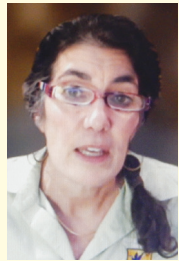


Feds ponder a return of Oregon's sea otters

BY CINDY YINGST
The Columbia Press

Oregon's last living sea otter was killed by fur hunters a century ago.

Otters are in the news again after a study of their reintroduction to the state was included in last year's federal budget, signed into law by President Trump in December 2020.



Zwartjes

"They've been lost off the coast since the early 1900s," said Michele Zwartjes, field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Oregon remains the only (coastal) state without otters."

The agency is tasked with completing by the end of the year a report on the cost and consequences of reintroducing otters to Oregon. There is no active proposal to reintroduce them. Yet.

The Elakha Alliance, named for the Clatsop-Chinookan word for sea otter, has been working to bring otters back to the Oregon Coast and was successful in working with U.S.



David Ledig, Bureau of Land Management

A lack of sea otters off Oregon's shores has led to an overpopulation of sea urchins.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., to add the feasibility study to the federal budget.

The group argues the mammal's return would bring balance to the ecosystem. Others have argued that, just as sea lions are a hit with coastal visitors, otters could boost tourism, too.

"Some people are very excited about

it and the tourism aspects it could bring," Zwartjes said. "On the other hand, shellfish fisheries are very concerned."

Otters' favorite foods include crab, clams, oysters, and mussels — commodities many Clatsop Coun-

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Firefighters step up as vaccine deadline passes

BY CINDY YINGST
The Columbia Press

Fears that Warrenton's largely volunteer fire department would be decimated by the COVID-19 vaccination mandate have been quashed.

All but two of the volunteers are now either vaccinated or have filed legitimate medical or religious exemptions, Chief Brian Alsbury said.

"It's great news," he said. "It is just phenomenal that everyone did the right thing."

The best news: The city has four new volunteer firefighters.

In late September, 15 of the city's 23 paid and volunteer firefighters were unvaccinated and nearly all of the unvaccinated told the chief during a staff meeting that would not abide by the mandate. Others who are vaccinated had threatened to walk off in solidarity.

Mayor Henry Balensifer wrote to Gov. Kate Brown asking her to exempt rural firefighters from the vaccination mandate, warning he might request she send the National Guard if no volunteers were available to answer medical calls. She was not swayed and the mandate went into effect Monday.

"We had a bunch of them kind of have a change of heart," Alsbury said.

As of Tuesday, Warrenton Fire Department had 23 volunteer firefighters and three paid staff members. Seven have been exempted for religious or medical reasons, one requested a six-month leave, and the final unvaccinated medical worker resigned to



Alsbury

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High school focuses on teaching real-world success

Workforce Prep goes beyond churning out trained employees

BY CINDY YINGST
The Columbia Press

Imagine graduating from high school without knowing how to succeed in the working world. An education is meant to prepare the learner for a valuable job, right?

Yet there are 4.6 million Americans

ages 16 to 24 — about 1 in 9 — who are neither enrolled in school nor working, according to the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions.

Once they've disconnected from school and work, it's unlikely they'll ever find a job that can support a family.

This year, Warrenton High School established a Workforce Prep class designed to reach those "opportunity youth," as they've been called, and the school has joined forces with TechBridge, an Atlanta-based nonprofit organization. Its mission includes

providing marketable skills to those living in rural or impoverished areas.

Internet technology is TechBridge's specialty and the company agreed to work with Warrenton as its high school pilot program.

"I was looking to create a class that dealt with students learning soft skills in the business world," Principal Rod Heyen said. "Soft skills" include interpersonal and behavioral issues and things like resume writing, interviewing well, and maintaining a clean social media profile.

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