



FALLEN STARS

Sea star wasting unusually high at Haystack Rock

Survey findings could be a worrisome indicator

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

A wasting disease is again plaguing sea stars at Haystack Rock — and it's not clear why.

A survey in January found that 64 of the 247 sea stars monitored had symptoms. The spread of the disease in the sea star population — 26 percent — is higher than other locations on the West Coast.

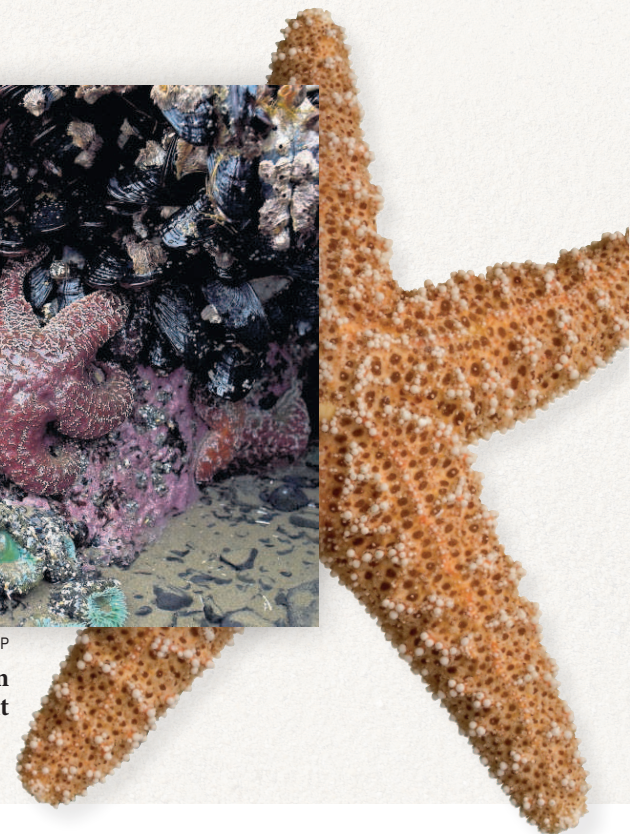
The disease was first spotted in Washington state's Olympic National Park in June 2013, and then shortly after on the coast from Alaska to Southern California. It didn't appear at Haystack Rock until 2014, where a summer survey showed more than 70 percent of the population was affected. The population bounced back in 2015 when there was a sharp increase in the birth of baby sea stars.

See Stars, Page 7A



PHOTOS COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Sea stars at Haystack Rock in Cannon Beach have been hit hard by a wasting disease.



Fire district foregoes hike

Extra money would have paid for firefighter paramedics

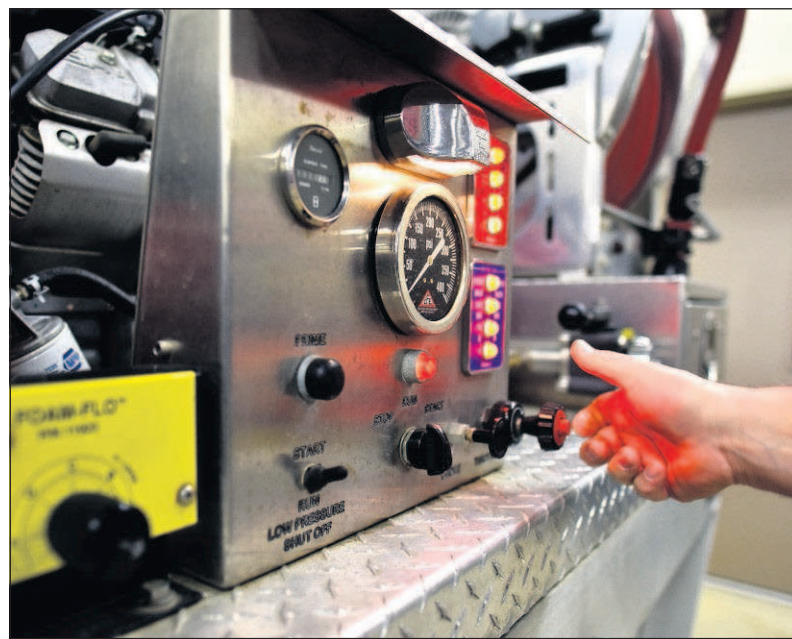
By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

The Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District will not propose a tax increase on this year's fire chief levy to pay for firefighter paramedics.

Residents will vote in May whether to renew the levy that pays for the fire chief's salary, expenses and training at the rate of \$0.1488 per thousand of assessed property. This rate will again bring in about \$141,469 to the fire district over five years.

Fire Chief Matt Benedict had suggested increasing the rate up to \$0.35 per thousand of assessed property and modifying the fire chief's levy into an operational one to allow funding for two firefighter paramedics.

