

IN BRIEF

Warrenton to hire interim planning director

WARRENTON — The city will bring on Mike Morgan as an interim planning director.

Morgan is a former mayor of Cannon Beach and has done interim planning work for Astoria and Warrenton in the past.

Scott Hazelton, the city's former planning director, who served in the role for five months, resigned in January, but was working remotely to assist with the completion of a few projects.

City staff is budgeting for a full-time planner and a planning tech, City Manager Linda Engbretson said.

A new city manager will also be hired in the coming months to replace Engbretson, who is retiring.

State revises virus case count in local outbreaks

The Oregon Health Authority on Wednesday updated the number of coronavirus cases tied to recent outbreaks on the North Coast.

At Clatsop Care Memory Community, a Warrenton care home, an outbreak first reported in late January now stands at 12 cases.

At Suzanne Elise Assisted Living Community in Seaside, the number of cases tied to an outbreak first reported on Jan. 11 now stands at 15 cases.

At Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, the case count tied to an outbreak in January now stands at 25. The investigation began on Jan. 19.

Nancee Long, the hospital's communications director, said that none of the cases originated in the hospital.

The revised figures were disclosed in the health authority's weekly outbreak report.

— The Astorian

Warrenton man sentenced to prison for sex abuse, burglary

Wolf broke into two homes last summer

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

A Warrenton man who in a drug-addled state broke into two homes and sexually abused a woman last summer has been sentenced to more than six years in prison.

Steven Michael Wolf, 44, pleaded no contest in Circuit Court to first-degree sexual abuse and first-degree burglary.

A sentencing hearing began on Feb. 24 and was finished on Thursday to address an error in the time he would serve under the plea agreement.

On Sept. 8, Wolf showed up in the yard of Tajah Eide. He was speaking gibberish and threatened to kidnap Eide's young daughter. At one point, he forced his way into the home and backed down when Eide confronted him.

Warrenton police later intercepted Wolf, and a Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare worker saw that he was high on something. Neither Columbia Memorial Hos-

pital, where medical staff didn't think Wolf belonged as a patient, nor the Clatsop County Jail, where staff wasn't set up to accommodate his condition, accepted him.

Wolf was cited in lieu of an arrest and released, while the county sheriff's office was figuring out how they could hold him in custody.

Early the next morning, a woman awoke to discover Wolf in her home. She opened the door to let him out. He put her against it and began to sexually assault her. The woman elbowed away from him, shouting for help. Her husband in the other room grabbed a shotgun. Wolf fled.

Three days later, Wolf was found in the home of his mother, who had a restraining order against him.

Wolf said he has no memory of these events.

His case highlighted the limitations of local law enforcement when arrestees do not qualify for hospital care but still require special medical attention. Sheriff Matt Phillips has argued that, for people like Wolf, Clatsop County needs a secure detox facility.

Wolf had originally pleaded not guilty. His attorney, Lane Borg, said the switch to a no-contest plea is not an attempt by Wolf to deny responsibility or challenge the facts, but because "he has no recollection of this."

Dawn Buzzard, the chief deputy district attorney, pointed out that Wolf has a history of violent behavior, including multiple assaults often involving drugs and alcohol. "He's been a real danger," she said.

Borg said, "It is unfortunate that there was a potential for an intervention between the first burglary and the second burglary that, I believe, in large part, did not happen because of a bureaucratic dispute between the jail and the hospital, and that he was let go with methamphetamine on him, and then ... this next case happens."

Normally, Wolf's sex crime would have earned him 75 months, but the settlement negotiation led to an agreement on 70 months.

Judge Henry Kantor found that Wolf's diminished mental capacity and other circumstances made the shorter

sentence appropriate. Wolf's sentence for the burglary is 66 months, 60 of which will be served concurrent with the sex abuse charge.

Wolf will receive credit for time served. He must register as a sex offender and receive sex offender treatment, as well as treatment for substance abuse.

Buzzard read statements from the victims of Wolf's home invasions. Both women described overpowering anxiety, of fixating on whether their doors are locked, of living in fear.

"My 4-year-old daughter who was with me that day is so scared to be away from me or her father for fear someone will take her," Eide wrote. "She is constantly by our side, everywhere."

Wolf apologized to the women and said he was embarrassed by the situation. "I didn't know what I was doing," he said.

"Cases involving violent conduct that follows use of drugs, unfortunately, are not unusual," Kantor said. "And the law does say, at some point, you make the decision to use drugs, you take the consequences for what follows."

DEATHS

March 3, 2022
MARTINEZ, Tina Louise, 44, of Westport, died in Westport. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

Feb. 26, 2022
MORRISON, Sandra Kay, 76, of Astoria, died in Clackamas. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

MEMORIAL

Friday, March 11

WIRTH, Walter Bradley — Graveside ceremony at 1:30 p.m., Willamette National Cemetery, 11800 S.E. Mount Scott Blvd. in Portland, followed by a reception.

ON THE RECORD

Strangulation

• Thomas Cregan Hecox, 70, of Seaside, was indicted on Friday for strangulation, fourth-degree assault constituting domestic violence, interfering with someone's making a police report and harassment.

Assault

• John Laurence Reed, 47, of Warrenton, was arrested on Wednesday on Oregon Route 104 for fourth-degree assault constituting domestic violence and harassment.

Theft

• Samuel Joe Johnson, 31, of Astoria, was arrested on Thursday near Home Depot in Warrenton for second-degree theft and first-degree criminal trespass. The crime is

alleged to have occurred at Fred Meyer.

