

Prairie: Sandy plains represent a very distinct challenge

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Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian
Eric Owen, land steward for the North Coast Land Conservancy, plants native seed at property the organization has conserved at Reed Ranch between Warrenton and Gearhart.

Restoration work that has occurred or is ongoing at sites across the Clatsop Plains — an area of wetlands and sand dunes that stretches from the Columbia River south to roughly Tillamook Head near Seaside — will create pockets of potential habitat.

The bombs planted at Reed Ranch contain over a dozen different kinds of plant species native to coastal prairies, many of them nectar species important to silverspot butterflies and other pollinators.

The seed was collected by hand by some of the same volunteers who also helped assemble the seed bombs and plant them in the sand this month.

“The biggest limiting factor for us to really move forward in large-scale resto-

ration work is the absence of large quantities of native seed for plants the butter-

fly is dependent on,” said Celeste Lebo, a natural resources specialist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

To really dig into a site, project managers need a lot of seed and plant material to play with. But it doesn’t help that there is no established method of how to successfully restore coastal prairie habitat.

“Even if we could find something that works, and a magic combo of all these site treatments, we really need a large quantity of seed and plant materials to follow up,” said Carla Cole, the natural resources project manager at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park.

While Cole, Lebo and Reich have been able to find seed and plants for smaller restoration sites so far, they have been unable to build up a real bank of plants.

Lebo recently applied for funding to coordinate a regional effort to secure high-quality native seeds and plants to restore coastal prairie, grasslands, estuaries and other habitat and to create a coastal native seed partnership.

Distinct challenge

The funding Lebo applied for through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board would pay for a part-time coordinator at the Institute for Applied Ecology, an organization that helped establish a similar partnership in the Willamette Valley. Besides overseeing the seed partnership, the coordinator’s job would also be to develop a best practices plan for how to restore coastal prairie land.

“People have been at this for over 15 years, maybe two decades, and it is still not

clear how to restore coastal prairie habitat,” Lebo said. “We really don’t have a good model of success.”

One of the few successes Lebo, Reich and others can point to is prairie restoration work in Nestucca Bay near Pacific City. But it’s not clear how much of a hand the specifics of the site, or particular treatments, might have had in that success.

The sandy Clatsop Plains represent a very distinct challenge.

This summer, 545 silverspot caterpillars were placed on Saddle Mountain, the first time the area has seen these insects since they disappeared decades ago. Surveys conducted later counted 27 adult silverspot butterflies.

When 1,000 caterpillars were released at a site in Nestucca Bay the year before, a contractor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-

vice could only account for 9 percent of the caterpillars along his survey route. This does not mean only 9 percent became butterflies, he cautioned.

Predation is a big problem when butterflies are introduced to an area, Lebo noted. That people could see even 27 silverspot butterflies at Saddle Mountain is a success.

Still, Cole, Lebo and Reich find it helpful to focus on the overall goal of restoring coastal prairie habitat rather than to concentrate only on the very difficult path of recovery for the silverspot butterfly.

With things like the seed partnership and a Clatsop Plains pollinator project in the works, Lebo is hopeful their work will benefit a wide variety of species and Clatsop County’s coastal prairies as a whole.

Thief: ‘I was addicted. I am very good at hiding it’

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Deana Lynn Freauff, 55, was found guilty in 2016 of first-degree theft, six counts of aggravated first-degree theft and seven counts of aggravated identity theft after serving as the company’s financial manager for nearly four years before abruptly quitting in 2014.

Several of the crimes took place before the effective date of state Measure 57, which increased prison sentences for some drug and property offenses. But the original sentence treated each count as if they took place after the law went into effect, leading to the appeals court decision.

On Thursday, Freauff returned to Clatsop County Circuit Court for a new sentencing hearing in front of Judge Dawn McIntosh. Citing numerous examples of case law, Thomas Freedman, Freauff’s Portland-based attorney, asked the judge for a sentence of between three and five years, while Deputy District Attorney Beau Peterson asked that the original sentence remain in place.

“Yes, it was an egregious situation, but it was just money,” Freedman said. “I know there’s this talk that she’s a serial predator and a horrible person. What we are really talking about here is an addiction.”

On these key points, McIntosh largely disagreed. “I’ll admit, when I first saw this case, I thought, ‘Really? That long for stealing money?’” McIntosh said. “But I took a look at both sides of this, and it’s not just about stealing money.”

