

Elk: Movement back and forth across Highway 101 still a top concern

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They plan to have a document, called a declaration of cooperation, ready in May or June that details specific actions they believe should be taken across jurisdictions to reduce elk and human conflicts. At that point, legislators like state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, who was in attendance at Tuesday’s meeting, will have a better idea of what sort of budgetary or policy changes might be necessary.

“Some of these are going to take some money, there’s just no two ways about it,” Johnson said.

Among the recommendations, group members have suggested simpler items such as the development of fencing alternatives to give landowners options to keep elk out of yards, the creation of educational materials so new residents or visitors are aware of how to live safely near elk, additional tracking of elk to better understand their movements, changes



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
An elk stands in a yard in Warrenton.

to habitats or landscaping to attract elk to or deter them from an area and consistent no-feeding ordinances across jurisdictions.

Lethal take

Some of the suggestions will prove controversial.

Many Gearhart residents who have attended public meetings about the elk have opposed any sort of lethal take. When Warren-

ton Mayor Henry Balensifer, who has helped lead the meetings with Seaside Mayor Jay Barber, asked for a quick poll to see if anyone was adamantly opposed to any culling of elk, Gearhart City Manager Chad Sweet raised his hand.

“Our community wouldn’t go for it,” he said.

However, he agreed it was an important item to keep as part of the discussion, along with the possibility of controlled hunts and the removal of problem elk.

One piece of the issue, Sweet said later when going through recommendations for addressing human behavior around elk, is that “humans have made Clatsop Plains more attractive to elk. We have done that over the years, especially in recent years. Humans are also compounding some of these issues by stopping in the middle of the road taking selfies, et cetera.”

Meanwhile, other recommendations will likely be too expensive. Proxim-

ity sensors to alert drivers when elk are near Highway 101 could be useful, but a report from group members found “the technology is very expensive and does not always work well.”

They also looked at the possibility of a wildlife crossing, including a highway overpass.

“Highway 101 presents a barrier for elk moving from the urban areas to less populated areas,” a draft report from a subcommittee looking at elk management noted. “A wildlife crossing will reduce vehicle collisions and may also enable elk herds to move west to east, rather than become a sedentary urban fixture.”

The patchwork of varying terrain and land ownership, along with the sheer cost of this kind of infrastructure, make it unlikely. However, Henrikson said there could be ways to encourage other types of corridors within developing areas to give elk clear pathways, eliminating the

chance that herds become stuck in an urban area.

Highway concern

Elk movement back and forth across Highway 101 remains a top concern.

Collision data presented on Tuesday confirms what numerous anecdotes have suggested: the elk population is growing and herd interactions with human populations are going up.

The data, presented by Jae Pudewell of the Oregon Department of Transportation, showed an increase in elk collisions over the past 10 years along Highway 101 in the Clatsop Plains area. Collisions with other wildlife have increased in a way transportation officials would expect with more traffic and development along the highway, Pudewell said.

But when he looked at the elk data, the numbers are “twice, almost three times, as high as the other data,” he said. “It looks like the problem is increasing much

more rapidly for elk.”

Still, more information is needed.

The state’s data likely undercounts elk and vehicle encounters, Pudewell said, and combining it with data collected by Oregon State Police or the national and state parks is problematic. Elk and vehicle interactions seem to be at their worst in the fall and winter — but not every year. Besides, all seasons are trending higher with no clear reason why, Pudewell said.

Rangers at Fort Clatsop have put radio collars on several elk recently to better understand herd movements within Lewis and Clark National Historical Park.

But until they are able to collar multiple elk across the different herds that use the Clatsop Plains, enabling them to trace the animals going back and forth across the highway, Pudewell said, “We won’t really know why the elk cross the road — other than to get to the other side.”

Safeguards: Astoria now in line for two new visits by the Celebrity Millennium

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legitimate concerns about the safety of cruise ships, announced additional safeguards after a meeting on Monday.

