

TOURISTS *from page 6A*

While some practiced social distancing on the beach, others gathered in crowds.

In Historic Old Town Florence, the bulk of Bay Street remained quiet as restaurants such as 1285 Restobar shuttered their doors completely and others remained “take out only.” Inside, the open establishments adhered to social distancing policies, making customers wait 6 feet apart in lines.

But outside, groups stood closely together while eating take-out food from local restaurants on street corners and parks, while others sat on crowded patios, elbow to elbow. South of town, past the

now-closed movie theater and bowling alley, the South Jetty parking lots were packed as tourists flocked to ride the dunes. Groups of people sat in various picnic locations on tailgated trucks as the roars of ATVs filled the air.

While the tourists do present an opportunity to spread COVID-19 to the region, they also divert attention from first responders should accidents occur on the dunes. That could also put additional stress on hospitals as they prepare for a wave of COVID-19 patients.

Florence resident Mary Benson saw the crowds first-hand as she visited Heceta Head Beach over the weekend.

“We weren’t anticipating that

many people down there,” she said. “My husband and I are both very elderly and severely handicapped. So, we just thought we would go and get a breath of fresh air. Silly us.”

As the couple sat in one of two handicapped places in the parking lot, they watched as the parking spaces quickly filled up, as both tourists and residents circled the parking lot, “trying to find anywhere to park.”

“A whole group of 10 people in a large SUV moved in next to us,” Benson said. “They were apparently staying at a hotel and saying how nice it was to be staying by the beach.”

The restrooms were closed on the beach, so tourists began urinating and defecating behind the building, or working their way down to the caves on the beach to urinate there.

“It’s bad enough being stuck in the house and not being able to go out,” Benson said. “But if you’re going out to get a breath of fresh air and you’ve got all this going on all around you, I don’t think people have that much sense.”

Benson’s major concern was not the spread of COVID-19 by out of town tourists, but the issues they were leaving behind.

“The crowds weren’t so bad, but there was no oversight, nobody watching out,” she said. “It’s a hygiene issue. That stuff isn’t going anywhere. When people can go back there, (the park) is going to be unfit to be on. It’s just making a lot of work for later on.”

Benson does not believe that Brown’s order to shut parks down would do any good if social distancing could not be enforced.

“That’s not going to stop people going there,” she said. “They’re going to go no matter what. It’s very well for people to say, ‘We’re going to close them,’ but then not put anybody down there to enforce that?”

Benson felt that there should be a park ranger on site at all times to at least keep restrooms open and clean them, collect fees for the park and enforce social distancing.

“I just think it’s making work to not have somebody there,” she said.

But the argument against keeping the parks open is that

it would endanger the lives of park keepers by exposing them to COVID-19, while also encouraging more tourists to come to the Siuslaw region. This could in turn put employees in the region, such as gas stations attendants, at risk of contracting the disease — as well as deplete resources from local grocers.

Siuslaw was not the only region visited by tourists over the weekend, and multiple coastal governments attempted to clamp down on the number of visitors to their community.

“Pack your bags and leave immediately,” Tillamook Mayor Suzanne Weber told tourists over the weekend. “Our community is small and our resources are few. Our community is not equipped to handle a significant community health crisis with tens of thousands of additional people.”

Cannon beach issued a resolution stating: “All visitors within the city’s jurisdiction are ordered to evacuate within 24 hours. ... A visitor is defined as any individual who is spending time in the city for pleasure, recreation or non-business reasons and is not a resident, property owner or business owner.”

However, it was difficult for cities to stop tourists. The majority of Siuslaw region tourists were on state and national grounds, away from the jurisdiction of governments such as the City of Florence and Lane County. To be able to stop the tourists, a statewide decree was needed — which the governor implemented through Monday’s executive order.

The reasons for the severe regulations can be seen in a new study published by Columbia University and released in The New York Times on March 20. In that study, which tracked possible infections for every county in the U.S., three possible outcomes were analyzed: spread with no control measures, some control measures and severe control measures.

Until Monday, Oregon fit into the “some control measures” category, as was seen in Florence over the weekend. Some businesses were restricted while others were allowed to remain open.

In that case, the study pre-

dicted 100 total cases in Lane County by April 1. The numbers would continue to slowly rise, with only 700 cases by April 14. However, by April 26, the cases were predicted to rise to 2,800 — and by May 10, the county would see as many as 11,000 cases, representing 3 percent of the county’s population. Mid-May is when the cases would begin to spike, with 38,000 cases by May 25.

As a result, 21 percent of the population would have COVID-19 by June 4.

This trend of exponential growth would continue through mid-June with 66 percent of Lane County testing positive by Aug. 1 — with 230,000 cases of coronavirus infection.

Underscoring those numbers is a CDC report released March 18, which studied the fatality rates of individuals in the U.S. already diagnosed across the nation with the virus.

