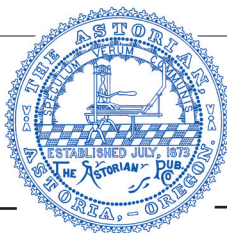


OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Some guidelines to stay safe by the ocean

In the last 20 years, we doubt a year has gone by without some sort of tragedy on the Oregon and Southwest Washington coasts.

The latest drownings, Wednesday afternoon at Rockaway Beach, have ripped a Colorado family apart.

Samuel Allen, 17, was body boarding without a wetsuit and struggled to get back to the shore, according to the Coast Guard. His father, Robert Allen, 50, went into the water to assist. His stepmother lost sight of them and called 911.

Two Coast Guard helicopter crews arrived. A rescue swimmer pulled an unresponsive Robert Allen from the water, provided CPR and transferred him to emergency medical technicians on the beach, but he died.

Helicopters and a Coast Guard cutter

‘Just because the sun is shining, it does not mean that it’s safe to go out into the ocean. **That water is cold, and the risk of potentially fatal hypothermia is real.**’

searched through the night for Samuel Allen, but called off the effort the next morning.

Mother Nature is so unforgiving.

Just because the sun is shining, it does not mean that it’s safe to go out into the ocean. That water is cold, and the risk of potentially fatal hypothermia is real.

Logs, riptides and waves are among the biggest dangers.

We have repeatedly issued warnings about the dangers of logs in the water and on shore. Their weight when tossed by a wave can knock a swimmer

unconscious.

The American Red Cross offers safety tips about rip currents that bear repeating.

First up is the admonition to only swim in areas patrolled by lifeguards. That ought to be obvious, but too often it isn’t. And never swim alone.

If you are caught in a rip current, stay calm and don’t fight the current, safety experts advise. Swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current. And once you are free, turn and swim toward shore.

The National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is equally vigorous in its warnings, noting that rip currents account for four out of five of ocean rescues performed by lifeguards

NOAA warns about shorebreaks, too. These are ocean conditions that occur when waves break directly on the shore, and a significant cause of spinal injuries.

Small or high waves can be equally as unpredictable and dangerous and typically form when there is a rapid transition from deep to shallow water.

Our beaches are among our greatest natural wonders. They can be fun, a terrific source of pleasure and create lasting memories from childhood to adulthood. But they also come with dangers, too. Locals and visitors alike should heed those warnings and work to stay safe.

