

ATV use on local state highways supported

By RICHARD HANNERS
EO Media Group

An effort is underway in Grant County to get approval for use of ATVs on state highways.

Senate Bill 344, introduced by Sen. Ted Ferrioli in 2017 and passed unanimously in the House and 29-1 in the Senate, allows the Oregon Transportation Commission to designate specific routes on state highways where ATVs could travel.

ATVs are currently allowed to cross state highways at an intersection or at a place more than 100 feet from any highway intersection. The goal of SB344 was to allow ATV riders to leave a trail at a highway and then travel on the highway a short distance to the start of another trail. Drafted by a work group made up of ATV users, vehicle deal-



Contributed photo

A group of ATV riders make their way through a wooded area of the Morrow-Grant County OHV Park.

ers and the state Parks and Recreation and Transportation departments, the legislation allows a road authority to authorize ATV use within highway rights of way in counties with less than 20,000 people.

While many rural Oregon

cities and counties adopted ordinances to allow ATV use on city and county roads, state highways typically serve as the main access road in rural communities.

The legislation established a seven-member All-Terrain Vehicle Access

Routes Advisory Committee to review applications for routes. Six members are appointed by the state parks and recreation director, and one is appointed by state transportation director.

The John Day City Council gave its consensus support Dec. 11 to forming a working group with other nearby communities to identify proposed routes in Grant County and to consider a joint application for designation.

John Day City Manager Nick Green described a presentation by Ian Caldwell, an OPRD grants and community programs representative for central and Eastern Oregon, at the Nov. 21 meeting of the South East Area Commission on Transportation.

The purpose of the legislation is to promote tourism and local recreational uses by connecting towns with

trails. Those goals align with the city's overall economic development plans, Green said.

The Transportation Commission will consider road speeds, road width and traffic volume when reviewing applications. They will also consider whether to allow ATVs on the paved roadway, the shoulder or the highway rights-of-way in a designated route.

City Councilor Gregg Haberly said he's been working on the legislation for about eight years. He noted that adjacent states have more lenient regulations for ATV use on state highways, and it's already allowed in Oregon for agricultural uses.

"As long as they let bicycles, motorcycles and smart cars on highways, then they should allow ATVs too," he said.

Changing the rules

for ATVs will help the depressed economy in Grant County, Haberly said. His proposal is to allow ATVs to travel on state highways from John Day to Prairie City, Long Creek, Monument and Seneca.

The state advisory committee will conduct field reviews of routes proposed for designation and consult with the county courts or commissions, the sheriff's offices, the land management agencies that provide ATV riding opportunities and city representatives where routes would exist.

Caldwell said that Umatilla, Baker and Lake counties have approved similar ordinances to Grant County's for ATV use.

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AP Photo/Adam Kealoha Causey

In this Dec. 31, 2018, photo, clouds cast shadows in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Comanche County, Okla. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is directing dozens of wildlife refuges including this one to make sure hunters and others have access despite the government shutdown.

U.S. orders refuges to staff for hunters despite shutdown

Tualatin River, Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually among refuges to be kept open

By ELLEN
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is directing dozens of wildlife refuges to return staffers to work to make sure hunters and others have access despite the government shutdown, according to an email obtained by The Associated Press.

The partial restaffing of 38 wildlife refuges is angering wildlife groups, who accuse the Trump administration of trying to minimize the public impact of the more than two-week-old shutdown to limit the political blowback for President Donald Trump. Trump and Democrats in Congress are locked in a dispute over Trump's demand for billions of dollars for a wall on the southern U.S. border.

In an email sent Tuesday afternoon, Margaret Everson, principal deputy director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, cites "opportunities, including hunting" that are being lost in the shutdown.

Everson advises in the email that 38 wildlife refuges around the country will bring back some furloughed staff using carryover funds.

"While many of our refuges have remained accessible, but not staffed, the extended lapse in federal

appropriations is impacting both our ability to serve the public and to protect natural resources under our care in some places," Everson wrote.

"For the next 30 days, using previously appropriated funds, we will bring back a limited number of employees to resume work on high priority projects and activities that support the Service's mission and meet the public's desire for access to Refuge lands," Everson said in the email.

An email sent to a Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman seeking comment elicited an automatic email saying she would respond to requests after the shutdown ends.

The shutdown has forced federal agencies to stop issuing paychecks for hundreds of thousands of government employees. Government services largely have been limited to the most pressing, such as Transportation Security Administration workers providing security at airports without pay.

