

IN BRIEF

Fishing boat catches fire in Warrenton

The U.S. Coast Guard assisted local agencies Friday afternoon after a fishing boat caught on fire near the Skipanon River in Warrenton.

Officials said everyone aboard the Pacific Cloud abandoned the boat and made it to shore. No injuries were reported.

No other information was immediately available.

County commissioners approve right-of-way policy

Clatsop County commissioners on Wednesday adopted a policy to restrict commercial use in rights of way.

The county placed a moratorium on permits for businesses operating within rights of way in October after a neighborhood dispute over a firewood stand in Warrenton. Since then, the county has worked on amending the ordinance.

The ordinance prohibits commercial activity in county rights of way, with the exception of seasonal flower and produce stands with permits.

Other permitted activities may also be allowed. Requests will be reviewed by the county.

State discloses virus case at Anchor Christian Academy

The state on Wednesday disclosed a coronavirus case at Anchor Christian Academy in Hammond.

The Oregon Health Authority, in a weekly report on outbreaks, described the case as involving a staffer. The most recent onset was April 9.

Niki Hawkins, the school's principal, said the staff member is asymptomatic and has since tested negative for the virus twice. She said the staffer is quarantining at home.

Meanwhile, a fourth student has tested positive for the virus at Seaside High School, according to the state.

Children rescued at Hug Point

Two children were rescued from a cliff Wednesday afternoon at Hug Point State Park.

Fire crews were called at about 1:30 p.m. to a report that two children were stuck on top of a rock and could not get back to shore because of the incoming tide.

The crews helped lower the children from the rock into the water, where they were carried to shore. Both children were reportedly uninjured, just cold.

Merkley to hold virtual town hall

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley will hold a virtual town hall for Clatsop County on Wednesday.

The Oregon Democrat will answer questions and update constituents about his work in Washington, D.C., at 4 p.m. on Zoom.

To join the meeting, visit tinyurl.com/MerkleyClatsop. "Hearing from Oregonians across the state is critical to doing my job," Merkley said in a statement.

— *The Astorian*

DEATHS

April 14, 2021

FIELDS, Joyce Caroline, 87, of Vancouver, Washington, formerly of Astoria, died in Portland. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

April 13, 2021

KARGE, Kenneth, 82, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

April 12, 2021

SCOTT, Joyce Elaine, 95, of Ocean Park, Wash-

ington, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

April 10, 2021

OLNEY, Theodore, 71, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

April 8, 2021

SHELLABARGER, Joyce, 81, of Svensen, died in Svensen. Hughes-Ransom Mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

ON THE RECORD

Strangulation

Jonathan Milton Wood, 33, of Oregon City, was arraigned Thursday on charges of strangulation, two

counts of assault in the fourth degree, driving under the influence of intoxicants, reckless driving and two counts of harassment.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY

Knappa School District Board, 5:30 p.m., Knappa High School Library, 41535 Old U.S. Highway 30.

Seaside Budget Committee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

Astoria City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

TUESDAY

Clatsop Care Health District Board, 3 p.m., strategic planning, (electronic meeting).

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

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Gearhart Small Business Committee, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Shoreline Sanitary District Board, 7 p.m., Hertz Station, 33496 Westlake Lane, Warrenton.

the Astorian

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New regulations aim to protect whales from crab fishing lines

By FEDOR ZARKHIN
The Oregonian

Rick Lilienthal and his father were just half a mile offshore, heading into the ocean to pull in their crabbing lines, when they saw a gray whale going "100 miles an hour" with a buoy trailing off its left fin.

"It was just a shock," Lilienthal said. "I'd never seen one before."

That was 50 years ago. Lilienthal, a 68-year-old commercial Dungeness crab fisherman, said he hasn't seen another entangled whale since.

But a slew of rule changes coming within weeks could make such rare occurrences even less frequent, even as they have the potential to wreak havoc on summertime crabbers' harvests.

Starting May 1, Oregon fishermen will have to reduce the number of crab cages they can drop in the ocean and won't be allowed to drop them lower than 40 fathoms, or 240 feet.

Gway Kirchner, an environmental advocate who gave input on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife rules, acknowledged that whales getting caught in crab fishing lines isn't nearly as big of a problem in Oregon as it is in California and Washington state. But that doesn't mean it's too early to take action.

"If we don't take the steps that we're taking today, I think that it could become a significant problem for us," Kirchner said, citing the changes to whale migration and feeding patterns possibly driven by climate change.

