A2

State reports three new virus cases in county

The Oregon Health Authority reported three new coronavirus cases for Clatsop County over the weekend.

Since the pandemic began, the county had recorded 4,582 virus cases as of Monday.

— The Astorian

People for Portland proposes ballot measure to eliminate outdoor camping

Advocacy group People for Portland has proposed a November ballot measure that would redirect the bulk of the money from Metro's 2020 Homeless Services Measure toward emergency shelter and force people living on the streets to move into the shelter space.

If passed as drafted, the measure would constitute a sharp departure from the region's strategy for addressing homelessness, prioritizing shelter at the expense of securing permanent housing for people.

The measure would require at least three-quarters of the tax money from Metro's supportive housing service measure to be funneled toward emergency shelters. That ratio would remain until each county has enough beds to shelter every person experiencing homelessness in the region and each municipality is enforcing its own anti-camping ordinances.

It's not immediately clear how this measure would work under Martin v. Boise, a landmark federal court ruling that found cities could not enforce their anti-camping rules if they did not have a sufficient amount of shelter beds for everyone experiencing homelessness.

Portland Street Response to expand citywide

Starting Monday, people across Portland looking to assist someone in a mental health crisis have a new option: They can call 911 and ask for the Portland Street Response.

The unarmed emergency response program will begin serving people citywide, quadrupling the footprint of the program and bringing the police alternative to all 145 square miles of the city.

- Oregon Public Broadcasting

DEATHS

March 27, 2022 BRAKE, Robert John, 84, of Ocean Park, Washington, died in Ocean Park. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements. March 26, 2022 COPLEY, Hannah May, 79, of Warrenton, died in Warrenton. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

BIRTH

March 23, 2022

ENGBLOM, Danica and Troy, of Brownsmead, a girl, Taya Walker Engblom, born in Portland. Older siblings are Teegan and Tatym Engblom. Grandparents are Leah and Darrion Klauser, of Svensen, Patricia and Clint Larsen, of Prineville, and Gene and Julie Engblom, of Culver. Great-grandparents are Lewis and Cheryl Kinder, of Svensen, Sharon Klauser, of Astoria, and the late Robert and Harriet Engblom, of Knappa.

Infections expected to rise as new version of omicron spreads

By GARY WARNER Oregon Capital Bureau

An upswing in COVID-19 cases in Oregon is expected to hit soon, driven by infections of the hyper-contagious BA.2 version of the omicron variant, according to a new state report.

The forecast from the Oregon Health & Science University shows a much lower peak for the new wave of cases, topping out at under 300 hospitalizations per day in the first week of May, then resuming a downward trend until reaching current levels again by late June.

"The primary forecast shows a slight increase in hospitalized patients as the impacts of BA.2 and reduced COVID restrictions are experienced," said the report written by Dr. Peter Graven, the chief COVID-19 forecaster at OHSU.

The forecast is part of the mixed medical and political signals around the nation as the omicron surge that began in late November and peaked in mid-January has rapidly dropped to levels not seen since before the delta variant spike began at the end of June.

As of Friday, the statistics in Oregon showed a precipitous drop-off. Positive test results — a key indicator of future growth of the virus — were at 2.5%, down from the high point of 22.6% in mid-January. The Oregon Health Authority has said throughout the pandemic that a rate of 5% or under was manageable for health care providers.

The pandemic in Oregon



Gov. Kate Brown intends to lift the state of emergency on COVID-19 on Friday.

reached two milestones over the past week, passing 7,000 deaths and 700,000 cases.

The expected rise in cases is due to two factors, one expected, but the other an unwelcome surprise.

Even before the official lifting of indoor mask requirements, compliance with safeguards was waning. OHSU forecasters said a slowing of the drop in cases was likely as more people became exposed.

But the loosened restrictions also came as the BA.2 "subvariant" arrived in Oregon. Beginning last week, the health authority started tracking BA.2 cases, which have been small but rising. Analysis of wastewater around the state has shown traces of BA.2.

