

## IN BRIEF

## County ends COVID-19 dashboard

The Clatsop County Public Health Department has discontinued its COVID-19 dashboard that provided updates on community outbreaks, coronavirus cases and vaccination rates.

The department will instead provide links to coronavirus information from the Oregon Health Authority and federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The change reflects a new stage of the pandemic, along with new guidance from the CDC, the department said.

People can still make appointments to get tested for the virus by calling 503-325-1000.

— *The Astorian*

## Group seeks endangered species protection for West Coast bull kelp

An environmental group is seeking Endangered Species Act protections for underwater forests of bull kelp along the West Coast.

The Center for Biological Diversity on Thursday submitted a petition to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to grant endangered status to the long stalks of kelp that are critical to Oregon coastal ecosystems.

“Bull kelp face threats from climate change, sea urchin predation and coastal development,” said Mukta Kelkar, a science intern with the Center for Biological Diversity who co-authored the petition. “And so we’re asking that the federal government step in and protect them under the Endangered Species Act.”

Bull kelp create balance in Pacific Coast communities of sea otters, urchins and sunflower sea stars. The towering brown algae also store carbon and support a vast array of marine life like salmon and abalone.

Urchins eat kelp, but otters and sea stars historically kept the spiky salad-eaters in check.

However, sea otters largely disappeared from the subtidal ecosystem of the U.S. West Coast, as trappers went after their pelts in the 18th and 19th centuries. Warming oceans have also caused rapid spread of sea star wasting disease, which has decimated sunflower sea stars, another urchin predator.

That’s led to a proliferation of purple sea urchins that are mowing down kelp forests, creating underwater wastelands and putting this vital ecosystem at risk.

“Purple sea urchins take over the previous kelp habitat and graze very destructively on what’s left,” Kelkar said. “And after that happens, it’s very difficult for kelp to recover.”

— *Oregon Public Broadcasting*

## States weigh adopting California’s electric car mandate

Seventeen states with vehicle emission standards tied to rules established in California face weighty decisions on whether to follow that state’s strictest-in-the-nation new rules that require all new cars, pickups and SUVs to be electric or hydrogen powered by 2035.

Under the Clean Air Act, states must abide by the federal government’s standard vehicle emissions standards unless they at least partially opt to follow California’s stricter requirements.

Among them, Washington, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon and Vermont are expected to adopt California’s ban on new gasoline-fueled vehicles.

Oregon regulators are taking public comments through Wednesday on whether to adopt the new California standards.

— *Associated Press*

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

## TUESDAY

**Seaside Community Center Commission**, 10 a.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A.

**Seaside Library Board**, 4:30 p.m., 1131 Broadway.

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

**Astoria Library Board**, 5:30 p.m., Flag Room, 450 10th St.

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

**Seaside Planning Commission**, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

**Astoria City Council**, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

## WEDNESDAY

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

**Seaside Improvement Commission**, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

**Knappa School District Board**, 6:30 p.m., Knappa High School Library, 41525 Old U.S. Highway 30.

**Gearhart City Council**, 7 p.m., City Hall, 698 Pacific Way.

## THURSDAY

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

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## AR-15 style rifle in Bend shooting is loved and hated

## Police say weapon purchased legally

By GARY WARNER  
*Oregon Capital Bureau*

The rifle type used in the deadly Bend shooting in late August has enjoyed a popularity boom among millions of gun owners, while it is reviled by gun control advocates as an icon of mass murder.

Police say a gunman fired more than 100 shots at The Forum Shopping Center on Aug. 28 with an AR-15 style rifle, killing two men in the Safeway supermarket. Officers found the shooter dead at the back of the store from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, next to his rifle and a shotgun.

The police description of the rifle hints at its convoluted history.

Touted for its modern, military look, the AR-15 design is actually 66 years old. It inspired the design of the M-16 rifle used since the Vietnam War, but the AR-15 itself is very rarely used by U.S. armed forces.

