

Oregon Coast beetle considered for endangered species protection

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced last week that the Siuslaw hairy-necked tiger beetle may qualify for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The announcement came in response to a petition filed last year by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Xerxes Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

The two conservation groups expressed thankfulness that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering protecting the “imperiled” species.

Farm groups, in contrast, expressed concern that another endangered species could mean more challenges for farmers working the land.

“The Siuslaw hairy-necked tiger beetle is now one step closer to protection,” said Sarina Jepsen, endangered species director at the Xerxes Society.

Anne Marie Moss, communications director for the Oregon Farm Bureau,



Sarina Jepsen/Xerxes

Siuslaw hairy-necked tiger beetle.

expressed concern. “We know the Endangered Species Act has a devastating impact on farm and ranch families across Oregon,” Moss told the Capital Press.

The tiger beetles, according to the Center for Biological Diversity, once lived on coastal beaches from Northern California to Washington, but their numbers have been in decline across the region. In the most recent surveys, the beetles were only found at 17 sites in Oregon and three sites in Washington. Fewer than 50 individual beetles were located in the most recent survey.

Conservationists say protecting the beetles under the Endangered Species Act is critical to saving

the “severely threatened” species.

“As unspoiled stretches of the Oregon Coast vanish to development and the impacts of climate change, we risk losing unique species like the tiger beetle,” said Quinn Read, Oregon policy director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “I’m hoping Endangered Species Act protection can give these beautiful insects and their habitat a fighting chance of survival.”

But farmers and industry leaders say adding another species to the list could hurt those who work the land.

Some farm groups say that while protecting rare species is important, restrictions imposed under the

Endangered Species Act can adversely impact farmers and ranchers by requiring them to bear the brunt of providing habitat for listed species and taking actions that might interfere with normal farming activities.

Some critics also say it’s not clear whether the restrictions are actually effective at protecting species.

“What we don’t know is whether federal and state restrictions under the (Endangered Species Act) actually work to recover species effectively,” said Moss. “We’re enduring the pain, but it’s hard to see much benefit from all the restrictions on utilization of water and land and access to ag practices the ESA can bring. We will advocate to minimize the impact on ag families as this process unfolds.”

Advocates of protecting the beetles, however, say farm groups should have little reason for concern over legal protection of the beetle because its primary habitat is around sand dunes or in coastal areas where fresh water meets ocean beaches, areas where farming doesn’t happen.

Housing: There is already interest among developers

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has become.”

City councilors looked to the 2019 county housing study, which identified a severe lack of affordable and workforce-priced housing. Earlier this year, they decided to focus on developing workforce housing at Heritage Square.

But even as city leaders are generally united on a broad vision for the property, a number of challenges remain.

The Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, which has merged with the Astoria Sunday Market, said the market is willing to look at a new location if the space at Heritage Square is not available in the future. But there is still a mix of opinions in the community about what should go up on the block and what kind of open space should be retained for public uses.

Then there are environmental, geotechnical and regulatory hurdles.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality designated the property as a brownfield and there is con-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Flowers and weeds have grown into the sides of the pit in Heritage Square.

tamination in the area based on previous activities at the site. Any developer who takes on a project in Heritage Square will need to work closely with the state.

Code changes

City leaders will also need to make changes to several comprehensive plan sections, if they want to develop Heritage Square for any other use besides an urban park. Housing is not allowed outright under current zoning, though it isn’t clear if Asto-

ria’s rule in this regard is in line with the state.

Either way, code changes involve a lengthy public process and take, at minimum, six months to complete, according to City Manager Brett Estes.

Given some of these realities and the desire for housing for lower-income levels, the city needs to be ready to make some concessions to developers or perhaps offer incentives, Southgate said.

He listed examples like decreasing the price of the

land, offering a tax abatement or helping to bridge the gap between what a housing project might generate in rent versus what it costs to construct.

There is already interest among developers to take on the project, Southgate assured city councilors.

With state subsidies and other incentives available for this type of housing now, he said, it is a good time to look at development offers for affordable and workforce housing.

Survey: ‘We all can come together when we want to help people’

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Chad Kernutt, a state employee in Albany, said COVID-19 restrictions passed down by state authorities while the public was restricted from most of the year’s legislative session was a sign of a state off track.

“The constant masking, the constant overregulation of businesses, telling them what they can and can’t do, and now the mandates on vaccines,” Kernutt said in a phone interview. “I believe it should be handled at the local level.”

Feelings about the state’s direction vary on demographic lines. The youngest and oldest groups were more likely to say the state’s on the right track, and those in rural areas tend to be more pessimistic about the state’s overall direction, according to the survey, which had a margin of error between 1.8 and 2.9 percentage points.

When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Oregonians — 56% — believe it’s not yet safe to open businesses and fully restart the economy. Just 36% of Oregonians said it’s urgently important to fully reopen the economy.

“No, I don’t think we’re quite there yet,” said Deb Runkle, a retiree in Bandon. “Personally, it scares the crap out of me because I’m compromised in the first place. Coming from that standpoint, it upsets me quite a bit when people don’t do what they’re supposed to do.”

Concerns about the pandemic center largely around the economy and community health more than individual health. Eight in 10 said they were “somewhat or very concerned” about the pandemic’s impact on the economy, and more than three-quarters had the same level of concern about the health of their communities.

