

Local estuary partnership included in protection funding plan

A new law expands a program to protect and restore estuaries throughout the nation, including the lower Columbia River.

The Protect and Restore America's Estuaries Act had strong bipartisan support and was signed into law on Jan. 13. The act reauthorizes the National Estuary Program and nearly doubles the annual funding for the program.

"Estuaries are often overlooked and undervalued, but they are a key tool in our work to solve the climate crisis," said Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore. "As co-chair of the Congressional Estuary Caucus, ... I am com-

mitted to securing additional resources to protect our precious coastal ecosystems. I applaud the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership for leading outstanding resiliency efforts in the Pacific Northwest to restore and protect habitat, improve water quality, restore flood plains, and address marine debris."

Oregon and Washington congressional leaders unanimously voted in support of the bill.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., wrote the Columbia River Basin Restoration Act.

"Estuaries provide critical habitat for waterfowl, migrating birds, fish, and other wild-

life—all invaluable elements of Oregon's natural beauty," Merkley said. "The Columbia River estuary, in particular, is a local treasure, and I'm pleased that this bill will ensure a robust National Estuary Program will continue."

Funding will support research, restoration, water quality, community engagement, and programs to address threats to the nation's estuaries.

The act also ensures national estuary programs take climate change and extreme weather events into account and it expands grant eligibility for organizations working to address stormwater runoff,

coastal resiliency, and accelerated land loss issues.

The National Estuary Program was established in 1987 by amendments to the Clean Water Act and is a program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Twenty-eight national estuary programs exist across the United States, including Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership and Tillamook Estuaries Partnership.

In Oregon and Washington, the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership was founded in 1995 when the lower Columbia River was declared an estuary of national significance.



A contractor works on an estuary survey last year.

Crime: Walmart's security department has led to the arrest of many shoplifters

Continued from Page 1

— a 19 percent drop that went from 87 cases in 2019 to 70 in 2020. He expects an even greater drop in 2021 as the full effect of Senate Bill 110 is felt. The new law decriminalizes many drug-possession crimes.

With more people at home, Workman said he was surprised to see a small drop in disturbance calls, rather than an increase. However, police answer many of those calls at bars and other businesses. Last year, the agency responded to 1,022 disturbances.

Property crimes decreased 9 percent, from 1,254 calls in 2019 to 1,143 last year. A property crime occurs when someone's belongings are stolen or destroyed without the use or threat of force, such as burglary, vandalism and arson.

Many Warrenton residents have wondered about Walmart's contribution to the crime rate.

"Even before the Warrenton Walmart opened on June 13, 2018, I would regularly get questions on what I thought



Walmart has two parking spots reserved for police officers.

the store would do to our call volume and levels," Workman wrote. "My routine answer would be that any large retail store will have an effect on the call volume and statistics for my department."

There have been an increase in calls where Walmart stores have opened throughout the United States, Workman told city commissioners.

"They do produce 33 percent of all calls for the city of Warrenton," he said. "... That's huge. Fred Meyer is not that far behind."

Both stores employ loss-prevention personnel



Police Chief Matt Workman

and have intricate security systems to spot and stop shoplifters. Home Depot recently established a loss-prevention department at its Warrenton store.

Workman also compared calls between Walmart, Fred Meyer and Costco, the city's three big-box stores that had security departments in 2018, 2019 and 2020. He included calls that may have been handled by other agencies, including Warrenton Fire Department, Clatsop County Sheriff's Office, and Oregon State Police.

Thefts and arrests were

highest at Walmart while disturbance and other types of calls, such as fender-benders in the parking lot, were fairly steady across the three stores.

Last year, Walmart accounted for 33 percent of the city's theft calls, Fred Meyer had 14 percent, and Costco, which is a members-only store, had 1 percent. For assault and disturbance calls, Walmart made up 6 percent of calls, Fred Meyer had 5 percent, and Costco had 3 percent.

At all three stores, the most likely time for a police call is between 6 p.m. and midnight. The next busiest time is between noon and 6 p.m.

Workman also reported on trends and changes within the department during 2020.

Overtime was up, as officers filled in during staff shortages. Commissioner Rick Newton warned against consistent use of overtime, which in 2020 could have paid for another full-time officer.

"Overtime is a very dangerous thing. It's like a double-edged sword," Newton said. When it becomes standard practice, "any time you

reduce overtime, you can have a morale problem because people have learned to live on more money."

A new practice, which began in the middle of 2019, is use of clearance codes to distinguish when a contact involves someone who is homeless, or physically or verbally aggressive. Astoria and Seaside also have adopted the codes.

"2020 was a very unique year for everyone, presenting multiple challenges and changes that affected all of Warrenton's citizens and visitors," Workman wrote in his report.

"... (T)he men and women of the WPD persevered through these challenges and remained committed to community policing by being involved in numerous community events, all while continuing our duty to protect and serve."

Among the events: story time at the library, Shop with a Cop at Christmas, buddy programs, Warrenton High School's virtual graduation and parade, Trunk or Treat at Halloween, and drug take-back events.