

Birds: Impact of the terns was significant

Continued from Page A1

Researchers from Oregon State, Real Time Research and the University of Washington drew on 11 years of data collected from PIT tags — small radio transponders that can be used to track a fish’s movements — affixed to upper Columbia steelhead smolts.

As the fish moved through multiple stretches of the river on their journey to the Pacific Ocean, they were exposed to all types of predation. But researchers found that in most of the 11 years, tern predation on steelhead rose to the top. The impact of the terns was significantly greater compared to predation by other colonial waterbirds like cormorants and gulls.

There has been little research overall into whether reduced predation results in greater salmon survival — either when fish are small and beginning their out-migration to the ocean or across their lifetime, Roby noted.

“Without clear evidence that reduced predation means greater survival to adulthood, management to reduce predator impacts would be a waste of time and resources,” he said.

Critics say it is this kind of data that was missing from a federal management plan to address a massive colony of double-crested cormorants at the mouth of the Columbia River.

Since 2015, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has killed thousands of adult double-crested cormorants and destroyed numerous nests in an effort to reduce the size of the colony on Oregon’s East Sand Island. The Army Corps said these measures were necessary to protect juvenile runs of listed salmon and steelhead species.

But others — including Roby, who had led research efforts on the island for years — challenged the management plan. They argued that the Army Corps could not show that trying to control the cormorants in this drastic way would result in more threatened and endangered fish surviving to return as adults.

Previous studies also warned that dissuading the birds from nesting on East Sand Island could cause them to nest elsewhere, in particular on the Astoria Bridge.

Double-crested cormorants have since abandoned the island several times in recent years. They have not returned in the same numbers even as the Army Corps moved from lethal management to changing the island’s landscape to limit nesting.

The cormorants’ move to the bridge created new issues.

Last summer, as many as 10,000 double-crested cormorants were counted on the Astoria Bridge. There has been a significant increase this year, said James Lawonn, avian predation biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Oregon Department of Transportation is weighing options.

RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT IN MOST OF THE 11 YEARS, TERN PREDATION ON STEELHEAD ROSE TO THE TOP.

The birds’ presence and accumulated guano are problematic for necessary bridge inspections and upcoming maintenance, a department spokesman said.

Separately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed new possibilities for double-crested cormorant management, giving state and tribal wildlife agencies more leeway in how they deal with the birds and opening the door to lethal take where it may not have been permitted before.

Opponents of the proposed rule worry it could needlessly decimate the Western population of cormorants without any benefit to salmon.

Cormorant concerns aside, the authors of the Caspian tern study found that even comparing predation of young salmonids by one tern colony to another is suspect. The amount of listed fish consumed varied widely depending on where a colony was located.

The tern colony that shared space on East Sand Island with the cormorants consumed far fewer young salmon and steelhead than the former tern colony on Rice Island, just 13 miles upriver. At the mouth of the river, they had a variety of other prey to pursue.

“If proponents of that intensive lethal management, the widespread culling of double-crested cormorants throughout the Western states, point to this study” — which was focused on a different bird species and a particular population of steelhead — “that will be a misapplication of the science,” Roby said.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Maritime Road connects U.S. Highway 30 to the proposed apartment complex location. The road was built during World War II without proper permitting and will need to be properly dedicated as a right of way.

Tongue Point: Blue Ridge is the crown jewel

Continued from Page A1

government, City Manager Brett Estes said, but legalizing Maritime Road allows him to extend utilities to the site and record a plat with the county surveyor. The developer declined to comment for this article.

The dedication of 54th Street and Maritime Road is also the lowest-hanging fruit in a longer-term effort to improve access for all the properties around Tongue Point by dedicating old Highway 30 as a public right of way.

The former highway zig-zags downhill from the intersection with Maritime Road to North Tongue Point, where Hyak Maritime and WCT

Marine Construction have been developing a shipwright center. Improving access will help them with extending utilities and an eventual realignment of the roadway to improve truck access.

Along the old highway on the west side of Tongue Point are several property owners who have developable land but have been unable to wade through federal access issues. Local businessman Michael Benesch, who bought land at Tongue Point 15 years ago with the hopes of putting in new homes or multifamily units, said he has tried to deal with the federal government, but to no avail.

