

HECK GNAW!

Porcupines spotted in Clatsop County

By Katie Frankowicz and Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

A Clatsop County timber company saw porcupines for the first time in forestland around the Ecola Creek watershed near Cannon Beach this summer.

Squashed, dead porcupines are a common sight on the side of highways on Washington state's Long Beach Peninsula, and hikers occasionally spot live ones lumbering down trails and logging roads around Willapa Bay.

But they are rare in Clatsop County — even though the same mixed hardwood and coniferous forest habitat the large, stumpy-legged, quill-covered rodents prefer exists here. The Lewis and Clark National Historical Park between Astoria and Warrenton keeps a list of animals spotted in its dense, forested land. Porcupines aren't on it.

But contractors for Greenwood Resources investigating porcupine-related damage to young stands around the Ecola Creek watershed have now trapped 17 porcupines in a 1,500-acre area.

These sightings are the first official reports of porcupines in Clatsop County received by the local Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife office, said Michelle Dennehy, a spokeswoman for the department.

But she doubts the porcupines seen on Greenwood's land are new to the area. Likely, they've been here all along, and the sightings could be a sign that the population is growing.

'A balance'

Depending on where they are, what they're doing and how many of them are around, porcupines are either an exciting wildlife sighting or a threat capable of damaging acres of young, valuable trees.

For Greenwood Resources,

a timber company that prides itself on a commitment to responsible stewardship and has been praised for its collaboration with local land conservation groups, it's a little bit of both.

"We want to embrace the critters. This is their home," said Kathryn Olson, an area forester with Greenwood Resources based in Gearhart. "But it's a balance."

It is not unheard of for timber companies to trap and kill porcupines, sources in Washington state and Oregon say.

Georg Ziegler, animal damage control supervisor with the Washington Forest Protection Association, says identifying markers such as bark being stripped away and eaten and distinctive tooth marks make it clear when porcupines are to blame for tree damage. He said they can take a heavy toll on industrial timberland.

Porcupines can weigh up to 40 pounds, but despite their bulk they will climb high in young trees, gnawing around the trunks — "girdling" them — eating the bark. They may expose roots and clip branches in their foraging, making the trees more susceptible to disease and decay.

A draft management plan for the Elliott State Forest in Coos and Douglas counties named porcupines on a short list of wildlife species — including beaver, elk and

black bear — that were causing damage in the forest. The damage, the plan's authors note, was "sporadic and occurs in varying severity as to the number of trees damaged."

Growing population

Porcupine populations are believed to be robust in Oregon. The rodents are found mostly east of the Cascade Range, but they have become more common in western Oregon, as well, Dennehy said.

On public land, they are considered unprotected mammals; people who want to trap or hunt them have to apply for a furtaker license through the state. The season is open the entire year and the state does not track harvests. In general, there tends to be very little public interest in hunting porcupines, Dennehy said.

On private lands, the state considers them predatory animals for the damage they do to tree saplings and they can be trapped without permits.

"The porcupine range has been expanding slowly for the last 30 years or so," said Dennehy. "ODFW saw much the same reaction in Tillamook County 25 years ago when the 'first one' showed up as roadkill and people were flabbergasted."

Not anymore.

"They're fairly common in Tillamook now, though the county isn't overrun with them."

Olson grew up in Clatsop County and has seen a few porcupines during her time here. She has also seen evidence of porcupine-related damage in the woods she helps manage for Greenwood, but she and other foresters weren't worried about a few girdled trees here and there.

This summer, though, they saw several acres where numerous 10- to 20-year-old trees had been hit. Most of these trees will likely die or bush out, Olson said, losing their value. In her seven years with the timber company, she has never seen the level of damage they are seeing now.

Next year, Greenwood expects to initiate an annual program to monitor where porcupine activity is taking place and if it is occurring in stands that are particularly vulnerable. The company will work with contractors to establish acceptable and unacceptable levels of damage that will guide when, if necessary, more animals need to be trapped and killed.

Zoning change pushes Seaside campus ahead

By R.J. Marx
Cannon Beach Gazette

Before shovels can break ground for a new high school campus, Seaside needed to rezone two parcels — one 40 acres and the second 49 acres.

With the third reading of two ordinances Monday, Oct. 9, the Seaside City Council opened the door for development of the campus, designed to replace old and vulnerable buildings in the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

"It's one more step in the process of moving forward," Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley said after the council meeting. "The meeting tonight was really about clarification of wording and setting up clearly stated ordinances that reflect the urban growth boundary change."

The property, located at 2000 Spruce Drive, includes the residential portion of the existing Seaside Heights Elementary School site outside the wetlands zone.

The new campus, approved by a \$99.7 million bond vote in November, will be built on 89 acres, 49 of that designated as county forest and the other 40 zoned residential. Both these designations will be changed to institutional campus as a result of the City Council approval, clearing the way for the campus, with a total project budget of almost \$113 million.

In making their decision, city councilors relied on testimony and input from the school district, the comprehensive plan, and Planning Commission decisions.

Late changes and updates to the ordinance contained revised tax lot

numbers and other minor changes, consultant Greg Winterrowd of Winterbrook Planning said.

"What the new ordinance does is make sure we are talking about the right properties," Winterrowd said.

Planning Director Kevin Cupples delivered revised findings, along with a response sheet directed to public concerns.

Findings determine the two ordinances comply with state planning goals as well as city and county review standards.

During a public comment period, John Dunzer, a resident, presented a summary of an appeal he planned to submit to the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

In previous meetings, Dunzer said the city could find alternate sites within the urban growth boundary that did not require building a new campus.

Mayor Jay Barber and councilors Tita Montero, Dana Phillips and Steve Wright voted for the rezoning and comprehensive plan change. Randy Frank, Tom Horning and Seth Morrissey were absent.

Architects Dull Olson Weekes anticipate the design phase to reach next June, when construction could begin. The campus is slated for opening in the fall of 2020.

"We're still in the design-development phase and that's a long, complex process," Roley said. "The City Council has been very helpful in guiding us through this process properly."

Approval is subject to the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners and takes effect upon the board's approval.

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