

IN BRIEF

State reports 25 new virus cases for Clatsop County

The Oregon Health Authority reported 25 new coronavirus cases for Clatsop County on Friday.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 4,231 virus cases and 38 deaths as of Friday.

— *The Astorian*

COVID hospitalizations in Oregon are peaking

SALEM — The number of people hospitalized for COVID-19 in Oregon will peak near current levels and then steadily recede to pre-omicron levels by the end of March, Oregon Health & Science University said in last week's forecast.

"The way Oregon handled omicron is almost as good as you're going to see," said Peter Graven, the director of the OHSU Office of Advanced Analytics. "Oregon pushed out booster shots, Oregonians modified their behavior early, before omicron fully arrived here, and we kept our masking rates relatively high compared with other states."

Meanwhile, the percentage of tests for COVID-19 that were positive for the virus dropped last week to 19% from an all-time high the previous week of 24.5%, according to Oregon Health Authority data.

— *Associated Press*

European green crab erupt in Willapa Bay

WILLAPA, Wash. — Nonnative European green crab are in the midst of a major expansion in Washington coastal waters, including Willapa Bay.

The small crab is regarded as a potentially devastating invasive species.

The Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe and Pacific County Vegetation Management have been working to determine overall populations and track the crab's growth in the bay. In 2021, Ed Darcher, with vegetation management, and others trapped 10,600 green crab in Willapa. Washington Sea Grant staff and volunteers are thought to have found around 4,400 last year in Grays Harbor.

The invasive species was first detected here in 1998, but populations remained low for most of the next two decades. State funding for ongoing monitoring was axed in 2003. However, a recent upswing in the crab population has local officials and shellfish farmers worried about their long-term impact on local aquaculture.

"I started to hear regular reports from farmers around 2015 and at that point the reports were pretty widespread through Willapa Bay," said David Beugli, executive director of the Willapa Grays Harbor Oyster Growers Association. "Farmers were reporting them on the oyster and clams beds, bare tide flats, within eelgrass beds and in deep channels."

"That was when we began to encounter multiple age classes and (egg-bearing) females. This is typical for an invasive species that persists in low number for years or decades until conditions become optimal."

— *Chinook Observer*

DEATH

Feb. 5, 2022

BRITT, Patrick E., 82, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

MEMORIAL

Saturday, Feb. 12

THOMASON, Dennis Leroy II — Celebration of life and potluck from 1 to 4 p.m., Olney Grange, 89342 Oregon Highway 202. Those attending are asked to bring a favorite dish to share.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

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

Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., work session, (electronic meeting).

Lewis & Clark Fire Department Board, 6 p.m., main fire station, 34571 U.S. Highway 101 Business.

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

WEDNESDAY

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

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

Warrenton-Hammond School District Board, 6 p.m., Warrenton High School, 1700 S. Main Ave.

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

THURSDAY

Seaside Civic and Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Ave.

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

Portland mayor bans homeless camping near busy roads

By REBECCA ELLIS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler has banned people experiencing homelessness from camping next to freeways and along high-crash corridors.

Wheeler issued an emergency order, effective 3 p.m. on Friday, that tasked the city's urban camping team with stopping people from setting up tents near busy roadways. The mayor said this is the first in a series of executive actions he plans to take in the coming weeks to address the city's homelessness crisis, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