The AR-15 has been called “America’s Rifle” by the National Rifle Association. It’s been dubbed “Baby Killer” by gun control advocates for its use in mass murders of elementary school children in Connecticut and Texas.

The total number of AR-15 style rifles in the United States is difficult to tabulate.

An estimate of 20 million is on the website of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a firearms and ammunition industry trade group. It refers to the AR-15 variants as a “modern sports shooting rifle.”



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

A cluster of flowers and candles for the Safeway shooting victims sat on the stage in Drake Park on Thursday.

“They’re popular for home defense, recreational target shooting and hunting,” the foundation’s website says.

Colt firearms bought the patents for the AR-15 in 1959 from ArmaLite — the “AR” stands for “ArmaLite Rifle.” The design was the inspiration of the M-16 rifle, the standard American military rifle since the Vietnam War.

The patent for the AR-15 ran out in 1977, allowing companies to build generic knockoffs. But Colt retained the AR-15 trademark, so each of the more than two dozen gunmakers who have built copycat variants has had to come up with their own name. Police call the alphabet soup of brands, names and numbers “AR-15 style.”

The gun has proven so popular that no one can buy a new one. With the market flooded with competition, Colt announced in 2020 that it would no longer make the AR-15. But it held onto the name.

The AR-15 is not a machine gun.

While the M-16 is capable of firing automatically — discharging all bullets with a

single pull of the trigger — the AR-15 is semi-automatic. One bullet is fired with each pull of the trigger, but it also feeds the next round into the chamber. The system allows for a higher rate of fire than earlier bolt- or lever-action rifles.

Congress effectively banned new sales of the AR-15 in 1994, but allowed the ban to lapse in 2004. Having emerged from the prohibition, the AR-15 became a symbol for many gun rights groups. It’s often seen during open carry gun rights rallies in Salem and elsewhere around the nation. It’s been the prize in Republican rifle raffles in Portland and elsewhere.

Despite its popularity and high political profile, the AR-15 is a niche market in the American gun collection.

The United States has a population of 333 million people who collectively own 400 million guns. The AR-15 accounts for less than 5% of the total. Most guns that Americans own are pistols. Pistols are also used much more frequently than rifles or shotguns in crimes.

But the AR-15 rifle has

played an outsized role in the highest-profile mass shootings, starting in 2007 when a gunman killed six people and himself in an apartment building in Crandon, Wisconsin. In May, a gunman using an AR-15 style rifle killed 19 children and two adults at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has fueled demand for the rifle. Since 2020, an estimated 2.8 million semi-automatic military-style rifles have been sold, part of a pandemic-driven surge in gun purchases, according to Forbes magazine.

Mass shootings have also surged over the same period. There have been 450 mass shootings in the United States so far in 2022, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit group that has tracked shootings and gun deaths. The incidents are on track to break the record of 692 mass shootings recorded last year. A pistol is most often used, but the use of firearms of all types are on the rise.

Oregon voters will be asked in November to weigh Measure 114, a gun control initiative that would require permits, a background check and completion of a gun safety course before the sale of a firearm and ban ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 rounds.

Police say that the Bend shooter had four 30-round magazines with him when he died. A preliminary investigation shows that the AR-15 style rifle and other firearms were legally purchased.

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

## New study finds animal crossings can save money

## Research looked at the economics

By TOM BANSE  
*Northwest News Network*

Collisions between vehicles and large animals, like deer, are not only scary. The medical, car repair and cleanup costs really add up. That is according to a new study out of Washington State University that supports the case for building more wildlife crossings on highways.

The Oregon and Washington state transportation departments are adding wildlife overpasses, underpasses and related fencing bit by bit, as scarce funding allows. The new study published in the journal Transportation Research Record by a Washington State doctoral student looked at the efficacy and economics of those road safety improvements.

