

Marijuana store knocks former landlord over safety features

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Sweet Relief, which is being sued by the owner of a building it subleased that was gutted after a butane hash oil explosion and fire in 2016, is blaming its former landlord for not installing proper safety equipment.

Hudson Specialty Insurance Co., the insurer for Richard Delphia's building at the corner of Portway and Industry streets, sued Jason Oei and Chris West — the main tenants of the building through marijuana concentrates company Higher Level Concentrates — last year for negligence. Oei and West were allegedly making butane hash oil in an open-ended system while smoking when the blast occurred.

Sweet Relief, a marijuana store, subleased an upstairs



The Daily Astorian

Richard Delphia is suing his former tenants over a butane hash oil explosion in 2016 that gutted his building at Portway and Industry streets.

suite of the building for a second Astoria location. The company was named a co-defendant, along with investor John Harper, for its knowledge of the operation.

Oei and West, who both filed for bankruptcy protec-

tion, were removed from the Delphia lawsuit.

Grant Stockton, a lawyer for Sweet Relief, knocked Delphia for failing to equip the building with automatic sprinklers, proper venting, adequate fire control and for

not preventing Higher Level's illegal activity.

Any losses sustained by Delphia and his insurer are the result of acts or omissions beyond Sweet Relief's control, Stockton wrote.

Delphia's lawsuit comes after another claim brought by Jacob Magley, a worker for Higher Level who was badly burned in the fire, was settled for an undisclosed amount.

Delphia's lawsuit, filed on the two-year anniversary of the explosion and fire, seeks \$351,000 for damages to the building, which is still a vacant, burned-out shell.

The lawsuit claims the unlawful use of a hazardous substance such as butane gas in an open-ended system was a violation of Oei and West's lease, and that Sweet Relief and Harper were negligent for their knowledge of the operation.

Warrenton teenager reportedly robbed in Astoria alley

By BRENNIA VISSER
The Daily Astorian

Astoria police are looking for a man who allegedly assaulted and robbed an 18-year-old Warrenton man in the 13th Street Alley between Duane and Commercial streets on Wednesday evening.

The teenager was skateboarding through the alley around 6 p.m. when he was approached by a group of six people, police said. One of them, a white man dressed in a yellow shirt and white pants, reportedly demanded money for a bus ticket.

When the teenager said he wouldn't pro-

vide money, he was "sucker punched" and knocked out, Deputy Police Chief Eric Halverson said.

The victim's brother rounded the corner shortly after and allegedly saw people taking items, including a cellphone and cash, out of the teenager's pocket. The group of people left when the brother began approaching them.

About four hours later, the brothers reported the incident to the police.

Anyone with information about the incident is urged to contact the Astoria Police Department.

Protections for Devil's Staircase, other areas sent to Trump for signature

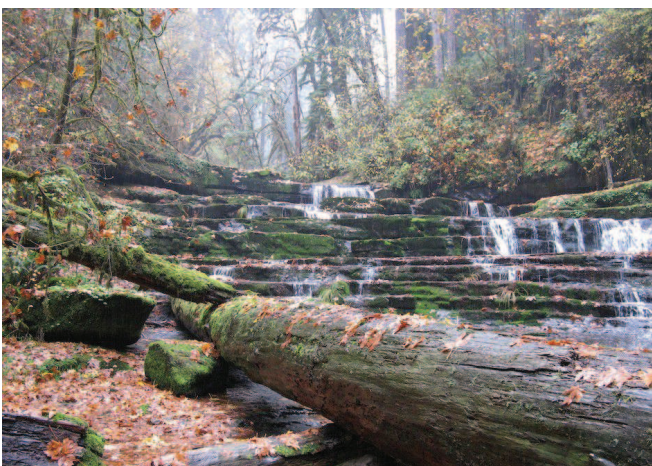
By JES BURNS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation this week that will provide greater protections to many of the Northwest's natural wonders — including Washington's Methow Valley; the Devil's Staircase in the Oregon Coast Range; and the Rogue, Chetco and Umpqua river watersheds in southwestern Oregon.

The Natural Resource Management Act easily cleared the House on a vote of 363-62. All five Oregon House members voted "yes." It now goes to President Donald Trump for his signature, having already passed the Senate.

Many of these protections have been kicking around Congress for more than a decade. U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, an Oregon Democrat, said on the House floor his effort to protect the Molalla River has been ongoing for 12 years.

"This legislation would designate over 21 miles of the Molalla River as wild and scenic, a federal des-



Chandra LeGue/Oregon Wild

The Devil's Staircase, a series of cataracts on Wassen Creek in southwest Oregon.

ignation that will permanently ensure its protection and preservation as one of Oregon's many natural state treasures," he said.

The massive Natural Resource Management Act includes a little of everything — bits and pieces meant to satisfy public land interests all over the country.

The land conservation measures have received a lot of attention. But there are other provisions in the bill concerning the Pacific Northwest, among them

wildfire risk, research and air quality resources, hunting on public lands, water management for the Yakima Valley — which is one of the Northwest's premier farming regions — and volcano emergency alert systems.

For hunters in the Pacific

Northwest, the bill guarantees something sportsmen's groups have been advocating for for years: public land access. Generally, hunting and fishing is allowed on federal public lands, unless a specific closure has been put in place by local land managers.

"What this legislation does is take it a step further in codifying and prioritizing those uses and establishing some parameters for how future closures need to occur with greater public input," said John Gale, conservation director for the advocacy group Backcountry Hunters and Anglers.

Gale said this would trigger when land managers make smaller, more localized decisions to limit access to public lands.

Gale's group also applauded the provision that permanently reautho-

rizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It earmarks money from offshore oil and gas drilling royalties for conservation projects. In particular, at least \$15 million from the fund would now be designated each year for projects that improve recreational access to federal public lands.

Gale said it is not uncommon to have federal land surrounded by private or state land, meaning it can be difficult or impossible to legally access. The funds would be used to negotiate easements, purchase or other legal methods of giving the public access.

"There's often some obvious way to get in there,

and lots of potential options to explore. This gives us the tools we need to have those conversations," Gale said.

Another provision in the Natural Resource Management Act aims to shore up the nationwide response to volcanic emergencies — something with which the Pacific Northwest has had firsthand experience with the eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980.

The legislation provides \$55 million to the establishment of a National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System and "organize, modernize, standardize, and stabilize the monitoring systems of the volcano observatories in the United States."



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