The Grand Princess was quarantined off the coast of California after one of its former passengers became the state’s first confirmed death from COVID-19, the novel coronavirus. Astoria was scheduled to host the ship March 31, but regional cruise ship managers concluded it could not begin its voyage up the West Coast in time.

Local officials doubled down on that conclusion.

“First, it is not possible that she will be ready to pass Coast Guard screening protocols on that date,” Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones said in a statement with Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan, the chairwoman of the county Board of Commissioners, and Will Isom, the

executive director of the Port. “Second, even if she did, we collectively agree that we would decline her visit.”

Health and safety

The local officials said public health and safety is their top concern.

The State Department has issued an advisory urging U.S. citizens, particularly travelers with underlying health conditions, not to travel by cruise ships. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended that travelers defer all cruise ship travel worldwide. “Cruise ship passengers are at an increased risk of person-to-person spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19,” the CDC said.

Cruise lines, local officials said, must “proactively demonstrate the most rigorous and enhanced standards of screening of ves-

sel, passengers and crew for COVID-19 before the community would consider accepting a visit.”

Local capacity for absorbing coronavirus patients from an infected vessel will also be a factor. “This capacity may change rapidly once infections are found in Clatsop County,” officials said.

“Because there will be no scheduled cruise ship visit before April 4 at the very earliest, for the time being we will continue to actively monitor the federal guidelines and requirements as they evolve and plan collaboratively,” the statement said. “We will meet well before the first scheduled visit to reassess and decide jointly on a path forward regarding cruise ship visits.”

Astoria is scheduled to host more than 35 cruise ships this year, starting with the Celebrity Eclipse on April 4. The Grand Princess is still scheduled for two

visits May 7 and Oct. 18.

Some cruise ships have relocated away from Asia itineraries toward the West Coast. Astoria is now in line for two new visits by the Celebrity Millennium April 22 and April 27.

Signs go up at schools

The Astoria School District also announced new measures because of the virus.

Beginning Tuesday, signs went up at each building entrance telling people what to do if they feel ill, Superintendent Craig Hoppes wrote in a letter sent to parents and staff.

Among other measures, staff will be asked to track any illnesses parents bring up with them — a process that has been done to some extent in the past but will be reinforced, Hoppes wrote.

School buses and buildings have been disinfected and custodial staff will be asked to clean common

areas more frequently.

Hoppes also emphasized simple, everyday steps people can take to reduce their chances of exposure, such as washing their hands often and staying home if sick.

Local schools are following guidance from the Oregon Health Authority, which recommends against closing schools and campuses when there are no cases of the virus, Hoppes said. If a case is detected among students or staff, the state still recommends that schools consider all alternatives before closing.

“The safety, health and well-being of our students and staff is our highest priority,” Hoppes wrote. “We are working diligently, in partnership with public health experts, to minimize the disruption to schools and to provide a safe and healthy place for everyone. We will continue to monitor this matter closely, and will react as appropriate.”

With new recommendations about how to limit exposure to the virus have come event cancellations.

As a precaution, the county postponed a community conversation on a school-based health center at Knappa High School on Thursday until further notice.

The presentation “Surviving a Tsunami” scheduled for Saturday in Manzanita was canceled. The speaker, Brian Atwater, a University of Washington professor, asked to be excused because of an advisory that King County residents over 60 years old limit their travel.

The Riverbend Players, a community theater group based in Nehalem, postponed upcoming one-act play performances scheduled for the end of March because of uncertainty around the virus.

Katie Frankowicz contributed to this report.

Brown: Order seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks

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have to take the form of a single step,” Brown, a Democrat, said at a press conference. “It can happen when several separate actions add up. And that’s what I’m doing today.”

The 14-page order directs the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to reduce emissions. The order directs the department to expand the state’s existing low-carbon fuel program, which is designed to gradually reduce emissions from gas, diesel and others.

Specifically, the order seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks 20% by 2030 and 25% by 2035.