Last week, nearly all states were showing a rapid decline in cases. The BA.2 infections are seen as the main reason nine states are now showing a reversal in the trend.

BA.2 has spread rapidly in Asia and Europe. Twice as contagious as its already superspreading cousin BA.1, the BA.2 virus has caused a tsunami of new cases in China, which is reporting its highest infection rate of the 29-month pandemic, which began in Wuhan at the end of December 2019.

The World Health Organization reported 18 European countries are seeing a rise in new cases.

The organization said Friday that BA.2 was able to spread because of what it called premature removal of mask and other social distancing rules.

But the mixed messaging from medical and political sources continues. Gov. Kate Brown has announced the state of emergency that's been in place since March 2020 will end on Friday.

New York ended its vaccine mandate for athletes and performers. Los Angeles schools have ended masking. The U.S. Capitol has reopened for public tours. Hawaii was the last state to end indoor masking mandates earlier this month. The rate of people getting a first shot of vaccine has dropped off since early in the year.

While President Joe Biden continues to ask Congress for an increase in COVID-19 aid, the White House Easter Egg Roll is on for the first time since 2019.

All omicron variants so far have proven to be significantly more contagious than previous COVID-19 spikes, with the latest Oregon Health Authority statistics showing 61.9% of new infections were in unvaccinated people, while 37.7% were vaccine "breakthrough cases." Of those, 52.7% were fully vaccinated and boosted.

Most federal, state and local political leaders across the country have said they won't impose new restrictions unless a more virulent variant appears. In the United States, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are considering a request from vaccine-makers Pfizer and Moderna to approve a second booster shot for either the elderly or all adults. The shots have already been approved for immunocompromised people and some foreign nations, including Israel, are offering a fourth shot to the general public.

A federal advisory panel is meeting April 6 to discuss vaccination policy, but action could come earlier.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Federal spending bill sends millions to Oregon Coast conservation efforts

By KALE WILLIAMS The Oregonian

The \$1.5 trillion federal spending package signed earlier this month by President Joe Biden designated funding for a host of programs throughout Oregon, with millions flowing into agricultural and scientific endeavors as well as improvements to public safety. The package funded irrigation infrastructure improvements in central and Eastern Oregon, research on wildfire smoke exposure to wine grapes and efforts to increase energy efficiency at rural utilities, among dozens of other projects. A sizable chunk of the money flowing to the state will be used to bolster environmental conservation efforts on Oregon's coast, which will help aid the "blue economy," according to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, who sits on the committee that decides how to dole out government funds. "I joined the Appropriations Committee to turn input I get from Oregonians into solutions that meet our needs and support our communities," Merkley said. "This bill contains critical investments that will provide substantial funding for Oregon's Blue Economy, including salmon recovery, kelp forest restoration and stewardship, ocean education and literacy, workforce development, and so much more."



country. The Oregon chapter, run out of Oregon State University, will see about \$2.5 million, which is matched by state funding, said interim director Dave Hansen.

Though many Oregonians might not be familiar with Sea Grant, the program has funded some of the most important research that affects people on the coast. About 40% of the money the program receives goes to grants, which have funded groundbreaking research on ocean acidification and renewable energy harvested from ocean waves. Hansen stressed that although the program is run out of Oregon State, researchers from any Oregon higher education institution can apply for grant funding. He pointed to recent research out of Portland State University, funded by Sea Grant, that found microplastics in the majority of razor clams and oysters collected on the Oregon Coast. The rest of the money goes toward education and outreach, Hansen said. Sea Grant hosts ocean safety courses to help oceangoers prepare for emergencies, works with communities to prepare for coastal hazards like tsunamis and was instrumental in convening a working group on whale entanglement issues bringing together representatives from the fishing industry, whale advocates and scientists to stop the cetaceans from becoming tangled in crab fishing gear. Former President Donald Trump previously proposed eliminating the Sea Grant program's funding, though the funding was ultimately restored in Congress. Hansen credited Oregon's federal delegation for making sure the program didn't see drastic cuts. "Sea Grant is the only extension program focused on marine issues on the coast. Whether you're looking at fisheries, aquaculture or tsunamis, this is stuff that no one else does," he said. "It is great for us that our federal delegation is so supportive. That's not true in every state."

arrangements.

