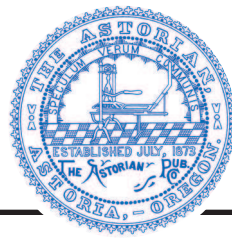


OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Combing the beach for objects is a popular pastime at the Cove in Seaside, as seen in this drone photo.

Citizens concerned about drone encounters

Seaside's surfers are upset about camera and drone operators at the Cove.

Resident Joyce Hunt came to the City Council in early December with a concern about drone encounters. Drones fly close overhead, she said, at the windshield level of cars and frightening families.

She asked for guidance on the issue. "I used to be a pilot," Hunt said. "I know that there are rules. I feel it's an issue I don't know anything about."

When she called police dispatch to complain about a low-flying drone, they "basically said it's legal to fly that."

After calls to the Federal Aviation Agency, local police and Oregon State Parks — which patrols the beaches — "it sounds like there are no straight answers."

The FAA "doesn't want to get into real local, unless you're within five miles of an airport," she said. "Just curious where I go, who I talk to if I have an obnoxious drone operator."

City Councillor Seth Morrisey of Morrisey Productions, based in Seaside, is an experienced drone operator.

"It's like the Wild West out there," Morrisey replied to Hunt's comments. "And everything you said was true."



R.J. MARX

Enforcement?

The Oregon State Parks Department enforces a small set of recreation- and natural resource-related rules on the ocean shore, media coordinator Chris Havel said in January.

"There are no state recreation rules against drones on the ocean shore," Havel said. "In fact, state agencies need permission from the Legislature to pass drone rules."

He said park staff "do regularly talk to people about the need for mutual respect; that normally doesn't involve citing people for violating rules."

Katie Gauthier, the legislative and policy coordinator for state parks, told the Astorian last summer that drones are generally legal in most state parks, including beaches, except in areas where flights could endanger wildlife or pose risks to people or property.

After Seaside's December meeting, Police Chief Dave Ham said complaints of drone operators are "infrequent" during the offseason, "maybe once a month."

"During the busier season we would see a few more, usually related to the beach area," Ham said.

The complaints usually concern an invasion of privacy.

"Although as you heard the other

FROM SEASIDE'S DRONE FIGHT AUTHORIZATION

Register your aircraft at www.faa.gov/uas/registration.

When flying a drone within 5 miles of the Seaside Municipal Airport, contact 503-738-5112.

Provide information on where you will be operating, what altitudes, and what type of flying activity you will be doing.

Never fly over groups of people.

Never fly over the Promenade, homes, hotels, or beach events.

Never fly near emergency response efforts.

Never fly under the influence.

Be aware of airspace requirements.

"You are officially a pilot, safety is in your hands."

night, using it in close proximity to people can be harassing and annoying," Ham added. "Generally speaking, harassing use of a drone could be violating the city disorderly conduct ordinance."

Dispatchers usually tell those filing complaints that the city does not have specific ordinances prohibiting the use, but they are aware of the local airport and permits that can be obtained via the public works director.

"Usually our officers will respond to the area of the complaint," Ham said. "Unfortunately the operator is often times not located due to being able to remote control the drone from a substantial distance away from where it is operating."

An airport issue

Randall Henderson, chairman of Seaside's Airport Advisory Committee, said that drones are not "strictly speaking an airport issue."

But the committee has concerns that drones keep out of the flight path of lower-altitude flights offshore where it's legal to do so. "I would hope that drone operators are aware of that and keeping their drones in sight at all times as per the regulations."

The committee serves in an advisory capacity, he added, and not a rule-making body. It's "pretty easy" to operate a drone without anyone knowing about it.

Drone operators flying within five miles of the Seaside Airport are asked to call an airport sponsor or manager — that is, the owner of the airport or its manager. In that case, it would be the city of Seaside, which has designated a management role to Public Works Director Dale McDowell.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The site of the new high school in Seaside can be seen in this October 2018 drone photo.



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Trails left by planes over Saddle Mountain.

Operators are asked to notify McDowell, who says he can respond 24/7. They receive a fact sheet from the city and a list of safety guidelines. Drone information is available on the city's website under the heading "municipal airport."

While there have yet to be any safety incidents, pilots and others are worried a drone could hit a plane. Federal aviation rules are not specific enough, Henderson said, and should focus on regulating drone use near the airport's departure and approach path.

Instead, the FAA has picked a "one

size fits all" approach. That could be refined as drones become more prevalent.

For now, Henderson said the committee is taking a "wait-and-see attitude. ... You don't want to solve problems that don't necessarily exist."

What about the plight of the surfers? "We're concerned with safety of aircraft and if that rears its head in some way, we'll take it from there," Henderson said.

R.J. Marx is editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette, and covers South County for The Daily Astorian.