



BRENNA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

The Mola mola that washed ashore in Cannon Beach.

Holy Mola mola!

Cannon Beach Gazette

Visitors to Cannon Beach met up with this sea creature Sunday morning.

It was identified as a Mola mola, an ocean sunfish, nearly 7 feet long, according to Tiffany Boothe of the Seaside Aquarium.

Having the Mola mola swimming in the waters of the North Coast is not uncommon, but having one wash ashore only happens a couple times a year, she said.

The fish are surface dwellers, and while the one found on the south end of the beach near Tolovana was about 7 feet long, they can grow to be about 11 feet long. They're the largest bony fish recorded and are known for carrying a multitude of eggs.

"It's not that uncommon, but usually when we have them wash up they are smaller," Boothe said. "The Mola mola is in our area in the summer. During the fall and spring if they get washed up on the beach, they are usually coming from storms from the south."

Sunfishes garnered a lot of attention in 2015 and 2016 after turning up in Alaska due to warm water blob in the Pacific Ocean.

Boothe said the warm water current that brings the Mola mola northward has been trending closer to the shore in the past couple years, which could increase the likelihood of seeing these sunfish wash up on the beach.

"It's a cool fish people don't get to see very often," Boothe said.

'The World of Haystack Rock'

"The World of Haystack Rock" library lecture series is free to the public and held second Wednesday of each month, November to April from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Cannon Beach Library, 131 N. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach. Scheduled lectures include:

Wednesday, Nov. 8, "Marine Mammals, They Don't Eat Grapes" Dr. Debbie Duffield, professor at Portland State University

and coordinator for the Northern Oregon/Southern Washington Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

Wednesday, Dec. 13, "The Puffin Study" Shawn Stephenson, features wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Wednesday, Jan. 10, "The Marine Reserves Research Project" presents Wolfe Wagman, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Past paperwork errors hinder fire grants

FEMA grants harder to secure due to past paperwork errors

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Issues with past grant paperwork could make it harder for Cannon Beach Rural Fire District to secure certain types of future funding.

In 2016, the volunteer fire department applied for two different grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency: one to fund a new volunteer recruitment and retention position, and the other to hire a fire inspector. Both were denied, due in part to the district's failure to properly close out a grant received in 2010, Division Chief Marc Reckmann said.

"When FEMA approves or denies a grant, part of the scoring is looking over seven years at your completion and performance," said Reckmann, who wrote the grant applications.

"In 2010, the district received a grant for turnouts, which required a period performance report to be filed a year after and a closeout report after the grant was done in 2014. Neither were done."

The grant was applied for and used under both former fire chiefs, Cleve Rooper and Mike Balzer. Neither Reckmann or current Fire Chief Matt Benedict were associated with the district in those years. The reason why the reports weren't filed are unclear.

What they do know is soon-to-be expired breathing equipment, outdated communication gear and other department needs will need to be funded in the near future. FEMA grants are a significant avenue for volunteer rural fire departments to pay for this kind of equipment.

But if the reporting errors continue to impact the department's competitiveness for



Chief Matt Benedict

these grants, the district may have to pursue other fundraising strategies to make ends meet.

"We're working to get notes from FEMA so we know what to do better next time," Reckmann said. "This isn't the end. We will keep applying. These issues may have played a role, but how large of one I don't know."

Current needs

Like many departments across the country, recruiting and retaining firefighter volunteers is a challenge. The department has about 18 volunteers, when it is ideal to have about 30.

"In general, it is hard to recruit volunteers, but in Cannon Beach it is even harder," Reckmann said. "With the cost of living so high, it is hard to find volunteers who can afford to live here and are also able-bodied to do the job."

To address this, Reckmann and Benedict applied for a grant to create a recruitment

and retention specialist who would figure out what resources are available to solve the problem. This person would explore different community partnerships in the hopes of expanding the program, Reckmann said.

Reckmann and Benedict are the only two paid employees of the fire district. While they each do their best to recruit volunteers, the necessity to retain volunteers for the safety of the community is a job in itself.

"I don't think most people in the community think of our firefighters as volunteers. When they show up on scene, they don't have a clue who is volunteer and who is paid," Reckmann said. "They just expect a firefighter who does their job."

Future hurdles

In the next five years, the department will need to replace all self-contained breathing equipment and two 22-year-old fire engines, Benedict said. The breath-

ing equipment will expire in 2019, and in total will cost about \$300,000 to replace in full. Up-to-date fire engines usually run around \$450,000 each, Reckmann said.

The department is also looking to replace outdated radios and repeaters. Because of the geography of the region and weak signals, first responders often have issues communicating with each other in places like Hug Point, where they often go for search and rescue calls.

"It's hard to command the scene when you have to walk back to your truck to communicate. Then you don't have eyes on the situation," Reckmann said.

Strict federal and state guidelines mean not replacing this equipment is not an option. If the department continues to be penalized for old reporting errors, Benedict will continue to look for other matching grants, but in the meantime could problem-solve by buying used equipment incrementally rather than in batches.

For the engines, Reckmann said proposing a levy may be necessary down the road.

"It may come down to decreasing the number of engines we use, buying used or getting a bottle at a time just to get us by. We can do that," Benedict said. "We will do what we need to do to keep our firefighters and the community safe."

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