But after a month of discussion, the fire district board came to a consensus that voters were unlikely to pass another tax increase after passing the \$99.7 million bond in 2016 for the new Seaside school campus. While the rate will remain the same, the board did vote to modify the levy so that revenue can be used for all operational and staffing needs, rather than just costs associated with the fire chief.



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Checking equipment to ensure it is in working order is a daily task at the Cannon Beach fire department.

"I think wording is important," said board member Bob Cerelli. "This shows we have more options for this money that can be helpful with the overall needs of the district."

Modifying the levy also helps pave the way to propose an increase in the future, Benedict said, after the fire district has more time to educate the community about the reasons for a higher property tax bill.

It will also allow the district to consolidate the budgeting process

and open up funds for more general maintenance and supplies, Benedict said.

The vote was unanimous, but some board members had concerns that changing the name without changing the rate could cause confusion among voters.

"I'm concerned about changing the wording. With all these bond issues out, I don't want people to get confused. The most important thing

See Levy, Page 6A

As demand grows, volunteers step up

Food pantry gets creative to handle growing need

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

As Nancy Littell and Judy Wood prepared for the Cannon Beach Food Pantry's weekly Wednesday service, they reminisced about the day it first opened.

Ten years ago, the food pantry was a few tables lined up in the basement of Cannon Beach Community Church. A few minutes before they were supposed to open their doors, no one was waiting in line.

"I remember thinking, 'What if we throw a party and no one comes?'" Littell laughed. "Yeah, well, I don't worry about that now. Our dance floor is full."

Over the past two years, the number of households using the small pantry in the shuttered Cannon Beach Elementary School has almost doubled. The food pantry used to serve about 26 households a week. Now, Littell and Wood are seeing closer to 40 families every

Wednesday, all taking home about three to five days worth of food.

While those visiting the food pantry represent a diverse population, Littell and Wood, the co-chairwomen, said almost everyone they serve lives from Cannon Beach to Jewell. In an informal survey last year, volunteers interviewed 89 households and found about 50 percent of all customers worked in a hotel, restaurant or retail job in Cannon Beach.

"The need is here, the need is strong and it's increasing," Littell said. "A lot of people don't realize we're even here. They ask, 'Why do we need a food bank in a place like Cannon Beach?' Well, we have the need."

'THE NEED IS HERE, THE NEED IS STRONG AND IT'S INCREASING!'

Nancy Littell

Contributing factors

The rising demand for emergency food is nothing new, Clatsop County Regional Food Bank Director Marlin Martin said. More than 25 percent of county residents qualify for emergency food assistance, and the number of households served peaked at 1,400 countywide in 2017.

See Food, Page 6A

PRSR1 STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 97
ASTORIA, OR



NANCY MCCARTHY

Marine ecologist Leigh Torres describes what her team from the Marine Mammal Institute have discovered about the gray whales that visit the Oregon Coast.

Unraveling a whale of a mystery

Marine ecologists study coast's whale habitat for answers

By Nancy McCarthy
For Cannon Beach Gazette

Whales have existed for millions of years, but, like the depths of the oceans they live in, they remain mostly a mystery.

Marine ecologist Leigh Torres and her collaborators at Oregon State University, where she is an assistant professor, are trying to unravel some of that mystery by studying whales at the Oregon coast.

Of the 200 whales that visit Oregon regularly between May and October, scientists know little, Torres said during a "World of Haystack Rock" lecture Feb. 14 in the Cannon Beach Library.

"We really don't know much about them," she said. "But we do know they have 'site fidelity'; the same individuals come here year after year, and we can see the same ones pretty regularly."

But with the advent of drones, computers and other testing equipment, it is easier to observe, measure and analyze the giant creatures in their habitat without disturbing them.

"The Oregon coast habitat is really important for these individuals because this is their prime feeding season and their prime feeding habitat," Torres said.

While the coast is important for the whales, the economy, Torres noted. In 2008, whale watching brought in nearly \$30 million, she said.

"And that was 10 years ago," she added. "They're an important part of our economy, our culture, and we all like to see them. So, the important

message here is that we don't want the gray whale to be disturbed, or leave or not show up in this habitat."

Torres is working on four research projects on the whales' habitat: vessel traffic impacts, preferable locations and food, entanglements and ocean noise.

By using surveyor's equipment and trigonometry in Depot Bay and Port Orford, Torres tracked vessels and whales in their vicinity. She learned that whales will continue to feed or travel to another site even with a vessel 100 meters away. However, if they were searching for food as a vessel approached, the whales would leave the area.

Until recently, Oregon lacked guidelines about how to operate vessels around whales, Torres said. Her team took its collected data to fishery groups and together they eventually

See Whales, Page 7A