

IN BRIEF

Trina & Ron's Place burns in Warrenton

Trina & Ron's Place, a Warrenton restaurant on N.E. Skipanon Drive, went up in flames early Monday morning.

The fire was called in at around 1 a.m., according to Warrenton Police Chief Mathew Workman. The city's fire personnel arrived shortly thereafter. Neighboring agencies also responded. The fire was under control before 5 a.m., Workman said.

"Looks like a total loss to me," he wrote in a text.

Gearhart seeks gun ban at City Hall

GEARHART — The City Council moved forward with an ordinance to prohibit weapons at city meetings, but rejected a \$5,000 purchase of a metal detector and hand-held wand to screen visitors.

A police officer will be present at city meetings to address potential threats.

The measure comes after what the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office deemed a false gun threat in June, when conversations from private Facebook groups administered by local residents led to reports of potential gun use at a council meeting.

Cannon Beach distributes grants to organizations

CANNON BEACH — The City Council has distributed grant funding to more than two dozen organizations.

The city allocated \$90,000 in community grants for the fiscal year that started in July. The City Council approved recommendations made by the parks and community services committee.

The council distributed \$11,691 to the Cannon Beach Arts Association; \$1,201 to the Cannon Beach Chorus; \$1,154 to the Cannon Beach History Center & Museum; \$3,630 to Clatsop CASA Program; \$8,476 to Clatsop Community Action; \$7,782 to Helping Hands Reentry Outreach Centers; \$2,435 to the North Coast Food Web; \$6,678 to Restoration House; \$3,060 to South County Community Food Bank; \$2,535 to Sunset Park & Recreation Foundation; \$11,610 to The Cannon Beach Academy; \$7,750 to The Harbor; \$1,369 to The Seaside Hall; \$12,376 to Tolovana Arts Colony and \$8,250 to Wildlife Center of the North Coast.

The council also distributed \$313,318 in tourism and arts fund grants, which come from lodging taxes.

The funding was distributed to support events put on by the Cannon Beach Arts Association, Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce, Cannon Beach History Center & Museum, Cannon Beach Library, Clatsop Animal Assistance, Coaster Theatre Playhouse, North Coast Land Conservancy and Tolovana Arts Colony.

Road to Soapstone Lake Trail to temporarily close

The road off state Highway 53 that leads to the head of Soapstone Lake Trail will close for about three weeks, the Oregon Department of Forestry announced.

Felling and logging operations will be taking place in the area, the department said.

The road will be open on weekends, the department said.

Once the felling is finished, log hauling will take place on the road between 5 a.m. and 2 p.m., the department said.

Signs indicating the road closure will be posted at the junction of the road and highway, the department said.

— *The Astorian*

MEMORIAL

Saturday, Aug. 13

ROEHR, Ernestine "Joy" — Celebration of life and open house from 1 to 3 p.m., 40271 Compass Lane in Svensen.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Clatsop County Planning Commission, 10 a.m., Judge Guy Boyington Building, 857 Commercial St., Astoria.

Clatsop Care Health District Board, 5 p.m., Clatsop Community College, Patriot Hall, Room 207, 1651 Lexington Ave., Astoria.

Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., work session, City Hall, 163 E. Gower Ave.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

WEDNESDAY

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 6 p.m., Judge Guy Boyington Building, 857 Commercial St., Astoria.

Knappa School District Board, 6:30 p.m., Knappa High School Library, 41535 Old U.S. Highway 30.

Astoria School District Board, 7 p.m., Astoria Middle School Library, 1100 Klaskanine Ave.

THURSDAY

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

Astoria School District Board, 5:45 p.m., special meeting, 1100 Klaskanine Ave.

Gearhart Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 698 Pacific Way.

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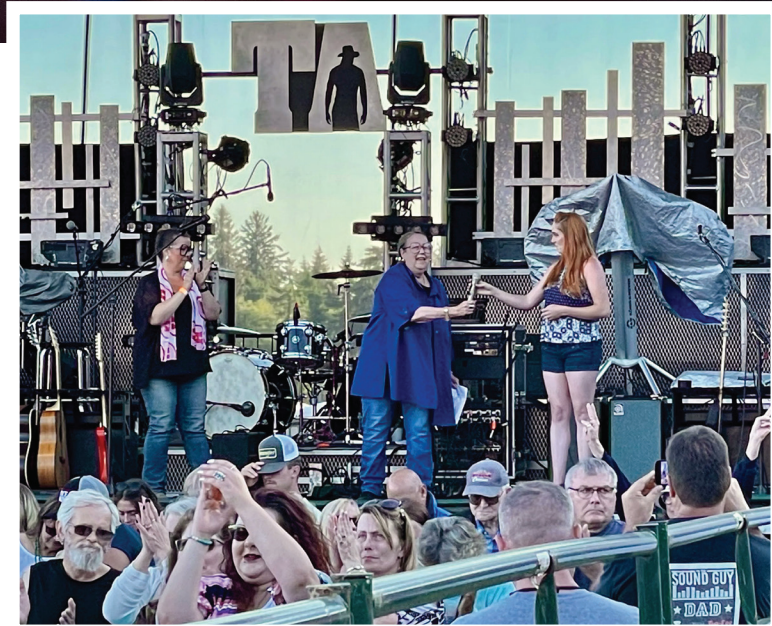
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FAIR DAYS



Betsy Johnson/Twitter

TOP: The Clatsop County Fair wrapped up over the weekend. Cows waited in stalls during the Future Farmers of America competition. **ABOVE:** Betsy Johnson, an independent candidate for governor, introduced country music star Trace Adkins. **RIGHT:** Eli Miles and his goat during the FFA competition.