Criminal trespass

• Jessica Ila Weatherly, 31, of Hammond, was arrested on Tuesday for first-degree criminal trespass, third-degree criminal mischief and second-degree theft. The crimes allegedly occurred at Walmart in Warrenton.

Reckless driving

• Daniel Joe Fritz, 44, of Hammond, was arrested on Wednesday for reckless driving, a hit-and-run involving property and first-degree criminal mischief. The crash is alleged to have taken place at S.W. Ninth Street and S.W. Jade Avenue in Warrenton. Fritz was arrested at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 10:30 a.m., work session, Judge Guy Boyington Building, 857 Commercial St., Astoria.
Astoria City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

TUESDAY

Clatsop County Planning Commission, 10 a.m., (electronic meeting).
Seaside School District Board, 4:30 p.m., special meeting, (electronic meeting).
Clatsop Care Health District Board, 5 p.m., Clatsop Retirement Village, 947 Olney Ave., Astoria.
Lewis & Clark Fire Department Board, 6 p.m., main fire station, 34571 U.S. Highway 101 Business.
Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., work session, (electronic meeting).
Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.
Clatsop Community College Board, 6:30 p.m., (electronic meeting).

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State issues new virus guidance for schools

By ELIZABETH MILLER
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Beginning March 12, Oregon will end COVID-19 contact tracing and quarantine for schools.

New procedures for schools are outlined in an updated resiliency framework released Wednesday by the state Department of Education.

With the recent announcement handing decision-making authority over masks to local school leaders, the state's guidance provides information on new quarantine, contact tracing and testing protocols for schools. The new guidance is set to be in effect through the end of the school year.

Education and health officials say that contact tracing efforts lag transmission of the coronavirus, and Oregon has very high levels of immunity due to vaccines and COVID-19 cases. Officials say the duration of immunity is unknown.

During a media briefing Wednesday, Colt Gill, the director of the Department



Elizabeth Miller/Oregon Public Broadcasting

A sign at Hillsboro Online Academy last year asked people entering the building to wear masks.

of Education, said Oregon is entering a new stage of the pandemic.

"Over the last two years we have made many shifts," he said. "From 'stay at home, save lives,' to physical distancing and masking, to a reintroduction of in person learning ... each shift over the last two years has been in response to a new stage of the pandemic and its impacts, as well as our experience in learning about the effectiveness of various mitigation efforts."

Instead of contact tracing,

shared Monday.

"We would encourage schools to work to make those tests available to individuals who are at high risk," state epidemiologist Dr. Dean Sidelinger said. "That could include special education classrooms, or classrooms that serve a large number of students with disabilities so that they have access to testing."

Schools will still have access to diagnostic testing for anyone with symptoms and screening testing for unvaccinated individuals.

School districts remain required to have a communicable disease plan to deal with any outbreaks. For any individual who contracts COVID-19 and has symptoms, an isolation period of at least five days is recommended, followed by five more days wearing a well-fitting mask. Isolation is not required but is strongly advised.

"Schools do have a responsibility if they know about an individual with COVID-19, to exclude them for those five days while they are recovering," Sidelinger said.

Heat and drought hurt health of Oregon forests

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

Drought, coupled with last year's heat waves, have weakened the health of forests across Oregon.

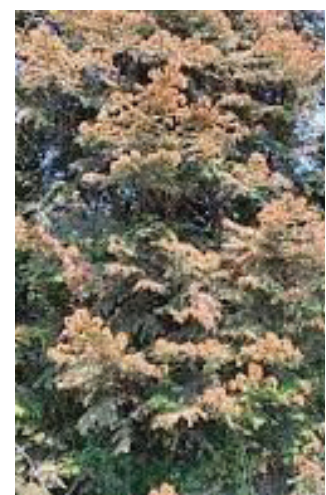
"In Oregon, we're facing several emerging issues: drought, fire, tree decline, insect outbreaks, tree pathogens and invasive species," said David Shaw, Oregon State University professor and forest health specialist with the Forestry and Natural Resources Extension.

Shaw was speaking to about 230 people at Oregon State's biennial State of the State Forest Health in Oregon conference on Tuesday.

Shaw motioned to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor map, an assortment of yellow, orange, red and maroon swatches representing the ongoing severity of Oregon's drought.

"This (drought) pattern that we're in has some serious consequences for forest health," he said.

It matters when too many



Oregon State University
Trees were scorched during a heat wave in Oregon last year.

trees die, said Andrew Gray, research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station, because healthy forests are needed to support wildlife, timber, water, recreation, carbon storage and wildfire resilience.

The past few years, Oregon forests have been suffering from biotic and abiotic factors — biotic meaning from living things, such as

invasive plants and bacteria, abiotic meaning from non-living things such as fire and atmospheric conditions.

"Between the abiotic and biotic stresses, the common thread is drought," said Danny DePinte, Oregon aerial survey coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service, who coordinates remote sensing and aerial analysis of forests via drones, planes and satellites.

The connection between drought and forest health is sometimes self-evident: dry fuels burn more easily. But drought also weakens trees, making them more susceptible to pests.

For example, DePinte said

southwest Oregon is facing an uptick in Douglas fir mortality to a pest called the flat-headed fir borer.

Robbie Flowers, a U.S. Forest Service entomologist, is also seeing intensified pest pressure.

"(Insects that defoliate trees) are coming into a larger, more prominent role in the era of these heat events and ongoing drought," Flowers said.

In central Oregon, for example, Flowers said bark beetles are a major concern.

According to DePinte, the aerial survey coordinator, another factor that damaged Oregon's forests last year was the heat dome that formed in June.

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