Wisnu Sugiarto, of the Washington State School of Economic Sciences, tallied the number of serious animal-vehicle collisions in the vicinity of 13 crossing structures in Washington. He compared those numbers to a control group of highway stretches that didn’t have the wildlife safety features. The raw data came from crash reports filed to the Washington State Department of Transportation from 2011 to 2020.

Sugiarto found a favorable cost-benefit analysis. The study estimated each crossing structure could save society between \$235,000 and \$443,000 annually through collision reductions. The savings varied based on structure size, design and location.

“If you plan on a structure having a 30-year lifespan, then there’s a lot of benefits,” Sugiarto said in an interview. “I hope that with this amount of benefits — in terms of quantified benefits — can give some information for transportation planners to think about.”

The study said the construction cost for a wildlife



Washington State Department of Transportation

This landscaped overpass allows wildlife to safely cross newly widened Interstate 90 near Keechelus Lake in the Washington Cascades.

underpass can range from \$500,000 to \$2.7 million. The cost for an overpass can range from \$2.7 million to \$6.2 million. Often, the cost represents an incremental add-on to a large highway improvement project.

By Sugiarto’s analysis, the more expensive wildlife bridges were more effective in reducing collisions than cheaper culvert designs. This finding derives partly from which species prefer which structure design. Deer are by far the most commonly found carcasses along state highways in the Pacific Northwest. Previous studies using wildlife cameras showed deer prefer airy, open crossings and shy away from enclosed culvert underpasses. On the other hand, tunnel-like passages appeared popular with bears and amphibians.

The Department of Transportation published a report of its own earlier this year on the benefits of wildlife crossings for road safety. Aside from matters of life and death, the department estimated the average vehicle-deer collision resulted in economic costs of \$9,175. Hitting an elk ballooned the average cost per collision to \$24,242 and a moose even more, \$42,652 per collision.

Notably, the bipartisan infrastructure package passed by Congress in 2021 created a new \$350 million competitive grant program for states, local governments and tribes

specifically to build more wildlife crossings over the next five years.

“A survey of close to 500 state and federal transportation agency representatives identified funding as the No. 1 barrier to making a national investment in wildlife crossing structures,” ARC Solutions executive director Renee Callahan said in a statement celebrating the bipartisan infrastructure package as “a crucial tipping point in improving human safety, reducing wildlife mortality, restoring connectivity and creating jobs.”

ARC Solutions is a partnership of groups seeking to promote road safety through wildlife passages.

The decadelong project to widen I-90 from Hyak to Easton, Washington, on the east slope of the Cascade Range includes a number of new wildlife underpasses. In addition, one prominent overcrossing was completed in 2018. A second overhead bridge solely for animals is planned and funded near Easton.

On a different stretch of highway, State Route 522 near Monroe, the state rebuilt a bridge with an increased

span to accommodate wildlife crossings underneath. Highway 97 in Washington’s Okanogan Valley is another deer collision hot spot getting attention.

Driving under the striking, arched and landscaped animal crossing over the six lanes of I-90 is what originally got Sugiarto interested in the topic.

“I was really curious because, first, it didn’t seem like there were any cars driving on the bridge,” Sugiarto said. “So, after I did some reading I learned that wildlife-vehicle collisions are an issue in many locations.”

During the 2022 session of the Oregon Legislature, lawmakers increased funding for wildlife crossing projects.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has focused on Highway 97 south of Bend, which had a very high rate of mule deer versus vehicle collisions. ODOT has already lined miles of this highway with 8-foot-tall fencing to guide deer and other wildlife to underpasses for safe crossing. Those sections then experienced major drops in collisions. Meantime, Oregon’s Driver & Motor Vehicles Services agency started selling specialized license plates earlier this year to raise money for projects intended to prevent collisions with wildlife.

The Washington State study did not attempt to quantify the benefit of improved habitat connectivity, but acknowledged that this is another valid reason for policymakers to justify spending on wildlife crossings. Major interstates such as I-90 and I-5 in Washington and I-405 in California sever the ranges of animals, such as cougars, and can consequently contribute to inbreeding within isolated populations.

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