Humpback and gray whale populations have rebounded in recent decades after being hunted to near extinction. That rebound, in combination with recent changes in the ocean ecosystem, has driven some whales into crabber territory and crabbers into whale territory.

Increasing humpback whale populations have forced the animals to compete for food, even as their primary source of nourishment — krill — has become



Oregon's new rules will limit how many pots commercial crabbers can drop into the ocean and how deep.

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Gway Kirchner | an environmental advocate who gave input on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife rules

less available due to ocean conditions. As a result, the whales are going after anchovies, which are generally found closer to shore. Crabs, meanwhile, have been migrating ever deeper into the ocean in recent years, drawing crabbers with them.

"Increased overlap is, theoretically, drawing more entanglements," said Caren Braby, the state's top marine resources official. "It's a common-sense conclusion."

There have been nine known cases of whales getting caught in Oregon crab lines in the past nine years, compared to four in the nine years before that, according to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife data. Of the seven humpback whale cases since 2003, five were in the last seven years.

By forbidding particularly deep crab pots during the summer months, state officials hope to reduce the risk to humpback whales passing off the Oregon Coast on their way north.

The whales are usually found 330 feet or deeper, the state says, meaning they will be better protected if crab cages stay at shallower depths.

One alternative to the ban on deep crab fishing is banning summer crabbing altogether, said Braby, the fish and wildlife agency's marine resources manager. While an extreme option, it could still be on the table, depending on how successful the new rules are.

But Lilienthal said the measures are overkill and have the potential to cause serious financial troubles for smaller fishing operations. The restrictions will take thousands of dollars out of their pockets, he said, because crab pots must be dropped ever deeper to find them in abundance.

"It hurts everybody," Lilienthal said. "That's money that's not going in your savings account to make it through the winter."

Braby acknowledged the virtually inevitable hardship

to come for crabbers and, she said, their concerns are understandable.

"They're about to experience something they've never experienced before," Braby said.

Indeed, financial impact will be one of the factors the agency will consider when evaluating the rules over the next few seasons, Braby said.

The state's measures are only in effect in the second half of the commercial crabbing season — from May 1 to Aug. 14. That means they are likely to affect smaller fishing operations more than larger ones because bigger businesses turn their attention to other ocean species that time of year, former Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission member John Corbin said.

Corbin, whose operations are based on the Columbia River, said he started seeing a change in the whale populations — and the conversations about them — in the last few years. The industry has become far more aware of the whales and has been trying to accommodate them.

"It's kind of like, 'Wow, what's going on here?'" Corbin said of growing whale incursions into areas where fishermen drop crab lines. "Because this is different than how it used to be."

Testing: 'I think it's the right thing to do'

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The school board, however, is more concerned that students get as much class time as possible now that they are back in classrooms. Astoria began the school year remotely last September and only started bringing the majority of students back to buildings in February.

"Our students have missed a large amount of in-person instruction due to COVID-19," said Grace Laman, the school board chairwoman, in a statement. "Students should be reconnecting with peers and school staff and not have to worry about a statewide assessment."

She echoed Colt Gill, director of the Oregon Department of Education, who had said in the state's waiver request that, "This is not the time to subject families and educators to additional stressors that would be required for remote admin-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Student testing has been disrupted for a second year by the coronavirus pandemic.

istration of summative assessments."

Instead, school district staff will use assessment data coming from the classrooms and schools them-

selves to work with students. State testing did not happen last year, either. It was interrupted by the start of the pandemic and the emergency closure of schools last

spring.

In a normal year, the school board supports the use of statewide standardized testing "in order to drive state and district goals," stated a resolution school board members approved at a meeting Wednesday night.

But, they also noted, "state-mandated testing will require sacrificing several hours of badly-needed instruction time for most students" and the statewide assessments "do not provide data or information that individual teachers can use to inform their instruction or identify areas for remediation among their students."

Superintendent Craig Hoppes told the school board he expects to see many other school districts make a similar decision.

"I think it's the right thing to do," he said, adding, "I think it will send a really strong message to our community."

Astoria Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival

Presenting Sponsor: **Fred Meyer**

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Passport Partner: **weekend**

This event is produced by the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

VOLUNTEER
PICK OF THE WEEK

Dottie & Ollie
Bonded pair 5 and 7 years old

Homekeeping hearts are happier. Here are two sweet reasons, so easy on the eyes and spirit.

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