

PARKS: ‘There’s been less damage to equipment, less graffiti, less things broken’

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warnings already, and one person has been issued three warnings since the ordinance was put in place two months ago. If their behavior persists, Edmiston said, the next step would be to ban them from the park for anywhere from a day to a month.

“If someone is warned for doing the same thing three times in a month they’re not getting it,” he said.

Most of the warnings have been given at McKenzie Park — not a surprise given its proximity to both the high school and the police station. And in most cases, Edmiston said, the misuse of equipment that drew the warning has been students sitting and putting their feet on the equipment and counters at the Rotary cook shack.

Edmiston said the main draw of the cook shack is the electrical outlets, where teens can plug in their phones. If the city can figure out how to cut the power to the cook shack when it’s not reserved for an activity, that might migrate students away from sitting on the counters.

Some teenagers say they can see why the police would want more say in students’ behavior at parks. Daniel Robinson, 18, said he spends a lot of time at city parks and has seen police tell people if they didn’t stop mistreating the cook shack at McKenzie Park they need to leave.

“They were nice about it,” he said.

He said he understood that the ordinance helps “keep the park in order.”

Josh Yeigh, 15, said the

new rules unfairly single out teenagers, who need places to hang out together and like being able to spend time outdoors.

“They’re good parks,” he said.

Larry Fetter, the city’s parks and recreation director, said measuring progress is subjective, but he feels there has been a noticeable difference at McKenzie Park and the Funland playground at Butte Park since troublemakers have been put on notice.

“There’s been less damage to equipment, less graffiti, less things broken,” he said.

Fetter said for many teenagers it seems enough just to have a police officer warn them that they will no longer be welcome to hang out with their friends at the park if they cause problems.

Even though the parks get used more in the summer, Fetter said there tends to be fewer nuisances because the people who cause trouble are pushed out by young families and groups reserving spaces for activities.

He encouraged people to give him a call or send him an email if they see anyone vandalizing equipment or misusing park facilities in a way that could damage them. If families just retreat in the face of disruptive behavior, he said, then the teenagers who graffiti, vandalize or trash the parks “have won a victory.”

“They’ve claimed that space as their own,” he said.

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TREES: Thin-barked trees suffered the most damage

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Ryan’s death in 2014.

The tree die-off might seem a bit mystifying. The freezing temperatures that arrived in mid-November weren’t anywhere near the coldest on record, but they came at a vulnerable time. On Nov. 15, the mercury dropped to 2 degrees after some abnormally warm temperatures earlier in the month.

“The first week of November, we had high temperatures in the 50s and 60s. On Nov. 5, it was 70 degrees,” said National Weather Service Forecaster Mike Murphy. “Then it flipped a switch. Winter started almost immediately.”

The quick reversal spelled doom for varieties of trees that usually shut down gradually as temperatures drop, said retired U.S. Forest Service silviculturist Dave Powell, of Pendleton. Ideally, he said, temperatures decline gradually, descending a staircase rather than plummeting off a high dive.

“Trees have all these vessels going up and down in the cambium layer between the wood and the bark,” Powell said. “It’s just like pipes — sugars and glucose move down to feed the root system and water moves from the ground to the foliage.”

Powell said thin-barked trees such as cherries and flowering plums paid the biggest price for the temperature plunge. Their cambium zones remained full of moisture and the pipes burst.

This spring, Greg McLaughlin, owner of McLaughlin Landscaping, has fielded calls from numerous homeowners worried about dead or dying vegetation.

“This was a significant event,” he said. “I don’t know if I can recall this much damage to shrubs and trees.”

McLaughlin has observed

damaged or dead plants all over town.

“There was significant shrub die-off,” he said. “Roses got hit really hard — at least a quarter of the roses in town.”

McLaughlin said his landscapers generally use plants rated for hardiness by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for Zone 5. That means they can handle temperatures as low as -20 degrees.

This year, however, some Zone 5-rated plants didn’t survive temperatures of 2 degrees. Since the landscaping company guarantees plants for a year, that means free replacements if they die.

For trees and shrubs that are still showing slight signs of life, it is hard to know whether to wait for possible recovery or get out the chainsaw. The browning cedars that Cook noticed at Riverfront Plaza in late January are now showing tinges of green, so he is holding off, though his crews have already removed other trees.

“Some of the smaller ones we’ve already yanked,” he said. “When you bend a limb and it snaps, you know it’s dead. If it bends, it has potential.”

McLaughlin advised waiting until the end of May or early June to take out sickly trees and shrubs.

“I’ve been amazed. Sometimes they fight their way through and put on new growth,” McLaughlin said. “But, it’s getting time to call it.”

John Robertson might give his Siberian elm a little more time, but in case the tree doesn’t pull through, he’s already looking for someone who has the expertise to take it down. The elm’s huge stump, he said, might become a bench or a table.

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WIND: Sherman County produces over 1,000 megawatts of energy

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ting other wind projects.

“I appreciate the significance of your agencies’ responsibilities in Eastern Oregon, and I strongly support your efforts to ensure national defense and safe skies,” Wyden said in his letter. “I do not, however, believe that these missions should preclude further development of wind energy resources.”

The Defense Department did not respond Thursday to a request for comment. Allen Kenitzer, spokesman for the FAA’s Northwest Mountain Region in Renton, Washington, said they have received Wyden’s letter and will respond in a timely manner.

Meanwhile, wind developers are left with uncertainty over moving forward on projects that could interfere with the radar

and scare away potential investors.

Jerry Rietmann, an Ione farmer and CEO of Wheatridge Wind Energy LLC, is currently in the process of permitting a 500-megawatt wind farm in Morrow and Umatilla counties, though he said more than 70 percent of the project’s 292 turbine sites have been identified by the FAA as potential hazards.

Despite meeting with leaders in Washington, D.C., Rietmann said they haven’t been able to come to a solution. It’s been a huge source of frustration, he said, but he remains positive moving forward.

“It’s hard for me to believe, at the end of the day, there isn’t a reasonable solution to continue wind development in the region,” Rietmann said. “If not, then I guess we made a good bet and lost.”

It is not known exactly

how much it would cost to replace the radar, but Sherman County Judge Gary Thompson said it pales in comparison to the billions of dollars in potential investment from wind companies looking to locate in rural areas like his.

Sherman County is Oregon’s second-smallest by population, with just 1,765 people. Thompson said the county is now home to more than 1,000 megawatts of wind generation, bringing in more than \$8 million in annual revenue.

“It’s our biggest industry, currently,” Thompson said. “In county revenue, it surpasses farming substantially.”

That money has already gone toward building a new library and Oregon State University experiment station in Moro, Thompson said. If something isn’t

done about the radar, it could essentially put a cease-and-desist on new wind farms and cut into their economic growth.

Wyden agreed, saying the issue threatens to place rural Oregon and Washington in “economic sacrifice zones.”

“Updating the radar system in Fossil will allow communities in rural Oregon to keep growing their economies and taking advantage of the clean energy resources that are so abundant in our state,” Wyden said. “I’m urging the Obama administration to update this system — as it did with Shepherd’s Flat Wind Farm — to keep the skies safe, give rural Oregon a boost and advance low-carbon, renewable wind energy.”

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