

# The PO

On  
NE ALBERTA ST  
Street

Last Thursday

Complaints

Unruly 'after hours'  
upset neighbors

See Metro, page 12

Libraries

Evolve

With programs  
for immigrants  
and high  
technology

See page 5



# The Portland Observer 41

'City of Roses'



Read back issues of the Portland Observer at [www.portlandobserver.com](http://www.portlandobserver.com)

Volume XXXXI, Number 30

Wednesday • July 27, 2011

Established in 1970

Committed to Cultural Diversity

years  
of  
community service

## Safe for Swimming

### River deemed healthy as progress made on sewers

BY MINDY COOPER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Warm-weather days are finally arriving within Portland, and residents throughout the metro-area are looking for healthy places to swim within the city.

According to the state of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, despite historically high-levels of bacteria present within its waters, the portion of the Willamette River in Portland that runs under the Hawthorne Bridge is safe for residents to swim in.

The Department of environmental Quality, which monitors bacteria levels and water quality monthly, said fewer than three percent of water samples in the past decade have shown unhealthy levels of bacteria under the Hawthorne Bridge, downtown.

"I think there are a lot of misconceptions that it isn't safe," said Doug Drake, the Lower Willamette River Coordinator for the DEQ.

Historically, concerns circled around the high bacteria levels from sewer overflows and rain run offs. Drake said this is because pipes laid several years ago were designed to combine both rainwater and sewer water and overflow when the area received too much rain.

"In most of Portland there is a combined sewer system because it is more economical," said Linc Mann, the Bureau of environmental Services Spokesperson. "It combines two kinds of sewage."

According to the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services, Portland's combined sewers overflow into the Willamette River on an average of 100 days per year during

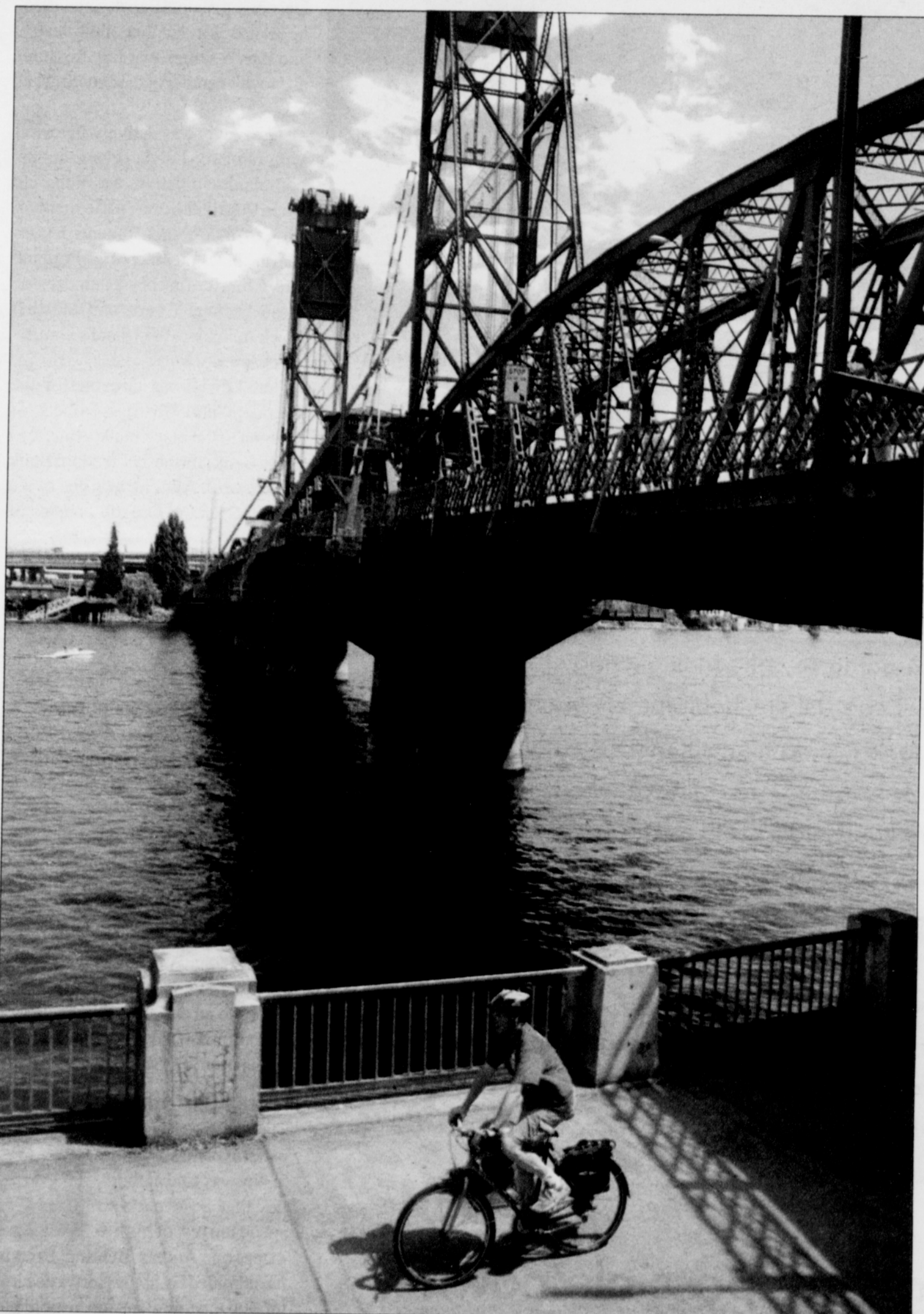


PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Willamette River at the Hawthorne Bridge in Portland gets good marks for water quality except during periods of rain, which is occurring less frequently because of the city's efforts at stopping rainwater from overflowing sewers.

wet weather—and any Portlander knows rain in the city is not a rare occurrence.

The combined system, explained Mann, includes sanitary sewage, which is anything that goes down a drain, and rainwater run-off. "The catch basins in some parts of Portland are connected to each other," he said. "This is why it is called a combined system."

Because the combined sewer overflows carry raw sewage that pollutes water and threatens quality of life, the city's environmental services said controlling the run-offs and CSOs is an important part of efforts to improve the Willamette River water quality.

"What happens is if you get enough rain, then the systems become completely full and then overflow into the river," said Mann.

Drake said this catalyzed the City of Portland to begin construction, mandated by the DEQ, for the Big Pipe Project, which began almost two decades ago.

Mann, who has worked with the city's environmental services for 14-years, said he believes it is the right thing to do to get sewage out of the Willamette River.

"We signed an agreement with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality 20 years ago, and since then we have spelled out several guidelines and reached several milestones," he said.

The City of Portland broke ground on the last of the East Side Big Pipe project, the largest sewer construction project in Portland history, in 2006. The \$464 million East Side Big Pipe is the last in a series of projects dating back to 1991 to control combined sewer overflows to the Columbia Slough and Willamette River. "We have to finish the program by December 2011, and we are on track to that," said Mann, who added, the completion will make it safer for people to swim.

continued ▼ on page 10