‘How could you not know?’

Dan Nelson, the owner of Diamond Heating, spoke at the often-emotional hearing, along with Freauff and five of her family and friends.

When Nelson hired Freauff, she was on probation after being convicted in 2009 for embezzling more than \$300,000 from two title companies in the Portland area. Freauff, posing as Nelson, forged a letter to her probation officer claim-

ing that he knew of her legal status and wanted to hire her anyway.

The probation officer never confirmed the letter’s author, and the company relied on references, rather than background checks, at the time, Nelson said.

“Do you know what a laughingstock I was when people have come up to me on the street and asked me, ‘How could you not know?’” Nelson asked Freauff. “I don’t want blood. I won’t get the money back. I just want to be an example, even though my pants were pulled down.”

Freauff started scamming the company immediately after her hiring.

During her employment, Freauff used the company’s ATM card to withdraw cash for clothing, food, her cable bill, her father’s car payments and furniture. She gambled with nearly \$100,000 of the stolen money at Spirit Mountain Casino in Grand Ronde and Palace Casino in La Center, Washington.

An accountant who was updating the company’s financial records discovered her crimes after asking Freauff for passwords to the records. Freauff never shared them and quit days later.

Diamond Heating

employs 21 people and has about a \$1 million payroll, Nelson said. On top of the stolen money, the ordeal cost the company hundreds of thousands of dollars more for things like legal fees and back taxes owed to the Internal Revenue Service, nearly driving the company to bankruptcy.

“This is a pretty good-sized business that offers family-wage jobs, and she put it on the brink of bankruptcy,” Peterson said.

Nelson said he spent six months focusing only on tracing every transaction Freauff had made during her employment and will likely have to work well into his 70s to afford retirement.

“You gave me cancer!” Nelson yelled at Freauff, a reference to an earlier statement of her cancer treatment in prison. “I am financially dead. I have cancer — financial cancer.”

Freauff said a gambling addiction led her to steal from the company.

“I regret what I did. It was wrong,” Freauff said. “I was addicted. I am very good at hiding it.”

Nelson rejected the explanation.

“Remember the sheep that was really a wolf? That’s Deana Freauff. She is absolutely a predator,” Nelson said. “You just don’t

have a gambling problem. You have a dark side.”

During their character statements, Freauff’s friends explained their longtime perceptions of her: welcoming, outgoing, compassionate, full of integrity, genuine, kind and intelligent.

“I have to say it was quite a shock,” said Matt Fitzer, a friend, about learning of Freauff’s crimes. “I think a lot of it happened after we drifted apart. The actions I heard today are not characteristic of the person I know.”

Melanie Culp, Freauff’s sister, said she is a good person who has had to overcome an addiction.

“I would never say that this was justifiable, but I would also say that prison is meant to be for the protection of the public at large, and Deana has been more than rehabilitated,” Culp said.

In her statement, Freauff also apologized to her fam-

ily and friends.

“My family and friends are everything in the world to me,” Freauff said. “Yes, I am a thief. But that’s not all I am.”

‘A predator’

By the end, though, the character statements seemed to result in more harm than good for Freauff. McIntosh said she didn’t buy Freauff’s demeanor in front of loved ones. The judge added that, had he not been the victim of the crime, she could see Nelson, who was friends with Freauff when she worked for him, in her friends’ shoes.

“I think you have the ability to act like that, and I think you did that for much of your life,” McIntosh said. “It was proven not only by the state, but also because of the defense witnesses called.”

McIntosh pointed to a shift in Freauff’s demeanor when Nelson testified — eye rolls, leaning back in her chair — versus when the

character witnesses spoke, when she cried into pieces of tissue.

“It seems, you know, diabolical,” McIntosh said. “I think that you are a predator. I think that if I have you out long enough, you will do it again.”

Freauff said she has held jobs while in prison and participated in a number of betterment groups.

“I’m at peace most of the time,” Freauff said. “Life will not be easy whether or not I get out of prison, but I will have a good life.”

Nelson, meanwhile, said it was sad that Freauff didn’t use her talent and intelligence for “great things.” He also forgave her.

“I’m extremely hurt, angered and misled, but I feel a little vindication that her friends were misled, too,” Nelson said. “At the end of the day, it is only money, but it’s about other people’s money. It’s about integrity.”