“It opens it up where someone can actually do something down there,” Benesch said of making the old highway a right of way. “You might actually see something happen.”

The crown jewel of potential residential development at Tongue Point is Blue Ridge. Although the former military housing complex is lined with dedicated city streets, access is from a city driveway on Highway 30 and from the old highway. The owners have not been able to establish an easement, Rosemary Johnson said.

Although the U.S. Department of Labor, which oversees Tongue Point Job Corps Center, is supportive of handling the roadway over and being rid of any maintenance, it doesn’t want to provide any money for improvements,

she said.

The pre-World War II roadway is badly deteriorated, runs past several landslides and likely needs to be reconstructed to modern standards. Finding the federal money before taking it on will require the help of the state’s congressional delegation, Rosemary Johnson said.

Despite all the challenges, Cary Johnson’s project and Blue Ridge remain two of the prime opportunities for future housing in a city bounded by water and steep hills.

“These were two of the biggest residential land areas when we did our buildable lands inventory,” Rosemary Johnson said. “Being able to develop these two will help the housing stock.”

Company: Most of business park is wetlands

Continued from Page A1

A report on the potential impact of the plant estimated it would pump out on average 20,000 gallons a day, comparable to 200 dwellings. Collin Stelzig, the city’s public works director, recently told the City Commission it would represent about 4% of Warrenton’s average water treatment, already at around 90% of capacity.

The city has other approved projects yet to be built worth up to 400 additional dwelling units of wastewater capacity, Stelzig said, and another nearly 260 dwelling units worth of projects not yet approved but possibly coming in the next three years.

“Currently, without this project, we expect that we’re going ... to meet our capacity in 2024 — somewhere around that time,” Stelzig said of wastewater treatment. “And with the fish processor, we could be before 2022.”

He cautioned that some approved projects might not come to fruition, giving the city more time to increase



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

The Port of Astoria has struggled to develop the Airport Industrial Park in Warrenton.

capacity. But the city is looking to move up an expansion of its wastewater plant with more projects certain to come, he said.

In his report, Stelzig said Scoular has told him the plant won’t grow beyond its initial footprint because of a lack of available seafood product within a reasonable proximity. He recommended the city negotiate special wastewater rates if the plant does want to expand.

Part of the issue with capacity is the airport, where the Port pumps back about five times as much wastewater as it receives in treated water from the city. Warrenton wants the problem fixed before a fish processing plant

moves forward.

The city and the Port have had an intergovernmental agreement to work on the issue since 2005. Business Oregon recently helped hire an engineer to study the issue. The Port has run smoke tests and looked at water lines with cameras. But there are no immediate solutions, Gary Kobes, the Port’s airport manager, recently told the City Commission.

“We’re now, with the camera work, looking at the integrity of the system,” he said. “And in the Port’s portion of the system, we’ve found some problems in the pipes, the manholes. It doesn’t necessarily account for the volume of water that

we’re seeing, but we have some structural issues.”

Kobes previously told the Port Commission that a high-pressure water system might be more cost-effective than relining or replacing the wastewater infrastructure at the airport. Pressure sewers help reduce the cost of pipes and maintenance. The Port is also working with the state on how to fund such improvements, Kobes said.

Most of the business park outside the airport is considered wetlands. The Port is trying to delineate where the wetlands are, and should ultimately have about 11 acres to develop at the industrial park, Kobes said.

Port Commissioner Robert Stevens came with Kobes to the City Commission to reiterate the importance of the project and the Port’s commitment to solve the airport’s wastewater issues.

“We are committed to partnering with the city of Warrenton and move this project forward and get the cannery done,” Stevens said. “We want to see it done. It’s a benefit to both the city and the Port.”

It’s in your inbox before your mailbox

In these uncertain times, be certain you can read your newspaper

Sign up for free digital access

Astorian subscribers can receive daily email updates and uninterrupted digital delivery on a computer, tablet and phone

Call 800-781-3214

the**Astorian**
dailyastorian.com/newsletters

