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CORONAVIRUS

Federal rule would take aim at cormorants

Birds nest on the Astoria Bridge

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Oregon used paintball guns to discourage nesting on the Astoria Bridge this spring ahead of an inspection of the massive structure. Loudspeakers still routinely blast eagle screams.

But the double-crested cormorants don't seem to care.

In a video shot by the Oregon Department of Transportation, it's birds all the way down. Nests full of eggs are everywhere on the steel supports.

The number of cormorants nesting on the bridge has increased steadily since hazing of a double-crested cormorant colony on nearby East Sand Island by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began several years ago. The federal agency shot adult double-crested cormorants and destroyed nests to protect runs of threatened and endangered young salmon.

Last year, a state biologist counted as many as 8,600 individual birds on the bridge during one May evening.

Accumulated guano and a proliferation of nests have made it tricky for inspectors to see what they need to examine in order to complete federally required bridge inspections. The problem has only grown this year, said Lou Torres, a spokesman for the Department of Transportation.

He is not sure what the state's long-term plan will be to deal with the birds' seasonal takeover of the bridge — or if they will need anything beyond a standard depredation permit issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to haze the birds and remove nests if necessary.

The department is working with state fish and wildlife staff to look at bird hazing strategies ahead of painting work scheduled to begin in 2021 and 2022.

Meanwhile, a proposed federal rule could widen the scope for state and tribal wildlife agencies across the nation to kill double-crested cormorants. The rule, out for public comment through July 20, proposes a new permit option for managing the fish-eating birds.

This new permit would allow state or tribal wildlife management agencies to kill double-crested cormorants in areas under their jurisdiction where it might have been prohibited or limited before. Agencies will need to demonstrate that they tried other, nonlethal methods first.

By authorizing management activities at the state or tribal level, the new permit will allow these groups to respond quickly to cormorant-related complaints.

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Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

ABOVE: A cormorant takes flight over the Columbia River near the Astoria Bridge. BELOW: Hundreds of cormorants nest on the bridge.



Astoria calls for masks indoors

County will weigh new requirement

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Astoria is moving toward a local mask requirement inside stores and other public places during the coronavirus pandemic, with or without Clatsop County.

The City Council unanimously passed a motion Monday night asking the county Board of Commissioners to opt into a mask requirement announced last week by Gov. Kate Brown for seven Oregon counties. The motion includes a caveat that the city will develop its own mandate if the county does not.

The Cannon Beach City Council agreed Tuesday night to recommend the county opt into the mask requirement. Seaside Mayor Jay Barber and Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown have also expressed their support to the county.

County commissioners were expected to discuss the issue Wednesday night.

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Two new virus cases reported in county
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Clubhouse to fill gap in treatment

Nonclinical space for mental health

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

A new organization led by an advocate for the homeless hopes to fill a gap in addressing mental illness in Astoria.

Beacon Clubhouse, funded through the Clatsop County branch of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and based out of the First Baptist Church on Seventh Street, plans to offer community and peer-led resources outside of a clinical setting.

People must be referred to the organization by a partner agency and participation in the clubhouse's education, job training and health and wellness programs is voluntary. The clubhouse, based on an international model, involves

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Port pursues more grant support

Recovery plan from the coronavirus

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

The Port of Astoria is starting to reap the benefits of a new grant writer and is hoping more coordination at the federal level will provide support to recover from a coronavirus-induced recession and

decades of deferred maintenance.

Shane Jensen, the Port's former property manager, who is now a contracted grant writer based in Idaho, secured the agency more than \$20,000 in cost reimbursements from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act through the state. The money reimburses the Port for staff time spent responding to the virus.

The Port, while efficient in operation and attracting millions in federal grants at the Astoria Regional Airport, has lagged behind other ports in securing maritime grants. The agency con-

tracted Jensen and has focused more on strategic planning.

The state signed off on a four-year strategic business plan to stabilize the Port's finances, giving the agency a better chance of loans and grant support from Salem. The Port is now creating a capital improvement plan that will prioritize the most important projects, from stabilizing seafood delivery docks on Pier 2 to developing an expanded boatyard on Pier 3 in lieu of a log export business felled by a trade war between the U.S. and China.

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Boats at the Port of Astoria.



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