

PENDLETON

Vandals wreck public restrooms

East Oregonian

Pendleton Parks & Recreation has closed some city park restrooms after vandals destroyed toilets and tore a stall door from a wall.

City officials said the vandalism has been a problem for a number of years and it is not getting any better.

Interim parks director Donnie Cook said his department on multiple occasions closed restrooms at Trailhead Park, Roy Raley Park and Brownfield Park because of repeated vandalism. He said the recent repair bill for the restroom at Trailhead Park, where culprits smashed porcelain to pebbles, could come to \$200, while he estimated repairing the door at Roy Raley Park at \$2,000.

Cook has been working with the parks department since 1991 and has always encountered vandalism, he said, but it has been more "violent and destructive" in recent years. Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said the destruction peaks during colder months as well as in the height of summer, and the crimes occur in spurts and most happen at night.

Cook said transients disable electronic locks on the restrooms so they can live in the facilities, yank out ventilation fan wiring to charge cellphones and defecate and urinate on the walls. Others rip off and destroy toilets and sinks and spray-paint graffiti across surfaces. Roberts noted some people start warming fires in the restrooms. Drunks leaving downtown bars often damage the restroom in Brownfield Park on Main Street.



This photo taken recently of the public bathroom at Brownfield Park shows the complete destruction done by vandals of a toilet and other fixtures.

The city parks department is trying to combat the ongoing rack and ruin. Cook said staff are repositioning security cameras to get a better look at people going in and out of bathrooms and replacing porcelain sinks and toilets with stainless steel ones. The department also reduced operating hours for the Roy Raley bathroom.

The city caught a group of three or four youth they believed had vandalized bathrooms in the past, Cook said, but there was not enough evidence to prosecute them.

Roberts encouraged anyone who sees anything suspicious at a restroom along the city's river parkway or in city parks to call police. The vandalism is costly, he said, and timely reports may help police catch any miscreants.



This recent photo shows vandalism done to a partition in a public restroom at Roy Raley Park.

Task force recommended for recurring drought

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Despite generous amounts of snow and rain this winter, Eastern Oregon is expected to continue experiencing drought in 2016 based on low soil moisture levels.

In light of this prediction from the National Weather Service, the state's water regulators want to set up a "Task Force on Drought Emergency Response" to find tools for alleviating drought impacts.

The idea recently won approval from Oregon lawmakers on the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water, which unanimously referred a bill to create the task force to the Joint Ways & Means Committee with a "do pass" recommendation on Feb. 3.

Reservoirs levels in Oregon and across much of the West are below average, which means it's too early to "declare victory" over the drought that afflicted farmers in 2015, said Tom Byler, director of the Oregon Water Resources Department.

"We're still not where we want to be, despite the good year we've been having so far," he said, noting that the long-term weather forecast for spring anticipates above normal temperatures and below average precipitation in the Northwest. The task force proposed in House Bill 4113 would consist of roughly a dozen members, with the governor appointing up to 11 and leaders in the House and Senate appointing four, said Racquel Rancier, senior policy coordinator for OWRD.

Members would examine short-term tools for dealing with drought, such as emergency groundwater usage and temporary transfer of water rights, as well as longer-term solutions, such as water storage, she said.

The task force would also improve information sharing among the diverse stakeholders, Rancier said.

The Oregon Farm Bureau is neutral on H.B. 4113 and would like to see resources dedicated to understanding the financial impact of drought across the state, said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the organization.

April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, said the task force is a step in the right direction but she agreed that Oregon State University or the Oregon Department of Agriculture should be funded

to better quantify drought effects.

Several committee members said they supported the idea but cautioned that the task force alone doesn't solve the drought problem.

"This does not check the box. We have a crisis in water supply," said Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte.

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Senators press FCC on bogus equipment fees

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Oregon's U.S. senators joined four of their colleagues Wednesday in pressing Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler about companies charging consumers for equipment they do not use.

Consumers of Internet and TV service complain more about billing than another problem, according to a statement from the office of Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden. More than 30 percent of consumer complaints in 2015 to the FCC were about Internet service billing and 38 percent were about TV service billing.

Wyden and fellow Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, joined Senators Al Franken, D-Minnesota, Edward J. Markey, D-Massachusetts, Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts, and presidential candidate Bernard Sanders, I-Vermont, in writing a letter to Wheeler about what the

shady practice.

"We are troubled upon hearing complaints of consumers being charged the modem rental fee after they have returned the rented equipment to Comcast or being charged the rental fee having never rented a modem in the first place," their letter states. "Not only are the majority of customers using automatic payment systems and may not personally authorize every erroneous charge, many consumers report having to call and remedy this problem through several billing cycles."

The lawmakers asked if and how the FCC regulates erroneous fees, how many unauthorized charges the FCC is aware of, the number of consumer complaints about erroneous equipment fees and what — if anything — is the FCC doing to address such complaints.

You can find a copy of the letter at www.wyden.senate.gov.



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