LETTERS WELCOME

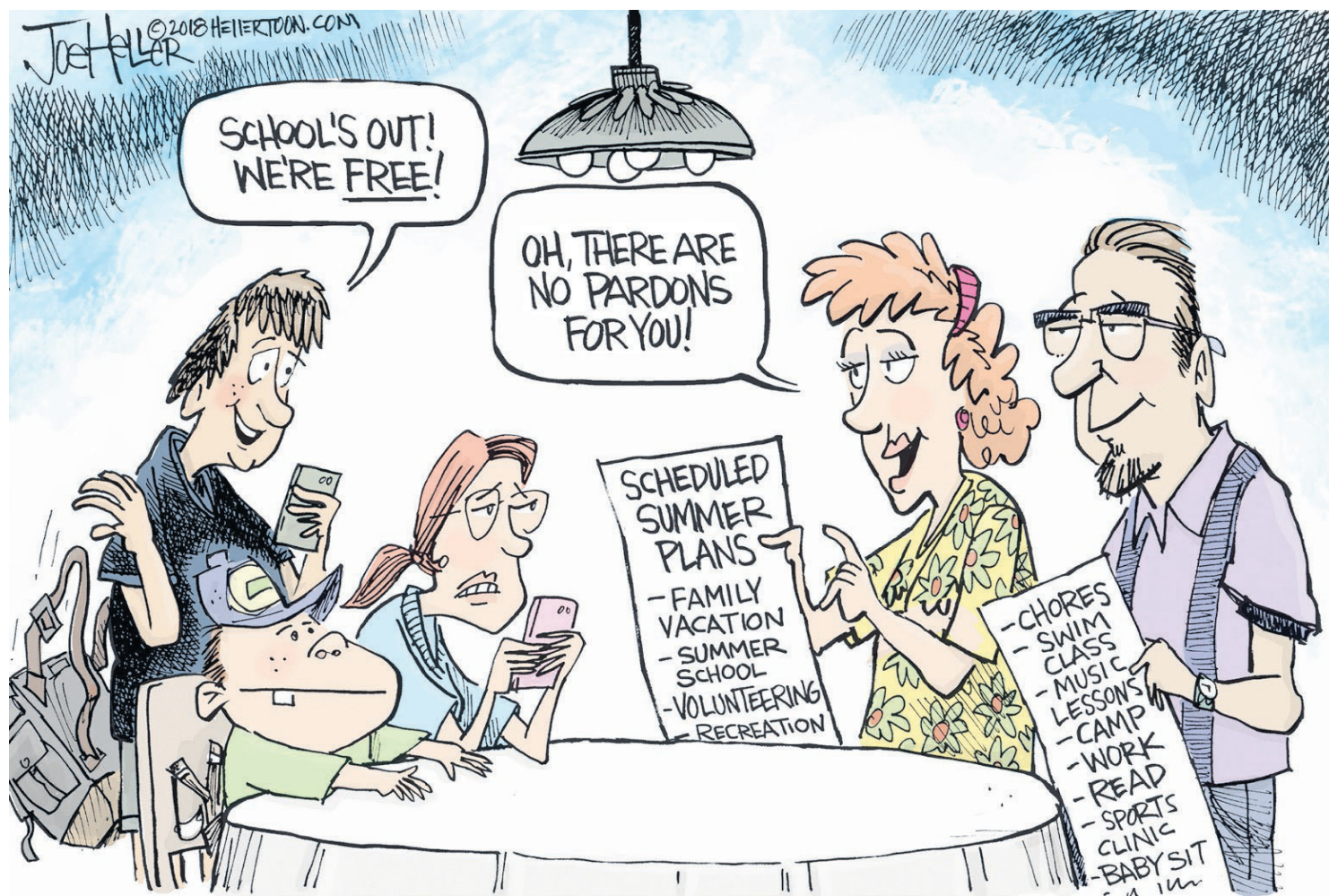
Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

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All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month.

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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Looking for a magic bio-bullet

For Gearhart residents who have been threatened by a fearsome mama elk protecting her calf or caught amidst the herd, controlling the elk population isn’t a matter of if it’s needed, but how it should be implemented.

Michael Finley, chairman of the Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife Commission, was among those who ventured to Gearhart this spring as part of a tour of Department of Fish and Wildlife and local officials to assess the region’s elk concerns.



R.J. MARX

Most of the time, elk and humans live peacefully together. “But during birthing, calving or during the rut they became very protective,” Finley said. “That’s the most dangerous time.”

Finley, a former superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, has had his own interactions with elk, especially during rut and calving seasons.

“In terms of public safety, I was chased several times,” Finley said. “I literally ran behind stone pillars. It’s real.”

Finley introduced a novel solution, one that he had seen efficiently control a wild horse population: contraceptive darting.

“Over time, the population went down,” he told Gearhart officials and wildlife commissioners. “It was non-lethal, so people didn’t get upset about it.”

Could it work in reducing the elk herd here?

Contraceptive vaccine

The immunocontraceptive vaccine called GonaCon is registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for use

on wild and feral female horses, burros, and white-tailed deer, according to Legislative and Public Affairs Gail Keirn of the USDA National Wildlife Research Center. It is not registered for use in elk.

GonaCon works by stimulating production of sex hormones. As a result, females don’t go into heat and males are less amorous as long as there are sufficient levels of antibodies in the female’s body.