Unlike as in some past shutdowns, the Interior Department — which oversees both wildlife refuges and national parks — initially had directed national parks to stay open but with little staffing, leading to pile-ups of uncollected garbage and human waste in parks. The National Park Service over the weekend said some parks could start using visitor fees to staff during the shutdown.

The Interior Department's shutdown plan also says a small majority of

agency staffers in charge of permitting and overseeing oil and gas development in federal waters will be kept at work no matter how long the shutdown lasts, "as they are essential for life and safety."

The Trump administration has emphasized public use on public lands in general, especially by hunters and oil and gas developers. This has angered environmental groups, which say the government is putting wildlife and habitat at risk.

On Wednesday, the National Wildlife Federation, National Wildlife Refuge Association, the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, the Trust for Public Lands and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Retirees Association urged the Trump administration to keep national parks, wildlife refuges and other public lands closed to the public during the shutdown.

"It is simply impossible to steward these shared American treasures properly, leaving thousands of lands and waters accessible to the public with no staff on site, even for an emergency," the groups wrote in a letter.

Desiree Sorenson-Groves of the National Wildlife Refuge Association criticized the partial restaffing of some wildlife refuges.

"If it wasn't essential to have these refuges open for the past three weeks, how is it essential now?" she asked. The bottom line was the Trump administration was trying to "make this less painful to the American

public," she said.

According to the email, the wildlife refuges being restaffed include Oklahoma's Wichita Mountains, scene of an annual winter elk hunt.

Rod Smith, a biologist with Oklahoma's Department of Wildlife Conservation, works with the federal government to coordinate the annual elk hunts in the Wichita refuge, 59,000 acres of craggy mountains jutting from the surrounding prairie.

Smith said Wednesday he and others are awaiting word on whether the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's directive on carryover money means a hunt can happen next week. If applicants who won the roughly 300 permits granted this year don't get to hunt by the end of January, they may have to wait until next winter.

"We've had to have patience. Wait and see is always hard," Smith said. "Then, just logistically it makes it difficult. And it will make it more difficult next year when we're carrying people over."

Other refuges identified in Everson's letter are Midway Atoll and Kilauea Point in Hawaii, Tualatin River in Oregon, Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually in Washington state, the Sacramento, Kern, Sutter and five others in California, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley refuge and four others in Texas, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal refuge in Colorado, Utah's Bear River refuge, and the Bosque del Apache and Valle de Oro refuges in New Mexico.

Moose enters hospital looking for some snacks

By RACHEL D'ORO
Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A moose wandered into a hospital building in Alaska's largest city and chowed down on some plants in the lobby as workers watched the massive animal in awe.

When a patient mentioned that security staffers were monitoring a moose that got inside the Anchorage building Monday, Stephanie Hupton dashed out and started recording.

"Didn't think we'd have a pet moose," said Hupton, who works in billing at a physical therapy office inside a building attached to Alaska Regional Hospital.

The footage shows the moose browsing around some greenery near an entrance before it stands gazing at the camera's direction. It briefly lingers before sauntering out

through an open door.

Hupton said she never felt threatened by the mellow creature. It was an experience she never expected when she moved to Anchorage three years ago from Carroll, Iowa.

"It's definitely different than small-town Iowa," she said.

The moose got inside through doors that were stuck open because of extreme cold in Anchorage, where temperatures hovered around zero Monday, hospital spokeswoman Kjerstin Lastufka said.

The plants in the warm lobby were likely inviting to the animal, who ate some of them before leaving after about 10 minutes, Lastufka said.

The moose caused no injuries or any big problems, other than the snacking.

"It was a pretty calm visit," Lastufka said.



Alaska Regional Hospital via AP

This Jan. 7, 2019, photo provided by Anchorage Regional Hospital shows a moose that had wandered into its therapy facility in Anchorage, Alaska, through doors that were stuck open because of extreme cold temperatures.

Oklahoma game warden catches poacher via dating app

CHECOTAH, Okla. (AP) — An Oklahoma woman looking for love got more than she bargained for when she unwittingly shared her exhilaration about illegally shooting a "big buck" on a dating app with a state game warden.

Oklahoma Game Warden Cannon Harrison says he uncovered the poaching in a conversation on Bumble with a McIntosh and Valle de Oro refuges in New Mexico.

shoot the deer at night, outside the rifle season. The woman only harvested the head and back-strap meat — and she sent Harrison pictures as proof.

The woman has pleaded guilty to charges of improper possession of an illegally taken animal and taking game out-of-season. She and an accomplice face \$2,400 fines.

The incident was posted to the Oklahoma Game Wardens Facebook page on Sunday night.