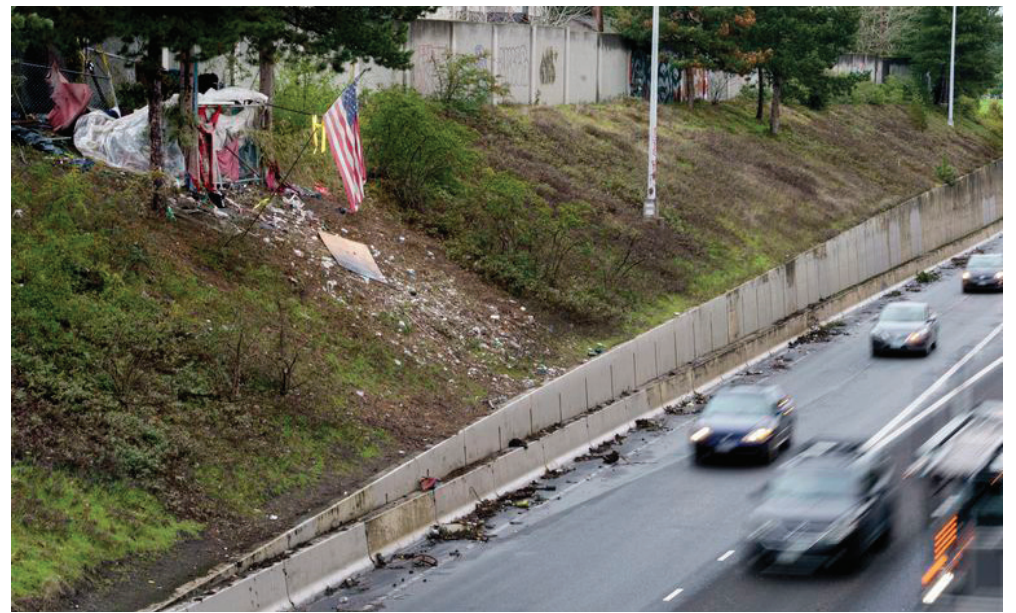
The order follows a report by the Portland Bureau of Transportation that found 70% of pedestrians who were killed by cars last year were homeless. While Wheeler framed the move as a "matter of urgency" and a humane follow-up to the jarring statistics, critics accused Wheeler of using the document as political cover for a harmful crackdown on outdoor camping.

Wheeler acknowledged the proposal was in the works before the report's release, but said the grim findings underscored the need to act fast.

"We have continuously witnessed unsanctioned camping in clearly unsafe locations, sometimes jarringly close to roads and freeways," Wheeler said at a press conference Friday. "You don't need to be a traffic engineer to sense that that's not safe."

Portland Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, who oversees the city's transportation bureau, said she was not consulted on the ordinance. Wheeler's chief of staff, Bobby Lee, said commissioners' offices were given the order on Thursday, though the mayor's office received little feedback.

The mayor's plan quickly generated outrage among homeless and transportation advocates. Opponents contend the mayor's action will do little aside from moving vulnerable people around the city, forcing them away from roads without giving them an alternative place to go. Twenty-five advocacy organizations penned a joint rebuttal Friday to Wheeler's plan, saying the mayor was ignoring the more significant factors causing deaths,



Kristyna Wentz-Graff/Oregon Public Broadcasting

A homeless encampment perched along Interstate 5 in Portland.

such as poor road design and deferred maintenance.

"Nowhere in any transportation study, advocacy campaign or community forum seeking to address our roadway safety problems has it been suggested that unhoused people and encampments should be swept or outright banned as a partial solution to this crisis," the letter read.

'Quite shameful'

Ashton Simpson, the executive director of Oregon Walks, said he felt the mayor's order was shaped, not by the transportation bureau's findings, but by the Portland Business Alliance and by People for Portland, an advocacy campaign calling for more police and shelter. Both groups have recently released polls that show that Portlanders' frustration with City Hall has reached a new threshold, and residents of the city would be supportive of a more aggressive approach to homelessness.

"The intentions and genuineness of the mayor are not honest," Simpson said. "It's quite shameful they would use people's death to further their own political interests."

The mayor said the polling did not play a role in his announcement, but noted he was feeling a new wave of support for his proposals.

"I think there's also been a systematic bias toward the long-term development of affordable housing and for some time I've been something of a lone voice saying we also need to act with urgency," Wheeler said. "I feel that the tide has turned. I feel the public supports this direction."

The mayor's office said the order will impact campers on 30 high-crash roadways, which are owned by both the Oregon Department of Transportation and the city. The area encompasses about 8% of the city, according to the mayor. Portland has the money to beef up sweeps in the area after the urban camping program was given additional funding in the last budget cycle.

Wheeler said there will be no "right of return" for people who were camping in these areas, and they will be forced to leave if they return to previous campsites. He added that he supports the idea of fencing off dangerous areas on state land where people should not be camping. He expects people to see the impact of the order over the coming months.

The mayor acknowledged Friday that it is far from clear where these campers are supposed to go. Multnomah County has capacity to shelter roughly 1,400 to 1,500 people year-round. There were about 4,000 people experiencing homelessness in Multnomah County in 2019, the last time there was a finalized count of the area's homeless population. The homeless population has likely grown since then.

