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Merkley seeks more federal help for wildfires

Senator takes lead on key subcommittee

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley said he's hoping to use his new subcommittee chairmanship to direct federal money toward protecting and improving the nation's vast public forests.

Given the Labor Day wildfires that ravaged Oregon, and the future prospect of a drier climate in the Northwest and elsewhere, Merkley said there's plenty of work to be funded.

"We know that these more aggressively destructive fire seasons are going to keep coming our way," the Oregon Democrat told reporters on a conference call Thursday. "Fire seasons are getting longer, forests are getting drier, so we have to do a lot more at the front end to try to reduce the ferocity of those blazes. That means a lot more forest management and prescribed burns — and a lot of good jobs."

Merkley spoke the day after he convened a hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee subcommittee that oversees budgets for the Department of the Interior Department and related agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Seaside plans a summer of programs for students

Funded partly through grants from the state

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For The Astorian

SEASIDE — The Seaside School District plans to offer a variety of programs this summer for students, including enrichment camps, summer school, a bookmobile, credit recovery and wrap-around child care.

"The overarching intent of summer programming is to complete unfinished learning, to continue allowing students to make connections with friends, to bolster social-emotional learning and to make school a positive environment," instructional coach and summer programs coordinator Cate Blakesley said at a school board meeting in May.

According to her estimate, 590 students — or roughly 35% of the student body — will be served this summer through academic and enrichment opportunities. Registration will be open through mid-June.

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County looks at future of North Coast Business Park

The property in Warrenton has proven difficult to develop

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

WARRENTON — After years of false starts and frustration, Clatsop County is exploring new options to develop the North Coast Business Park.

The county hired Mackenzie, a consulting firm in Portland, to assess the condition of 140 acres the county owns at the business park and create a development feasibility report.

The county Board of Commissioners discussed Mackenzie's report during a work session in late May, along with two options the consultant identified for potential development.

Brent Nielsen, of Mackenzie, said one option would be to consolidate the section best suited for development into a 30-acre block, which could be attractive to investors looking for bigger buildings.

The second option would involve three parcels that range from 6.5 acres to 11.6 acres, which could draw businesses interested in smaller footprints.

Both options would concentrate development on the corner of 19th Street and Ensign Lane. The county estimates the real market value of the options at about \$40 million. If the property is developed, the options could generate about \$400,000 in tax revenue in the first year.

It would take about \$6 million in infrastructure investment to move forward, with a timeline of about two years. The county estimates that in addition to tax revenue from the business park, the new projects could bring more than 400 jobs.

Brad Carnese, the county's real estate broker, said he preferred the first option. "I think the costs focused on one parcel are going to outweigh multiple parcels if we focus on option one within the package," he said.



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A consultant for Clatsop County has outlined options for the North Coast Business Park in Warrenton.

Marketing

A commercial real estate sign is posted on the corner of 19th Street and Ensign Lane, but Carnese said he has not marketed the property online as the county weighs the decision.

The business park had been identified as a potential site to relocate the county's public works facility. However, the county has said it would prefer to sell the property and get it back on the tax rolls.

"I was brought on to discuss disposing of the property, and at the end of the day we said, 'Time out. We need to learn as much as we can,'" Carnese said. "This is a significant economic future benefit to the community. And we don't have too many answers. We need to get all the facts, figures, et cetera."

"So we've taken some time, and a couple steps backwards and probably have a little bit more work to do."

The county has grappled with what to do with the property next to Costco for years.

In the 1960s, portions were cleared and graded for a proposed aluminum plant, but the plant was never built.

The county gained ownership in 1991 and designed a plan to sell about 70 acres adjacent to U.S. Highway 101 for commercial development. The proceeds were to be used for infrastructure improvement on the rest of the land.

Over the years, the business park has sat undeveloped, attracting homeless camps and off-roading. Meanwhile, the wetlands have spread, leaving about 30 developable acres of the 140 acres the county owns. Columbia Memorial Hospital and Fort George Brewery also own portions of the site.

Along with wetlands, there are other development constraints, including city water, pump station and wastewater limitations. The business park is generally flat, but there are steep slopes in the northeast corner, making it impractical for industrial development or use as wetland mitigation.

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Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Brendon Stock is the new manager of the Port of Astoria's Pier 3 boatyard.

New boatyard manager sees promising future

Stock hopes for an expansion at the Port

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Brendon Stock remembers in 2015 when the maritime community packed a Port of Astoria Commission meeting, pleading for the agency not to close the boatyard on Pier 3 in favor of log exports.

With log exports gone, the Port has a renewed focus on expanding the boatyard Stock now manages.



Originally from Seaside, Stock worked in the oil fields of Alaska in summers during high school. He served in the U.S. Air Force after graduation, returned in 2005 and worked in forestry and construction.

The Great Recession dried up the construction market. Stock got

a job at the Fred Meyer gas station in Warrenton to make ends meet for his wife and their children. Someone from the Port recognized Stock and asked if he wanted a job.

"As far as marine industry, I was actually pretty blind to it," he said. "I didn't even know boats had to come out of the water."

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