

IN BRIEF

Crab boats begin fishing off southern Oregon

Commercial crab boats farther south finally hit the water.

But the area from Cape Falcon near Arch Cape north to the Canada border remains closed to the West Coast Dungeness crab fishery. With Washington state waiting on the next round of testing results to see if levels of the marine toxin domoic acid have dipped in crabs, the closure is expected to remain in place until at least Feb. 1.

County's community health project manager leaves for service trip

Ellen Heintz, Clatsop County's community health project manager, finished her last day in the role on Friday before returning to Guatemala for a yearlong medical service trip.

The naturopathic doctor practiced primary care in Grants Pass and Medford for 14 years before volunteering in Guatemala in 2017 through Casa Colibri, a humanitarian organization serving indigenous Mayan villagers in the country's northwestern region.

She has been in her role for Clatsop County since 2018, and played a leading part in the county's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I have really appreciated working for Clatsop County Public Health during this unprecedented time," Heintz said in an email. "The team here is full of compassionate, fearless, dedicated folks who have tirelessly worked to support their community through this pandemic. They will continue to do their amazing work. I am honored to have been part of this team."

Weber sworn in to state House

SALEM — Suzanne Weber was sworn in on Monday to represent state House District 32 in the state Legislature.

The Republican, a former Tillamook mayor, defeated Democrat Debbie Boothe-Schmidt in the November election. The seat was open after Tiffany Mitchell, an Astoria Democrat elected in 2018, chose not to run for reelection.

— *The Astorian*

DEATH

Jan. 7, 2021

DUNN, Barbara Ann, 86, of Ocean Park, Washington, died in Ocean Park. Penttila's Chapel by the Sea is in charge of the arrangements.

BIRTH

Jan. 7, 2021

HUMPHRIES, Carrie and Seth, of Astoria, a boy, Bentley Matthew Humphries, born at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria. Older siblings are Carson, Baylee, Parker and Bryson Humphries. Grandparents are Lori Wangen, Robert Flavin and Tammy and Robert Humphries, all of Astoria.

ON THE RECORD

DUII

Danielle Leslie Brown, 34, of Warrenton, was arrested Monday on U.S. Highway 101 near Sunset Beach Lane for driving under the influence of intoxicants.

Robert Tristan Ibarra, 48, of Friendswood, Texas, was arrested Saturday on U.S. Highway 101 near Sunset Beach Lane for DUII and reckless driving following a crash.

John Robert Sashko, 59, of Lakewood, Washington, was arrested Friday on U.S. Highway 30 for DUII and reckless driving.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Sunset Empire Transportation District Board, 9 a.m., special meeting, (electronic meeting).

Clatsop County Planning Commission, 10 a.m., (electronic meeting).

Port of Astoria Commission, 4 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Astoria Historic Landmarks Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., Warrenton Community Center, 170 S.W. Third Ave.

Clatsop Community College Board, 6:30 p.m., (electronic meeting).

WEDNESDAY

Clatsop Soil and Water Conservation District Board, 10 a.m., (electronic meeting).

Warrenton-Hammond School District Finance Committee, noon, (electronic meeting).

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Warrenton-Hammond School District Board, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Astoria School District Board, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

THURSDAY

Gearhart Planning Commission, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

the Astorian

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Luke Whittaker/Chinook Observer

The debut of the newly-constructed drive-in at Neptune Theater drew a near-capacity crowd on New Year's Day in Long Beach.

Culling rises to the top of elk population control

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — A plan to reduce the local elk population relies on hunting outside city limits to stem the birth rate of elk calves.

"No doors should be considered closed, especially when you're looking at creative solutions for managing an urban elk herd," Manuel Padilla, project manager for Oregon Solutions, said at a City Council workshop in late December.

"You're going to start seeing very quickly a situation in which you are going to have very few, if any, options left to be able to start to bring down the herd to a manageable level," he said. "That's precisely why culling, although a tough decision, has been put forward and is strongly, strongly recommended."

The elk population in Clatsop County is exponentially higher than a decade ago, said Paul Atwood, a biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Growth is expected to be substantial in the years ahead.

AN INITIAL NUMBER TO BE CULLED CAN ONLY BE REACHED AFTER GEARHART PASSES A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING CULLING TO TAKE PLACE AND A PERMIT SOUGHT FROM THE STATE. ALL MEAT WOULD BE DONATED TO LOCAL FOOD BANKS.

In 2019, Gov. Kate Brown designated the Clatsop Plains Elk Collaborative an Oregon Solutions project, bringing together businesses, government and nonprofit organizations. Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer and Seaside Mayor Jay Barber are co-conveners, with a project team of 26 members.

