

Board selects outside interim fire leader

By Dani Palmer
Cannon Beach Gazette



JIM STEARNS

The Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District's new interim fire chief is on duty. The district's Board of Directors introduced Jim Stearns, of Hermiston, to the public during its regular monthly meeting.

The district provides firefighting and emergency service to the communities of Cannon Beach, Arch Cape and Falcon Cove. Board members interviewed Stearns and two other Special Districts Association of Oregon candidates, Dale Kamrath and Doug Dawson, in November in executive session. During a special meeting on Dec. 2, they selected Stearns.

"I think he'll be a good new addition," Board President Sharon Clyde said.

Former fire chief Mike Balzer was dismissed in mid-October due to personnel issues and Assistant Chief Frank Swedenborg has covered his post since. Stearns is working with Swedenborg, who is ready to retire and not looking to fill in permanently, to transition into the role.

Stearns spent 31 years — 20 as chief — with Hermiston Fire and Emergency Services. He has served on the state's wildfire management team, performing as incident commander at one point, and been on a federal interagency wildfire team that primarily covered the Western states.

He has also volunteered for the Sumpter Volunteer Fire Department, where he owns a cabin.

"I retired and didn't take to retirement well," he said.

Cannon Beach is Stearns' third interim gig since he began working for the Special Districts Associ-

ation of Oregon. He most recently served as Washington County Fire District 2's interim chief for six months.

He will likely be in Cannon Beach for half a year, as well.

Stearns is staying in the Cannon Beach RV Resort. His wife, Becky, is a retired school teacher who's splitting her time between Cannon Beach and Hermiston. They have a daughter in Medford and two sons in the Seattle area.

Stearns said he is "anxious to meet folks in the community" and encourages residents to stop by and visit. When he interviewed for the position there were volunteer firefighters in attendance along with board members.

"It seemed clear to me everyone wanted to focus on the community and the department being an active part of that community," he said. "That's what I like to see and do."

There has been some community opposition to Balzer's termination. Residents expressed disappointment in the board's handling of the situation during its November meeting.

Stearns said his outlook is to "start from today and move forward."

He and the Special Districts Association of Oregon will assist in the search for a permanent Cannon Beach Fire and Rescue leader.

Violets return to Clatsop Plains

Violets return to lure threatened butterfly back

By Katherine Lacaze
EO Media Group

CLATSOP PLAINS — About 9,000 early blue violet seedlings, native to the region, found a new home — or rather, returned to home — at sites across Clatsop Plains, assisted by volunteers from local communities who helped the North Coast Land Conservancy during the organization's two-day violet planting event Nov. 20 and 21.

Planting the flower seedlings was the latest chapter in the conservancy's decade-long quest to restore a prairie habitat on the Clatsop Plains and Long Beach (Wash.) Peninsula that will bring back a robust Oregon silverspot butterfly population, which is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The diet of the butterfly larvae consists entirely of dried violet stems and leaves.

There to get the violets into the ground were nearly 90 volunteers, including about 20 students from Seaside High School's National Honor Society and art of ethnobotany classes. Community members joined in from as far away as Newport and Lincoln City, with only a few repeat volunteers between the two days.

"The fortunate weather certainly favored our high turnout," Stewardship Director Melissa Reich said.



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

North Coast Land Conservancy Associate Director Jon Wickersham (left) oversees volunteers from Seaside High School who helped plant more than 10,000 early blue violets on the Clatsop Plains.

Using native plants

The early blue violet shoots were developed from seeds collected since 2006 at Camp Rilea and elsewhere on Clatsop Plains. From there, seeds were taken to the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Plant Materials Center in Corvallis to be planted. When the seed pods reached maturity, the center gathered the flowers' scattered seed to make a stock of more than 16,000 seeds.

"We keep the seed from the different regions separate because the habitat and conditions are different," Reich said. "Our violets need to thrive in very sandy soils and coexist with all the other native dune prairie plants in the area."

In 2014, a bag of Corvallis-grown violet seeds was sent to the North Coast Restoration Partnership's temporary native plant nursery in Tillamook. A group of young men from Camp Tillamook, an Oregon Youth Authority facility, filled thousands of plastic plug containers with seeds.

The seedlings spent most of 2014 and the winter of 2015 at the nursery, where they were exposed once again to the coastal environment. In July, the conservancy collected thousands of the burgeoning shoots and brought them back to the organization's Circle Creek property near Seaside to continue maturing in time for fall planting.

On Clatsop Plains, approximately 9,000 violets

were placed at two sites owned by the land conservancy — Neacoxie Forest and Reed Ranch — and one site owned by the National Park Service — John B. Yeon Scenic Corridor. The conservancy is planting the violets into plots treated last fall by an excavator that removed topsoil.

"We waited a year after the treatment to give the little violets an extra year to grow and develop their roots," Reich said.

Overall, the group had about 16,000 violets. The remainder were planted at the conservancy's Surf Pines property and are going to be planted later at the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge on the Long Beach Peninsula, Reich said.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Tuesday, Dec. 22

Cannon Beach Public Works Committee, 9 a.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Monday, Jan. 11

Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors Meeting, 6 p.m., 188 W. 2nd St.

Monday, Jan. 19

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin St.

Monday, Feb. 8

Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors Meeting, 6 p.m., 188 W. 2nd St.

Monday, Feb. 16

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin St.

Monday, March 15

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin St.

Monday, April 19

Seaside School District, 6 p.m.,

1801 S. Franklin St.

Monday, May 17

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin St.

Monday, June 21

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin St.

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