

State rolls out plans for recreational marijuana

‘All marijuana, all the time’ for licensing agency

By Erick Bengel
EO Media Group

North Coast communities have been scrambling to deal with the fallout, both real and imagined, of Measure 91, which was passed in November 2014 and legalizes the use and possession of recreational marijuana for Oregon adults.

Meanwhile, it has been “all marijuana, all the time,” for the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, according to Steven Marks, the agency’s executive director, at a lunch in Astoria Tuesday.

With a looming deadline of Jan. 4 to begin accepting applications for licenses to set up marijuana operations, the agency has much to accomplish in a short amount of time.

The agency’s job is pretty simple: Oregon statute gives them a mandate to know what’s going into a product, to track the product along the supply chain and to make the product available to Oregon residents in a system that the agency licenses and regulates.

When it comes to marijuana, Marks knows the numbers:

Of the 2.9 million Oregonians over the age of 21, roughly 20 percent have reported using marijuana within the last year. Of those users, about 30 percent — medical patients and “super users” — accounts for 70 percent of marijuana consumption in the state. That leaves about 70 percent of users — probably recreational users, Marks said — responsible for the remaining 30 percent of consumption.

Unlike Colorado and Washington — the first two states to legalize recreational pot — “we have a highly evolved marijuana grow community,” in part, because the plant is easier to grow outdoors in Oregon, Marks said. “In Oregon, we’re transferring an industry in from an illegal to a legal system.”

Sounds simple enough. But “simple” doesn’t mean “easy.”

In the pipeline

On the policy side, the agency needs to finalize the



Steven Marks

rules for licensing marijuana businesses and tracking product from grower to market. These rules must be in place before the agency can set up the online licensing application and fee system.

The agency recently announced 30 new full-time positions. A handful of these positions are policy-based while the bulk are responsible for licensing and inspections. The agency hopes to have each spot filled by early October and the personnel trained on the new rules and system-to-be-developed before November, Marks said.

Then there’s the “seed to sale” system for keeping tabs on the marijuana itself.

“Seed to sale” will require the barcoding of viable seedlings. The agency can then track a batch’s location, including who grew it and where. This is, in fact, a standard held to all legal consumables for the sake of consumer protection, one that allows for product recalls and the ability to trace the product back to its source.

“Seed to sale” also helps ensure that a licensee maintains compliance with the U.S. Department of Jus-

tice’s “Cole Memorandum,” which spells out the federal government’s marijuana-related prohibitions. These include not selling weed to minors and keeping the drug off the black market.

“We want to see people who can play by the rules, and who play by the rules even when markets are tougher,” Marks said.

He added that “seed to sale” serves as a substitute for the three-tiered system the OLCC applies to alcohol but not to marijuana.

Someone involved in the distribution of alcohol must be licensed as a producer or a wholesaler or a retailer, but never more than one at a time. But someone involved in distributing marijuana can be licensed in any number of capacities at once: grower, processor, wholesaler, retailer, laboratory tester, researcher, etc. This complicates the agency’s ability to follow product, a deficiency for which the barcoding of plants may compensate.

Though the agency has been moving at full speed in recent months, “there hasn’t been resistance to doing this,” Rane Niedermeier, OLCC government affairs and communications direc-

tor, said. “People know it’s hard, but they’re in there, and they’re doing it.”

Hashing out details

Once hired and trained, the new OLCC workforce won’t have a great deal to confront on the North Coast — at least not right away.

Astoria has three officially licensed medical marijuana shops, and when Oregon Senate Bill 460 kicks in Oct. 1, the shops will be allowed to sell recreational marijuana.

Across the bay in Warrenton, however, the City Commission voted not to allow medical marijuana dispensaries to sell recreational marijuana. Warrenton doesn’t have any medical marijuana dispensaries operating.

Neither does Gearhart, and there are none in the works, according to Gearhart City Manager Chad Sweet. However, in October 2014, the city voted to implement a 5 percent tax on gross sales of marijuana and marijuana-infused products to cardholders under the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, and a 10 percent tax on gross sales to non-cardholders.

Seaside has two medical marijuana dispensaries, but

City Manager Mark Winstanley doesn’t know if the City Council will allow them to sell recreational marijuana come October.

Cannon Beach’s business license application doesn’t allow for businesses that violate federal law, so, at the moment, medical and recreational marijuana facilities are off the table since marijuana remains federally illegal.

Once the OLCC starts accepting applications in January, the agency will likely prioritize the licensing of growers so that they can get their product to retail sooner rather than later, Marks said. The agency will then start licensing retail around fall 2016, he said.

One pressing question hasn’t gone unmentioned within the agency: Will the Oregon Liquor Control Commission change its name?

The agency hasn’t taken a position, Marks said. However, some people have floated the suggestion “Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Control” commission.

It would be cost-efficient at any rate: the commission wouldn’t necessarily have to change the acronym on its letterhead.

Big weekend storm wallops the coast

EO Media Group

A storm blew over the North Coast last weekend, blowing down trees, wreaking havoc on the Hood to Coast Relay finish, stripping the Astoria Column restoration and closing access to Coxcomb Hill.

Saturday’s storm toppled several trees, along with many limbs and branches, in Cannon Beach, according to Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn.

There was a tree downed near Les Shirley Park, another on Ecola Park Road and three on the highway in midtown.

“The dayshift officer was kept busy responding to these incidents,” he said.

After a calm Friday, a hurricane-like swarm of clouds brought winds gusting as high as 85 mph down on the Lower Columbia region. The National Weather Service increased its previous gale warning to a storm, remaining in effect through noon Saturday.

By late Saturday morning, gusts were reported as high as 84.8 mph on Radar Ridge in Pacific (Wash.) County, 78.2 over the Astoria Bridge, 70 mph on Washington’s Cape Disappointment and 60 mph

above Clatsop Spit. The winds built seas to between 14 and 16 feet, closing the Columbia River Bar to recreational traffic, and with it much of the Buoy 10 salmon fishery. A gale warning remained in effect through Saturday night.

The winds stripped off tarps on the scaffolding placed around the Astoria Column for its restoration and blew down trees and closed access to Coxcomb Drive through the weekend. Meanwhile, Hood to Coast organizers in Seaside had to cancel the relay’s beach after-party and establish gathering space inside the Shilo Inn.

The storm knocked out power to nearly 3,600 residents around Astoria Saturday, along with others on the Long Beach (Wash.) Peninsula and in South County.

The winds stayed above 20 mph at the National Weather Service’s monitoring station at the Astoria Regional Airport between 3 a.m. and 7 p.m. Another smaller storm surge kept winds between 10 and 15 mph between 12:40 a.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday.

The National Weather Service forecasts at least a 50 percent chance of showers through Wednesday, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

SEASIDE
Signal

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