1 23. 2022

ON THE RECORD

DUII

• John Wesley Trent, 48, of Astoria, was arrested on Sunday at Marlin Avenue and U.S. Highway 101 in Warrenton for driving under the influence of intoxicants. • Kathlyn Leigh Rook, 33, of Astoria, was arrested on Friday at E. Harbor Drive and U.S. Highway 101 in Warrenton for DUII and following too closely. She was involved in a two-vehicle crash.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board,

5:15 p.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Ave. A, Seaside.

Astoria Planning Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Gearhart City Council, 6 p.m., special meeting, City Hall, 698 Pacific Way.

WEDNESDAY

Astoria City Council, 7 p.m., work session on Heritage Square, City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

THURSDAY

Clatsop County Recreational Lands Planning Advisory Committee, 1 p.m., (electronic meeting).

FRIDAY

Astoria City Council, 10 a.m., work session on Heritage Square, City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

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Help for kelp

Bull kelp, the trees of the Pacific coast's oceanic forests, has been in trouble for years now.

Nearly a decade ago, sea stars began dying off in coastal waters up and down the West Coast. The mysterious sea star wasting disease decimated populations of the echinoderms. As one of the primary predators of purple sea urchins, the absence of sea stars was a boon for the spiny urchins, whose food of choice just happens to be kelp.

The explosion in the urchin population was bad news for kelp, which is considered a Jamie Hale/The Oregonian

The sun sets over Face Rock State Scenic Viewpoint in Bandon on the southern Oregon coast.

foundation species because it provides important habitat for dozens of fish, invertebrates and marine mammals. Areas that used to be so thick with the bulky seaweed that they were sometimes unnavigable to boats were left barren.

Included in the federal spending package was nearly \$1 million headed to the Ocean Alliance for an aerial and underwater survey of Oregon's oceanic forests to measure the extent of the problem.

"These important habitats have undergone significant changes in recent years due to warming oceans, loss of predators, and population booms of purple sea urchins, which eat kelp," Sara Hamilton, an ocean science expert and adviser to the Oregon Kelp Alliance, said in a statement. "(The Ocean Alliance) appreciates senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden's long-standing and strong advocacy for healthy kelp forests, and their contribution to the commercial fisheries and biodiversity of Oregon's nearshore oceans."

Paving a salmon superhighway

Another big chunk of money, \$65 million, was slated to help with salmon recovery on the West Coast and in Alaska. That funding, which will be doled out in grants, will help alleviate what Chrysten Rivard, Oregon director of the nonprofit Trout Unlimited, called "limiting factors."

"Limiting factors tend to be things like fish passage, dams or culverts that the fish can't get through, and addressing estuary restoration for habitat," Rivard said.

Some of that money will likely go toward a project called the "Salmon Superhighway," which aims to remove barriers that block oceangoing fish, like salmon and steelhead, from the various types of habitats they need at different stages of their lives on Oregon's northern coast.

Lots of those barriers come in the form of road culverts, which can also pose problems for humans, Rivard said. Removal of the culverts will not only benefit endangered fish species but also help alleviate flooding in coastal communities.

"At the same time as you're improving fish passage, you are also improving human safety," Rivard said.

Though the money will have to go through the grant process, with interested parties submitting applications in a competitive process, Rivard said some of the projects could be implemented as soon as this summer.

Many of the problems plaguing the coast — such as ocean acidification and threats to salmon and kelp — are only known because of the people who research them. Much of that research, directly or indirectly, is funded through the Sea Grant program, which saw a slight bump in funding in the latest spending package.

The program's \$76 million allotment will be distributed to 34 satellite Sea Grant organizations throughout the