Meanwhile, just 60% said they were concerned about their own health.

Views on the state’s economy are divided, too: About half say the economy is good or very good, while the other half calls it poor or very poor.

That’s up from previous surveys. Just 30% of residents rated the economy as good or very good last April and in June 2020, pollsters said.

OREGON VALUES AND BELIEFS CENTER

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a nonpartisan charitable organization, has partnered with Pamplin Media Group and EO Media Group to report how Oregonians think and feel about various subjects.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is committed to the highest level of public opinion research. To obtain that, the nonprofit is building the largest online research panel of Oregonians in history to ensure that all voices are represented in discussions of public policy in a valid and statistically reliable way.

Selected panelists earn points for their participation, which can be redeemed for cash or donated to a charity. To learn more, visit oregonvbc.org.

“We continue to hire a lot of people. We actually struggle to hire people, the market’s so hot,” said Jeff Jilot, who works for a Portland software company and rates the economy as good.

Views about the economy fall on demographic lines: Those with higher incomes, men and college graduates, tend to have rosier views of the state’s economy.

Still, more than half the state’s residents — 53% — say they’re worried about their personal financial situation, especially outside the Portland metro area.

Despite differences, 60% of respondents found room for agreement. That’s how many said there are things all Oregonians value about living in the state that “cut across political divides and represent common ground,” pollsters wrote. Top shared values included the state’s environmental quality, natural beauty and economic conditions.

“We all can come together when we want to help people,” Jilot said, saying, for example, most in the state agree on the need to help the homeless. “I do think folks want to see people happy, to see people succeed.”

Sweet Shop: ‘It’s got such a nice living space in the back’

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world. It was great to get to know her and see the concept develop.”

Real estate agent Ann Samuelson said Williams received multiple offers for the shop, which includes ice cream, coffee and places to sit in a garden outside. “It’s a unique property,” she said. “It’s the heart of Gearhart and the right buyer came along.”

As with many historical buildings, the Sweet Shop has gone through several transitions. In the 1920s, the business was known as Pop-pino’s Sweet Shop, which operated as a soda fountain. One side became a high-end beauty salon in the 1950s, later an antique shop.

Williams passed the shop with its for-sale sign posted in the window in 2016 and a friend suggested she buy the place. She approached Cindy Anderson, who had owned the business for 15 years, and purchased the building that October.

Williams renovated and refurbished both sides of the building, and added wine, beers, pastas and charcuterie.

The closed space still had remnants of the beauty salon — tall mirrors, work

stations and ornate columns. Williams left the mirrors for the ambiance and was able to use the stations to display products. The columns separated the larger room from a lounge area.

“Trantler,” a work by artist Keri Rosebraugh that depicts a tree and antler, was unveiled in the redesigned outdoor area in June 2020.

“It’s got such a nice living space in the back,” Samuelson said. “But it’s certainly leasable space if the buyer doesn’t decide to do something with the front.”

For Williams, she’s not quite sure where she’ll be living next. She plans on traveling, not making scones every morning, spending time with family and friends and working on writing projects.

“This quirky old building and I have been through our ups and downs, but I believe I am leaving it and Gearhart in better condition and spirit,” Williams said. “I am proud to pass along this bright spot of town history to people who can bring a different and equally wonderful light to the town and I hope everyone welcomes them to our special community.”

Schools: ‘Really pleased and proud of our parents’

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they are. We put procedures in place so that when kids are in between classes, they’re constantly moving — nobody stands around and visits ... I have administrators with rulers out, measuring desks to see how far kids are away (from each other). So there are fine details that we have to do, but that’s what we need to do to keep kids in and we will continue to do that.”

The Oregon Health Authority and local schools have disclosed a few dozen virus cases since the new school year began.

During the news conference, school superintendents highlighted that maintaining an open line of communication with parents has been key in contact tracing and limiting the spread of the virus.

Hoppes said they get a number of phone calls every day from parents asking questions regarding symptoms and keeping students home.

“I am just really pleased and proud of our parents because since last year when we started bringing kids back to school, they really stepped up with the symptom monitoring, it has been very helpful,” he said.

Superintendents also reit-



Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian

Schools are using contact tracing systems and other protocols to deter the spread of the coronavirus.

erated that schools are among the safest places for children during the pandemic.

“The evidence that we are looking at seems to suggest

that cases are showing up at school and getting caught because of the protocols that we have in place ... Because schools are open, it does mit-

igate the spread in the community and it seems to be safer with schools open,” Warrenton-Hammond Superintendent Tom Rogozinski said.

“Early on in the pandemic, in 2020, there was a little bit of that, ‘Oh, my gosh, the sky is falling, we had a case,’” Rogozinski said. “Now, not to normalize the threat, but to understand that ... the protocols that we are putting in place are working.”

While school districts have made online learning an option, superintendents also stressed the importance of in-person learning to student success. Rogozinski added that students’ social and emotional needs are also more easily met when classes are in-person.

“Kids are better learners and we can serve kids better when they are in-person,” Hoppes said. “The social-emotional that Tom talked about is so very valuable and we can do it a lot better when they are in-person.”

The Oregon Health Authority, meanwhile, reported 13 new virus cases for the county on Wednesday and eight new virus cases on Tuesday. Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 2,345 virus cases and 27 deaths as of Wednesday.