GonaCon vaccine has been studied and tested in female elk and found to be effective, Keirn said. Other contraceptive agents have been tested in wildlife, but like GonaCon, they are not registered for use with elk.

Larry Keller of New West magazine described a 2008 elk contraceptive darting at Rocky Mountain Park.

First, the animals had to be shot with a tranquilizer dart, accurate up to 45 meters or about 148 feet. Their lack of fear of people made the darting possible.

Once sedated, the elk were rolled on to their chests so they could breathe easier, blindfolded, injected with the vaccine and fitted with a radio telemetry collar to locate them later. Blood samples were extracted. Then they were injected with another drug to reverse the effects of the tranquilizer. The entire process took about 40 minutes.

Subsequent studies showed the contraceptive worked in completely reducing pregnancy for one to two years after the shot was administered.

A daunting process

Herman Biederbeck, biologist of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, hosted a town hall on elk in Gearhart in 2014 and attended this year’s elk tour with the wildlife commissioners.

The process of darting and catching a

free-range animal is next to impossible, he said, even though most of Gearhart’s elk are “pretty tamed down.”

“We’re not talking about a small group of five deer,” Biederbeck said. “This is a herd of 70 or 80 elk. You wouldn’t necessarily have to get all of them, but you’d certainly want to get a high percentage of them to limit the amount of new calves born and recruited into the population.”

After darting, animals could become more wary of people, state wildlife veterinarian Colin Gillin said in May.

Studies show results of immunocontraceptive vaccines in closed populations with deer, Gillin said, but effectiveness is hard to determine.

“Too many animals could come and go from the herd, and unless all the animals were marked, it would be impossible to know which ones had been treated,” he said.

Even if as many as 30 percent were darted, elk would still cause property damage and potential harm to people, dogs or cars, he said. “You’re probably not getting all of them, so you have some you never catch and they’re still making babies.”

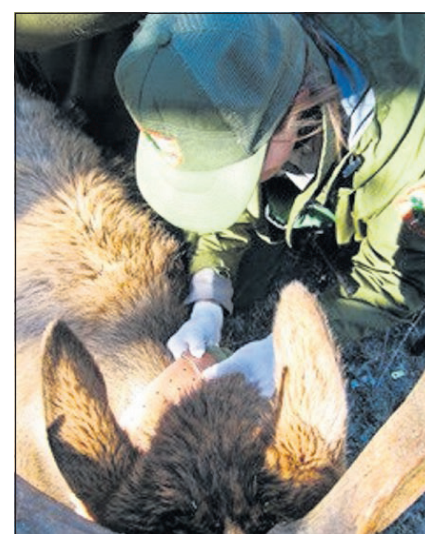
The process may have other adverse effects. “I’ve never seen anything saying it affected the animal’s well-being, but I don’t think they know,” Gillin said.

Lethal culling

Mayor Matt Brown raised the prospect of elk contraception at the April City Council meeting.

Whether it’s the best option in managing Gearhart’s free-ranging elk population is something that state and federal officials are still not sure about.

The National Wildlife Research Service says further study is needed to determine if fertility control can be applied



National Park Service

A park researcher fits a radio collar on an elk.

effectively to a large free-range elk population.

State Senate Bill 373, in effect since January, requires the state’s Fish and Wildlife Commission to adopt a pilot program in cities where officials determine deer “constitute a public nuisance.”

How animals would be taken is not specified, but the pilot program specifies that darts or lethal injection are prohibited.

While “a lot of people aren’t going to like” lethal removal, it’s quick, effective and usually less costly than alternatives, Gillin said. “The harvesting of animals, removing them from the population, is something the state is liable to be able to pull off.”

While a contraceptive vaccine remains a “pretty intriguing concept,” the opportunity for things to go wrong are pretty high, he said.

“Really think it through before you throw a lot of money at this,” he said. “Because you want it to work.”

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian’s South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.