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Smoke covered Clatsop County last year during the Labor Day fires.

Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Wildfire protection takes on a new significance

Dry conditions a concern as fire season approaches

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

With much of Oregon abnormally dry or experiencing drought, communities on the North Coast aren't sure what to expect as fire season approaches, but some wildfire protection measures have taken on a new significance.

Putting aside the catastrophic fires like the Tillamook Burn that blazed decades ago, wildfire has not been a major concern on the coast for some until recently.

But the Labor Day fires that burned across Oregon last year and filled North Coast skies with smoke and ash set off alarm bells.

The fires were not so much a wake-up call as a reminder that the coast is not immune to the threat. A shift in the wind can carry flames here, while a dropped cigarette, a carelessly maintained campfire or logging operations can spark a disaster if conditions are right.

"I would say we were very fortunate last year in that we didn't have a fire that would be destroying a bunch of homes," said Neal Bond, a protection unit forester with the state based in Astoria.

"But that could very easily happen here," he added, echoing others involved in coastal forestry.



Fire season in Clatsop County starts Tuesday.

Fire access roads

In Cannon Beach, the Labor Day fires were fuel for further arguments by city leaders, firefighters and nearby timberland managers pushing for better fire access roads into the city's Ecola Creek Forest Reserve.

The city-owned forestland protects the source of the city's drinking water and conservation is a driving factor in how the land has been managed. Some city leaders and those involved with updating the reserve's management plan worried that improving access could increase the risk of a human-caused fire, as well as negatively impact wildlife habitat.

Previous drafts of the plan called for limited access into the reserve,

arguing that people are predominately to blame for many disastrous fires in the state. Build a road, the theory goes, and they will come.

But Cannon Beach Emergency Manager Rick Hudson, neighboring timber companies and district fire personnel countered that without key access roads, it was nearly impossible to respond effectively to a wildfire in the reserve. Power lines, another potential fire hazard, also swoop through one section.

The two sides have since landed on a compromise, a balance between how some road improvements could proceed and continued conservation efforts.

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Astoria considers electric scooters

City Council divided over pilot program

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

A proposal to bring electric scooters to the streets of Astoria is in limbo while one city councilor collects feedback from the community.

Bird, an electric scooter company, approached city leadership about running a pilot program for pay-to-ride scooters. The company, which recently rolled out a similar program in Hermiston, would need permission to use city rights of way to stage scooters across the city.

In a City Council work session Wednesday, Mike Butler, a company representative, argued the scooter program would provide low-cost transportation options for tourists and residents and bring indirect benefits to the city.

But opinions were divided among city councilors. Mayor Bruce Jones and City Councilor Tom Brownson voiced concerns, but said they were open to discussing a pilot program.

"For me, the primary concerns have to be with people just being bad citizens and irresponsible," Jones said. Overall, he believes scooters pose no greater safety risk than bicycles.

"The problems are going to identify themselves," Brownson said, adding, "These are good things to try out. They're working in other places. We just have to see if it's going to work here or not."

City Councilor Joan Herman and Councilor Roger Rocka were adamantly opposed, saying they had significant concerns about riders' safety, particularly on the stretch of U.S. Highway 30 that runs through Astoria and can fill up with tourist as well as heavy truck traffic.

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Knappa reinstates health curriculum

Some parents had objected to the content

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

A state-created middle school health and sex education curriculum will continue to be used in the Knappa School District.

A committee tasked by the school district with reviewing "My Future-My Choice" at the request of a parent group concluded Thursday night that it is the only curriculum that meets the state's standards in their entirety. They decided to reinstate the curriculum after a brief suspension.

The Knappa Parents Organization, the group that requested the review, has informed Superintendent Bill Fritz they will appeal the committee's decision to the school board. The board meets Monday.

Oregon schools are required to teach sex education that recognizes different sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression. Knappa has used the state's curriculum for around a decade. Most

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'Fall down, pick up check'

Stuntman retires to Wahkiakum County

By PATRICK WEBB
Chinook Observer

CATHLAMET, Wash. — Call it the stuntman's curse.

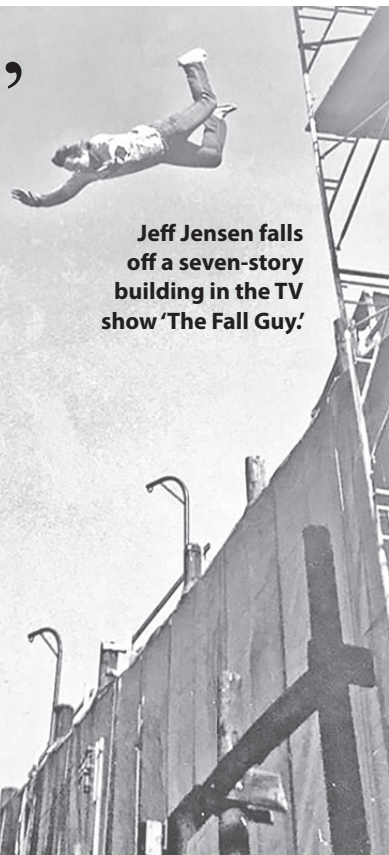
After a successful Hollywood career, standing in for tough guys like Sean Connery and Dolph Lundgren, falling off buildings, crashing cars and blowing things up, Jeff Jensen would always do one more stunt.

"It's difficult to turn down Steven Spielberg," he laughed. "I should have stopped before I was forced to stop. It's like being a pro foot-



Patrick Webb/Chinook Observer

Jeff Jensen said he fell in love with the scenery of Wahkiakum County on a trip north from California and has moved his home base. Now retired after a career as a Hollywood stuntman and movie director, he is setting up a foundation to offer job opportunities to disabled military veterans.



Jeff Jensen falls off a seven-story building in the TV show 'The Fall Guy.'

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