"In the absence of adequate shelters, in the absence of other alternatives, some people will pick up and move somewhere," Wheeler said. "Which isn't really solving the larger problem but does solve the immediate problem."

Under a 2018 federal court decision known as *Martin v. Boise*, cities are barred from prohibiting camping unless there

is available shelter space. Wheeler did not directly answer questions from reporters Friday about how his executive order meshed with the federal court's ruling in that case. He said only that city leaders would do their "level best" to give people alternative places to shelter.

'Clear and alarming'

Wheeler pinned the blame for the lack of shelter beds partially on the state and said he'd made a pitch to Gov. Kate Brown earlier Friday for help adding 1,000 temporary shelter beds.

Charles Boyle, a spokesman for the governor, responded that Brown was focused on working with local partners and had called for a \$400 million investment in affordable housing in Thursday's State of the State.

"Our office has communicated to the city that they should engage in the legislative process for additional budget asks," Boyle wrote.

Commissioner Carmen Rubio released a cautious written statement Friday on the mayor's proposal. It was not clear if she supports or opposes Wheeler's plan:

"The traffic fatality data is clear and alarming, and it requires a response. Over the coming days, as we learn more about how this will work from the mayor's office, I intend to make sure that our efforts to reduce traffic fatalities also treat people with dignity and respect," she wrote. "These actions will naturally disrupt the lives of our houseless neighbors, and we cannot lose sight of those human impacts."

Port of Morrow appeals \$1.3M state fine

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

BOARDMAN — The Port of Morrow is appealing \$1.3 million in fines levied by state environmental regulators for excessively spreading nitrogen-rich wastewater as fertilizer on area farmland.

The port is seeking to reduce its penalty, and has requested a contested case hearing with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Located along the Columbia River in northeast Oregon, the Port of Morrow's Boardman Industrial Park is a regional food processing powerhouse, with companies producing everything from frozen french fries to cheddar cheese.

Under a Department of Environmental Quality permit, the port can recycle wastewater from the facilities by spraying it on farmland growing potatoes, wheat, alfalfa and other crops.

However, the amount of wastewater applied cannot exceed a certain threshold to prevent groundwater contamination.



EO Media Group

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality alleges the Port of Morrow has applied excessive amounts of nitrate-containing water to some area farmland.

The state alleges the port violated its permit more than 1,000 times from 2018 to 2021, exceeding the nitrogen limit and threatening public health and safety.

In its response, the port did not dispute that violations occurred — specifically, that soil nitrates measured more than 30 pounds per acre in the fourth- and fifth-foot levels underground.

The port chalked up these offenses a combination of less available acreage and unusually high winter precipitation that required more fertilizer applications.

Because of those unexpected challenges, the port

claims the Department of Environmental Quality authorized up to 80 pounds per acre of soil nitrates in the fourth- and fifth-foot levels in 2019. Only six of the 66 fields cited by the state exceeded that limit, according to the port.

Violations were "unintentional, and beyond the reasonable control of the port," the appeal states, and "had no adverse effect on groundwater nitrate levels."

The port also denies it violated its permit by failing to monitor nitrogen uptake in crops, since there are no standard methods for such monitoring and the Department of Environmental Quality did not provide an agency-approved method until 2021.

Measuring nitrogen in plant tissue is "neither an accurate nor a useful measure of the amount of nitrogen removed from fields by

crops, and the information does not measure compliance with any permit requirement or serve any other purpose under the permit," the appeal states.

Groundwater nitrates are a serious concern in the Lower Umatilla Basin, which was designated a Groundwater Management Area in 1990 to curb contamination from nonpoint sources like farms and municipal wastewater facilities.

Drinking groundwater with elevated nitrates can be harmful in infants, causing a condition known as methemoglobinemia, or "blue baby syndrome."

The management area encompasses parts of northern Umatilla and Morrow counties, including the cities of Hermiston, Echo, Stanfield, Umatilla, Boardman and Irrigon, with a combined population of 33,534.

Irrigated agriculture contributes most of the leached nitrogen into the groundwater in the area, estimated at 70%. About 12% comes from confined animal feeding operations, such as dairies; 8% from livestock pastures and 4.6% from food processing land application.

The port acknowledged that most, but not all, of the sites for wastewater application are in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area.

the Astorian

Established July 1, 1873
(USPS 035-000)

Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103 Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com

MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number:
800-781-3214

Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

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