

Homeless count is up, but declines seen in key cities

Strategies could be working

By GEOFF MULVIHILL
Associated Press

A federal report released Monday provides a possible glimmer of hope for the homeless crisis that has gripped many cities up and down the West Coast.

The number of people living on the streets in Los Angeles and San Diego, two epicenters of the homelessness crisis, fell this year, suggesting those cities' efforts to combat the problem could be starting to pay off.

In Los Angeles, the count fell by 3 percent after a sharp increase the year before. Peter Lynn, executive director of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, said that can be credited to results of six months of stepped-up homeless services after Los Angeles County voters raised taxes to help in 2017.

Later that year, Los Angeles city voters approved a bond issue to provide more affordable housing — a factor Lynn said will start showing up in future counts.

"We're also dealing with the countervailing pressure of housing markets that are pretty unforgiving," he said.

Cities in California, Oregon and Washington state

have driven an overall spike in the number of homeless people nationwide in recent years. This year's count continued that trend, showing 552,800 people without homes across the country, up by about 2,000 from 2017, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's point-in-time tally. It was the second consecutive increase after seven straight years of declines.

The number of homeless referred to as unsheltered — those living in the streets, encampments or other open places — was more than 194,000 nationwide. That also was up from last year.

More than 37,000 of the unsheltered were in the Los Angeles area this year, down 2 percent from 2017.

San Diego, California's second most populous city, also saw a decline in both total homelessness and those on the streets. After a hepatitis A outbreak spread among the homeless population and killed 20 people in 2017, the city turned to industrial-sized tents to house hundreds of people. As the tents went up, officials also cited people camping on downtown streets. Encampments downtown cleared out quickly, but the number along the San Diego River doubled.

The city is considering a ballot measure to raise money for affordable housing

in 2020. Nationwide, the overall increase this year was driven by a 2 percent rise in the unsheltered homeless population — those living in vehicles, tents and on the streets — along with 4,000 people in emergency shelters after hurricanes, wildfires and other disasters, according to HUD. The numbers of homeless veterans and families continued their long-term declines.

At a time when rents are rising faster than wages — especially for lower-income people — an essentially stagnant count is a not a bad sign, said Steve Berg, vice president for programs and policy at the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

"Given what's going on with rental housing, it's not exactly good news. But it means communities are pushing back against the headwinds," said Berg, who like other advocates urges caution about reading too much into one-year trends in the homeless count.

The homelessness data picture is incomplete because several West Coast areas with large populations, including San Francisco, Portland and California's Orange County, did not conduct new counts of unsheltered homeless populations this year. Those places will do fresh surveys in early 2019.

Sea turtles die after rescue on Oregon Coast

By KALE WILLIAMS
The Oregonian

A pair of endangered sea turtles, rescued in separate incidents after being stranded on the coast last week, died after attempts to rehabilitate the injured animals were unsuccessful.

The first turtle, an olive ridley, was discovered by Oregon state trooper Josh Mullins after he responded to a call from a resident who found the animal on Horsfall Beach, north of Coos Bay.

The animal had been spotted earlier and looked to be free of injury, but search crews were unable to find it before high tide. Experts from the Oregon Coast Aquarium believe the animal may have been washed out to sea and sustained further injuries.

When Mullins found the ailing creature, it had cracks in its shell and was lethargic. By the time the turtle was brought to the aquarium the next day for treatment, its body temperature was roughly 30 degrees colder than normal.

The female turtle was named "Donatello," after a character in the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" comics, when social media users saw it dressed in purple bandages.

On Saturday, a couple walking along the beach in Waldport spotted the second turtle, also a female olive ridley, and called the aquarium.



A sea turtle was stranded on the Oregon Coast.

The couple enlisted the help of state parks ranger Doug Sestrich to carry the animal to safety before it, too, could be brought to the aquarium for rehabilitation.

Winter months can often prove perilous for sea turtles off the coast of the Pacific Northwest. Sometimes blown off course by strong storms, the creatures can end up in water much too cold for them and strandings are not uncommon along Oregon beaches.

Initially, experts at the facility were hopeful but guarded about both sea turtles' conditions. Donatello was responsive to her handlers and blood work showed no signs of infection. Subsequent analysis showed that her kidneys were severely compromised. The second turtle was suffering from cold-stun, said Evonne Mochon-Collura, Oregon Coast Aquarium curator of

fish and invertebrates.

"While she appeared physically intact, cold-stunning itself takes its toll on the turtle's internal organs," Mochon-Collura said in a statement. "As always with animals with sustained injuries, they have a lot of challenges through recovery. We submitted X-rays and blood samples for further analysis to determine her internal condition."

Both animals died Sunday, the aquarium reported.

The odds of rehabilitating stranded sea turtles are low, but the aquarium has had success in the past, specifically with two turtles named "Lightning" and "Solstice," both found on Oregon beaches and tended to at the aquarium. After being released in 2017, their movements were tracked in known breeding grounds off the coast of Mexico this spring.

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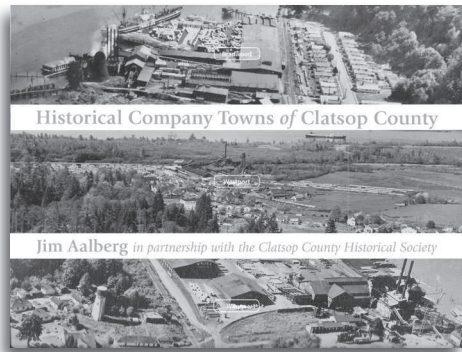
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