No one tool will solve as a magic bullet to solve the problem, Padilla said.

To be effective, a culling strategy needs to be used in conjunction with no feeding laws, hazing, fencing, increased hunting opportunities, better road signs and rumble strips in strategic areas, he wrote in an executive summary delivered to

city councilors.

Educational programs, wildlife corridors, elk behavior modification plans and land use tools would also be utilized to increase and preserve land for elk.

There is no precise number that can be predetermined that will mark "success" or "mission accomplished," Atwood said. "To eliminate an entire group is not feasible," he said.

A culling plan would provide details on best methods and locations for culling outside of the city limits.

"It's a very tight space, very urban," Padilla said. "There are probably not many, if any, areas for culling within the city limits of

Gearhart."

An initial number to be culled can only be reached after Gearhart passes a resolution authorizing culling to take place and a permit sought from the state.

All meat would be donated to local food banks.

Project team members aim for approval of a declaration of cooperation among partners by the end of February, Padilla said.

After the declaration has been signed, the project team will plan a more detailed timeline and implement the work outlined in the declaration.

Mayor Paulina Cockrum said she anticipates scheduling a town hall concerning the elk.

"All of the factors pointed out during the work session are important for the public to hear," she said. "Particularly the rich food source the urban setting provides for the Gearhart elk herd and safety factors when living near in their midst, how to keep humans and elk at safe distances from one another, and the coordinated approach we will need to take to manage the shared environment going forward."

Broadway Middle School inspection reports alarm residents

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — Critics of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District's purchase of Broadway Middle School have warned that up to \$5 million is needed for repairs and upgrades.

"This is a building that has mold, rot, asbestos, cracks, sinking, water within the structure and a roof that inspection reports show has needed total replacement for quite some years," said Seaside City Councilor Tita Montero, a member of Taxpayers for SEPRD Transpar-

ency, a Facebook group that has organized against the \$2.15 million purchase.

The school had asbestos inspections performed in 2016 and 2019 with no reduction in asbestos containing building material, Patrick Duhachek, a resident, wrote.

"Nothing has been done since 2016," he wrote. "Should we even be using this building and putting children in it?"

Duhachek cited a 2013 report showing the building had "moderate to high" collapse potential.

Seaside City Councilor

Randy Frank, who, like Montero, said he was speaking as a private citizen, said \$4 million to \$5 million needs to be spent just to keep the building watertight by replacing the roof and all west-facing windows.

The building, on the market after the Seaside School District moved to a new campus on Spruce Drive out of the tsunami inundation zone, "has served its useful life span," Montero said.

Montero, who acquired school inspection records back to 1988, said the school district has long known the middle school comes with

many hazards and high remediation costs.

The building is "the proverbial albatross," she said. "Given the cost of remediation and the probable impossibility of correcting all deficiencies, is BMS, in fact, a worthless building?"

"There are times when one just needs to walk away from what appears to be a dream and not because it was a bad idea but because it just won't pencil out," Frank said. "In my opinion, this does not necessarily end the desire to acquire the property but may be an opportunity to regroup and explore other ideas."

'Reopen the Coast' hits back at coronavirus restrictions

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — About 50 people gathered in the parking lot of Seaside City Hall on Sunday, drawn by an invitation to "Reopen the Coast" by lifting coronavirus restrictions throughout the state.

Warrenton's Brandon Williams said people "aren't buying" the need for the state's COVID-19 shutdown measures.

"I think people will see the businesses aren't scared to operate and exercise the freedom of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," said Williams, who ran unsuccessfully for Warrenton City Commission in November. "Masks should be up to the individual."

The event opened with a prayer and included a moment of remembrance for those killed in the Washington, D.C., insurrection last



State Rep. Mike Nearman appeared at the Seaside demonstration.

week.

Some passing drivers honked their horns in support of the rally, while others shouted their dissent from their cars or from across the

street.

Under a tent, T-shirts and bumper stickers celebrating the Second Amendment and President Donald Trump were offered for sale.

State Rep. Mike Nearman, R-Independence, who allegedly helped right-wing protesters enter the Oregon State Capitol building during a Dec. 21 special session after a "Reopen Oregon" rally in Salem, attended the Seaside event.

"I'm really happy to support businesses opening," Nearman told the crowd. "We need to get the economy going, especially on the coast. COVID is a serious virus, but the cure is worse than the disease. We need to think about that."

Nearman congratulated the audience on the election of Republican Suzanne Weber, who defeated her Democratic opponent, Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, in state House District 32 in November.

Nearman declined to speak about his role in the events in Salem in December, which are under investigation.