise, the larger message is to bring to light the importance of protecting bird habitat. Posters of the bird with the caption “They are all canaries” are being circulated around town to raise awareness. The phrase plays off the old adage “a canary in a coal mine,” referencing a time when canaries were used as early detectors for carbon monoxide in mining tunnels.

“They are our measuring stick to the quality of our environment,” Maine said. “When the birds start dying, that’s when you know you’ve got a problem.”

## Port: Agency sees potential for development at East Mooring

Continued from Page 1A

### Built by feds

Local groups appealed to the federal government after World War II for help building a boat basin to relieve congestion and add moorage for the fishing fleet.

“It was estimated that some 3,000 craft would benefit initially from the above-requested improvement, which would provide berthing space for 1,000 at one time,” Col. Ralph Tudor, a district engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, wrote in a 1946 recommendation for the project.

The basin, surrounded by rock breakwater and two wing jetties, was constructed in the late 1940s. The project included a 945-foot causeway that runs above the basin to the breakwater, with walkways down to the docks where boats moor.

“All facilities within the basin would be operated and maintained by the Port of Astoria without profit and open to all on equal terms,” Tudor wrote.

Ownership was under a joint partnership that included the city and Port. In 1968, the Astoria City Council vacated its right of ways in the basin at the request of the Port.

“The Port wanted dispensation to do things out there,” Astoria City Manager Brett Estes said.

The Port began lobbying Congress in the late 1980s to repair the deteriorating breakwater surrounding the basin, said Bill Cook, the Port’s former deputy director. Congress spent more than \$20 million in the early 2000s rehabilitating the breakwater. The rehab stopped at the transition between the breakwater and the causeway, which the Port has struggled to maintain.

In 2009, state bridge inspectors found the causeway in serious condition and ordered it closed to vehicle traffic. The Port made about \$150,000 in repairs and opened the roadway temporarily. But several years ago, the causeway



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The section of the mooring basin occupied by sea lions is off limits to the public for safety reasons.

closed again to vehicles.

Bruce Johnson, the state bridge engineer, said the Port still has more than 30 structural pieces above and below water needing repair before the causeway could reopen to traffic. The state has also provided the Port with an estimate of \$4 million to replace the entire bridge, although Johnson cautioned that the actual price could be two to four times more.

“There’s no way to know unless you do the actual design and engineering,” he said.

About a year ago, the state told the Port the entire causeway could be shut down in the next two years to all traffic — vehicle and pedestrian — if it isn’t fixed, Knight said.

“We’re going to have to wrestle as an organization,” Knight said of the heavy investment needed at the basin. “Is this something we’re going to tackle? Is it something we’re going to sit on, or is this something (for which) we need to engage a lot more people?”

### Planning for the future

The Port also owns several acres around the basin on either side of 36th Street. But any plans the Port has would have to pass muster with the city, which adopted building and height restrictions in the Civic Greenway portion

of the Riverfront Vision Plan between 16th to 39th streets. The Port can get exceptions if the agency presents a master plan that is approved by the Astoria City Council.

Kevin Cronin, a former Astoria community development director contracted by the Port to search and apply for grants, said he is seeking one this summer for a master plan at the East Mooring Basin.

Port Commissioner Bill Hunsinger, who is also a commercial fisherman, said the Port should go to Washington, D.C., to seek more federal support for fixing the basin.

“If we had maintained that (marina), our fishing industry would probably have been out there,” he said, adding the Port should get the fishing industry behind any pitch.

Commissioner Dirk Rohne said the Port should look into a public-private partnership.

The Port is creating a strategic plan to cover all of its properties. That plan should include language about the need to explore such options to improve the ailing basin, Knight said.

“Once it’s fixed, it’s a heck of an opportunity,” he said. “It was designed to have ... like 1,500 slips for boats. That was the original intent. So it certainly could be a moneymaker. It certainly could be a money generator.”

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