Industry groups critical

Partnership for Oregon Communities issued a statement saying that the order gives the governor few options for “blunting the most negative impacts” of her order and gives power to “unelected bureaucrats who will have the authority to regulate virtually every sector of our state’s economy.”

“At the end of the day, her directive could lead to a cap-and-trade style program that is far more sweeping than any proposal contemplated by the Legislature in recent years and will inevitably lead to significant cost increases for consumers and businesses alike, while offering little in the way of meaningful environmental benefits,” the group said in a statement.

Lobbyists for the Oregon Fuels Association didn’t comment on what the order will mean for fuel prices. But, in a statement, the association said that it worked

with legislators and the governor on the most recent legislative proposal to protect customers from significant increases in fuel costs.

The new order doesn’t contain the same cost-containment measures.

“This approach pushes groups like OFA, that have worked to improve the policy, into a firm defensive position,” the statement said. “We are currently reviewing the EO, but are prepared to use any tools at our disposal (including legal means) to protect our small businesses and their customers.”

The order also directs the commission to “cap and reduce” greenhouse gas emission from industrial sources, transportation fuels and other sources, such as natural gas.

Department of Environmental Quality spokesman Harry Esteve said that there were no estimates on what this will mean for consumer prices. “It’s in the very early stages,” he said.

The order directs the state Public Utility Commission to consider measures aimed at rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Sheeran said that the governor’s office doesn’t have the authority to tell the commission how to make decisions, but can direct it to consider the reductions.

Additionally, the order directs the state’s Building Codes Division to increase energy-efficiency requirements for new buildings. It also instructs the Oregon Department of Energy to require appliances to have at least the highest energy-efficiency standards in the country, which Sheeran said would benefit consumers.

On Monday, the legisla-

tive Emergency Board voted to direct \$5 million to the Department of Environmental Quality to begin drafting rules aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The allocation would be used to hire 10 new positions. During Monday’s Emergency Board meeting, Richard Whitman, director of the Department of Environmental Quality, said that the new hires would help complete initial rule-making for a greenhouse gas reduction program by 2022. That’s roughly the same timeline laid out in the bill killed last session to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A statewide program to cap greenhouse gas emissions has been a priority for Brown and Democrats who hold lopsided majorities in the Legislature. But previous attempts were stymied after Republicans walked out of the Capitol in the last two sessions, denying lawmakers a quorum to conduct business.

Brown’s move was welcomed by Democratic legislative leaders and environmental groups, but was criticized by Republicans.

“This is not only an abuse of power, it shows how out of touch the governor is with the pressing needs of families and communities across the state,” House Republican Leader Christine Dragan, R-Canby, in a statement.

Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr. has questioned the governor’s

move, saying it would open the state to an expensive lawsuit. “The governor is ignoring Oregonians,” the Grants Pass Republican said. “She is not listening to three-quarters of the state or the 28 counties that signed proclamations against the cap-and-trade concept. It’s obvious Kate Brown is not Oregon’s governor, she is Portland’s governor, and as she promised, she is serving revenge, cold and slowly.”

Brown said that her order had been carefully vetted to ensure it was in compliance with state law and the constitution.

Environmental groups cheer

After a similar bill failed to pass during the 2019 legislative session, a coalition of businesses environmental groups and others called Renew Oregon began preparing a greenhouse gas reduction initiative for the 2020 ballot.

Renew Oregon applauded Brown’s move in a statement following her announcement.

“Oregonians have organized, advocated, worked and voted for years demanding our state take bold action to reduce climate pollution, improve our health, and transition to clean energy. Gov. Brown delivered today with strong and comprehensive action,” said Tera Hurst, executive director of Renew Oregon. “This action will hold large corporate polluters accountable for the pollu-

tion they create. We all have a responsibility to do our part and most of us do, now it’s time for large polluters to start doing theirs.”

Brad Reed, spokesman for Renew Oregon, said the group is considering whether to move forward with its ballot initiatives or withdraw

them. He said the group will consider if the ballot initiatives overlap with the governor’s order and if they accomplish the same goals.

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