“This first preliminary description of outcomes among patients with COVID-19 in the United States indicates that fatality was highest in persons aged 85 [and over], ranging from 10 percent to 27 percent, followed by 3 to 11 percent among persons aged 65 to 84 years,” the CDC report stated.

One to three percent of persons aged 55-64 years old are dying, while less than one percent of persons aged 20-54 are being reported.

The United States Census states that 41 percent of City of Florence residents are aged 65 years and older. It’s an equation that could have devastating consequences in the event of a mass outbreak of COVID-19 in that population.

And the fatality risks could increase for younger populations if the hospitals become overloaded.

The CDC’s numbers are based on current infections, most of which are being treated with interventions such as ventilators.

One-in-four New York City patients with COVID-19 who require hospitalization are under 50 years of age. If a spike of infections overloads hospital systems, those younger patients that are currently being cared for could face increased fatality risks — as well as an increase

in fatality rates among elderly patients.

The Columbia study suggested that the only way to avoid these numbers is to enact “severe control measures,” such as those enacted by Brown.

In that scenario study, Lane County would see less than 11 cases by April first, fewer than what would occur if the state remained at “some” measures. Lane County would not hit a 1-percent infection rate until June 28, with 3,400 cases. By Aug. 1, just 3 percent of Lane County would have COVID-19.

With just 9,200 cases, the county would have 220,800 fewer cases than what would occur with “some control measures.”

In the case of severe measures, hospitals could remain stable and the fatality rate could remain low.

But how long the isolation is needed to keep numbers low is not stated by the Columbia study. More than likely, isolation measures would need to be intact until a vaccine could be found, with estimates on that lasting as many as 18 months. This has raised questions about whether the economic damage of the restrictions could be worse than fatalities caused by the disease.

“We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself,” President Donald Trump wrote on Twitter on March 23. “At the end of the 15-day period, we will make a decision which way we want to go!”

Even though Brown was expected to institute a statewide “stay-at-home” order, for weeks she was hesitant to do so, citing concerns of the economic impact it would have.

In just three days, Oregon unemployment claims jumped from 800 to 18,500 after Brown instituted some control measures.

The concerns are shared by Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, which stopped short of saying Oregon is headed for a recession in its March 17 report. However, “It is likely that until the public health situation improves, or at least the fears subside as health policy plans are announced, the economic damage will continue to mount.”



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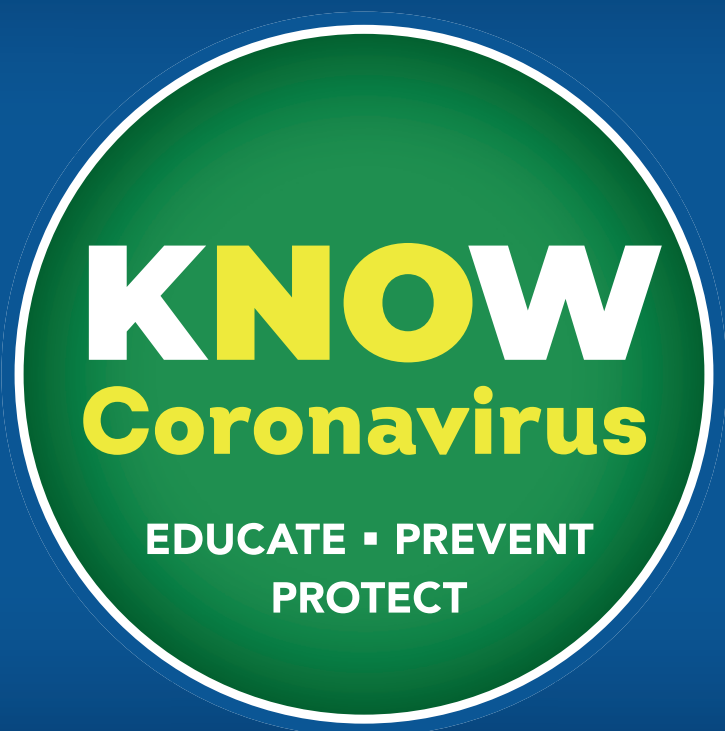
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The discovery of the new coronavirus, (COVID-19), leaves many people with questions. Your best defense is to learn the facts.

The best way to prevent COVID-19 is to avoid exposure. Because COVID-19’s symptoms are so similar to a cold or flu, it’s crucial for everyone to have access to medical care from home. That way, you can avoid exposing yourself—or others—to the virus.

We want to break down as many barriers to virtual healthcare as possible. That’s why, during this turbulent time, **our partners at Zoom+Care are offering cost-free COVID-19 risk assessment via ChatCare in Oregon & Washington.**

For more information, visit **peacehealth.org/coronavirus**.



To chat with a provider, log on to **zoomcare.com/chat**.