Photos above and below by Lydia Ely/The Astorian



Federal study gives hope to sea otter reintroduction

Decision could be years away

By TOM BANSE

Northwest News Network

A federal study ordered by Congress concluded it would be feasible to reintroduce sea otters to the Oregon and Northern California coasts. However, that finding doesn't mean the super-cute predators will be relocated into their former ocean habitat anytime soon.

Sea otters were hunted to local extinction along the Pacific Northwest coast as part of the fur trade in the 18th and 19th centuries. The critters were successfully reintroduced to Washington state, British Columbia and southeast Alaska 50 years ago. It didn't go so well along the southern Oregon Coast, where the otters released during the same time period mysteriously vanished after a few years.

Now, a key federal agency has wrapped up a detailed look at whether it is worth trying again in Oregon. The bottom line according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, yes.

"There would be multiple substantial biological and ecological benefits to the nearshore marine ecosystem from a reintroduction of sea otters to their historical range in Northern California and Oregon," the executive summary of the newly-released feasibility and cost assessment stated.

Michele Zwartjes, a Fish and Wildlife Service Oregon Coast field supervisor and one of the study co-authors, cautioned that her agency is years away from any decision to carry out a reintroduction plan.

"There's no recommendation as to whether or not reintroduction should actually occur," Zwartjes said in an interview. "We are in the very earliest stages of even considering the possibility of reintroduction."

Zwartjes explained that



Elakha Alliance

A new feasibility assessment looked at sea otter reintroduction in Oregon and Northern California.

restoring this keystone species could launch a cascade of positive, indirect effects. Hungry otters would reduce an overpopulation of sea urchins, which in turn could result in healthier kelp forests. More widespread kelp in turn could store carbon and nurse increased fish populations. The presence of sea otters could also spur increased tourism.

However, the federal agency acknowledged there is also risk to shellfish fisheries due to predation by sea otters on crabs, clams and sea urchins. The otters have big appetites because they need to eat heartily to stay warm in the cold Pacific waters.

Therefore, the federal report recommended as a next step that an experienced, neutral facilitator convene stakeholders, agency representatives and scientific experts to hash out reintroduction options "that might present an acceptable level of risk to all parties."

Zwartjes said additional studies are also needed, including a robust social and economic impact analysis. The Elakha Alliance, an Oregon nonprofit that supports reintroduction of sea otters, is already working on its own version of that with a view toward addressing the grave concerns within the fishing industry about competition from voracious otters.

"For our part in Oregon, we've hired a commu-

nity liaison person to work with the communities on the southern Oregon Coast, where the best habitat is located," said Bob Bailey, the board president of the Elakha Alliance.

"Elakha" is the Clatsop-Chinookan word for sea otter. The conservation group previously commissioned its own feasibility study, which reached similar conclusions to the federal one released in late July.

"Restoring a population of sea otters is doable," Bailey said. "It's likely to succeed and it's likely to bring major benefits to the ocean ecosystem and local coastal economy."

People in the fishing and seafood industry remain dubious about that. The West Coast Seafood Processors Association fired off a preemptive critique of the Fish and Wildlife Service study in June and the trade group's executive director, Lori Steele, said via email Thursday that all of their concerns were still valid.

"There is no doubt reintroducing sea otters will have significant impacts on fisheries, ports and other industries," California Sea Urchin Commission chairman Dave Rudie said in a statement. "We've seen it happen already in California. Look at what happened to Pismo clams in Pismo Beach and the loss of the abalone fishery in Morro Bay and Monterey in the 1960s and 1970s."

Coastal tribes are weighing in, too. When consulted by the Fish and Wildlife Service, tribes within the area under consideration for sea otter reintroduction in California and Oregon were generally supportive, with

the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians voicing particularly enthusiastic assent.

"We vigorously support restoration of sea otters to our coast, and the bolstered resilience of our near-shore ecosystem diversity that would result from it," wrote Siletz Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley in a letter. "We have been without that relative here to help take care of us for too long."

The Quinalt Indian Nation in neighboring Washington took exception, though, and said in a separate letter that it does not support further sea otter reintroductions, even at a distance to the south. Quinalt Nation President Guy Capoman wrote that he was concerned that sea otters, once established off the Oregon Coast, would expand their range north and threaten the viability of razor clam and Dungeness crab populations that tribal fishermen depend upon.

The confluence of biological and human variables led Zwartjes and Bailey to independently describe a working concept for a limited, targeted reintroduction in a few strategic locations along the coast, if the plans move forward.

"That would potentially result in a few hundred sea otters over the coming decades, not thousands of sea otters," Zwartjes said. "So, we believe those impacts would be relatively localized."

Individual Washington sea otters occasionally stray south into Oregon waters, but haven't stuck around long term. Washington is home to about 2,300 sea otters along the outer coast and western Strait of Juan de Fuca. Expansion of the central California population northward has been blocked by a "shark alley" around Half Moon Bay. The Fish and Wildlife Service report said shark bites are a leading cause of mortality for the threatened California sea otters.

Zwartjes said there was "virtually no chance" of colonization of the vacant otter territory along the Northern California and Oregon coasts through natural range expansion within the next 10 years.

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