

# LOOKING FOR A MAGIC BIO-BULLET

For Gearhart residents who have been threatened by a fearsome mama elk protecting her calf or caught amidst the herd, controlling the elk population isn't a matter of if it's needed, but how it should be implemented.

Michael Finley, chairman of the Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife Commission, was among those who ventured to Gearhart this spring as part of a tour of Department of Fish and Wildlife and local officials to assess the region's elk concerns.

Most of the time, elk and humans live peaceably together. "But during birthing, calving or during the rut they became very protective," Finley said. "That's the most dangerous time."

Finley, a former superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, has had his own interactions with elk, especially during rut and calving seasons.

"In terms of public safety, I was chased several times," Finley said. "I literally ran behind stone pillars. It's real."

Finley introduced a novel solution, one that he had seen efficiently control a wild horse population: contraceptive darting.

"Over time, the population went down," he told Gearhart officials and wildlife commissioners. "It was nonlethal, so people didn't get upset about it."

Could it work in reducing the elk herd here?

## Lethal culling

The immunocontraceptive vaccine called GonaCon is currently registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for use on wild and feral female horses, burros, and white-tailed deer, according to Legislative and Public Affairs Gail Keirn of the USDA National Wildlife Research Center. It is not currently registered for use in elk.

GonaCon works by stimulating production of sex hormones. As a result, females don't go into heat and males are less amorous as long as there are sufficient levels of antibodies in the female's body.

GonaCon vaccine has been studied and tested in female elk and found to be effective, Keirn said. Other contraceptive agents have been tested in wildlife, but like GonaCon, they are not currently registered for use with elk.

Larry Keller of New West magazine described a 2008 elk contraceptive darting at Rocky Mountain Park. First, the animals had to be shot

SEEN FROM SEASIDE  
R.J. MARX



with a tranquilizer dart, accurate up to 45 meters or about 148 feet. Their lack of fear of people made the darting possible.

Once sedated, the elk were rolled on to their chests so they could breathe easier, blindfolded, injected with the vaccine and fitted with a radio telemetry collar to locate them later. Blood samples were extracted. Then they were injected with another drug to reverse the effects of the tranquilizer. The entire process took about 40 minutes.

Subsequent studies showed the contraceptive worked in completely reducing pregnancy for one to two years after the shot was administered.

## A daunting process

Herman Biederbeck, wildlife biologist of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, hosted a town hall on elk in Gearhart in 2014 and attended this year's elk tour with the wildlife commissioners.

The process of darting and catching a free-range animal is next to impossible, he said, even though most of Gearhart's elk are "pretty tamed down."

"We're not talking about a small group of five deer," Biederbeck said. "This is a herd of 70 or 80 elk. You wouldn't necessarily have to get all of them, but you'd certainly want to get a high percentage of them to limit the amount of new calves born and recruited into the population."

After darting, animals could become more wary of people, state wildlife veterinarian Colin Gillin said in May.

Studies show results of immunocontraceptive vaccines in closed populations with deer, Gillin said, but effectiveness is hard to determine.

"Too many animals could come and go from the herd, and unless all the animals were marked, it would be impossible to know which ones had been treated," he said.

Even if as many as 30 percent were darted, elk would still cause property damage and potential harm to people, dogs or cars, he said. "You're probably not getting all of them, so you have some you never catch and they're still making babies."

The process may have other adverse effects. "I've never seen



A park researcher fits a radio collar on an elk.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**'REALLY THINK IT THROUGH BEFORE YOU THROW A LOT OF MONEY AT THIS. BECAUSE YOU WANT IT TO WORK.'**

State wildlife veterinarian Colin Gillin

anything saying it affected the animal's well-being, but I don't think they know," Gillin said.

## Lethal culling

Mayor Matt Brown again raised the prospect of elk contraception at the April City Council meeting.

Whether it's the best option in managing Gearhart's free-ranging elk population is something that state and federal officials are still not sure about.

The National Wildlife Research Service says further study is needed to determine if fertility control can be applied effectively to a large free-range elk population.



Wildlife biologist Herman Biederbeck (far right) and Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown (to his left) address visitors on the topic of elk in Gearhart.

R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

State Senate Bill 373, in effect since January, requires the state's Fish and Wildlife Commission to adopt a pilot program in cities where officials determine deer "constitute a public nuisance."

How animals would be taken is not specified, but the pilot program specifies that darts or lethal injection are prohibited.

While "a lot of people aren't going to like" lethal removal, it's quick,

effective and usually less costly than alternatives, Gillin said. "The harvesting of animals, removing them from the population, is something the state is liable to be able to pull off."

While a contraceptive vaccine remains a "pretty intriguing concept," the opportunity for things to go wrong are pretty high, he said.

"Really think it through before you throw a lot of money at this," he said. "Because you want it to work."

# The inner life of a summer vacation town

I just got off the phone with my friend, the author Judy Blundell, whose latest novel, "The High Season" just came out to rave reviews. The New York Times called Judy "a writer to watch; People Magazine named it their book of the week; and Entertainment Weekly said it is a "must read." Judy won the National Book Award a few years ago for her young adult novel, "What I Saw And How I Lied." Her newest book (she's written 114) is her first for a grown up audience.

Intrigue, she said, is an important subject. "The High Season" is full of intrigue. The story is set in the small beach town of Orient, New York. "Small towns are a wonderful repository of intrigue," Judy said.

Judy and I met years ago when she and her husband and young daughter lived in Katonah, N.Y., where we used to live. She said she wrote much of this book while sitting in a wing back chair in the village library. She said she worked on the book a long time. "I first thought about it 15 years ago," she said. "The story appeared to me but it has taken me a long time to write."

She said adult stories with adult themes and parenting and marriage and careers and what happens when those things derail all at the same time guided her novelistic thinking.

"What do you do in the face of catastrophe?" she asked.

Judy said she based the book on experiences and observations she developed years ago when she and her husband lived in Montauk, New York, a rural beach town whose tiny year-round population swells like a king tide during the summer months. She often thought about the full-time residents who worked multiple jobs and/or

VIEW FROM THE PORCH  
EVE MARX



turned their private homes into summer rentals just to hold on. With escalating taxes and infrastructure costs, the financial situation has only become more difficult for regular residents.

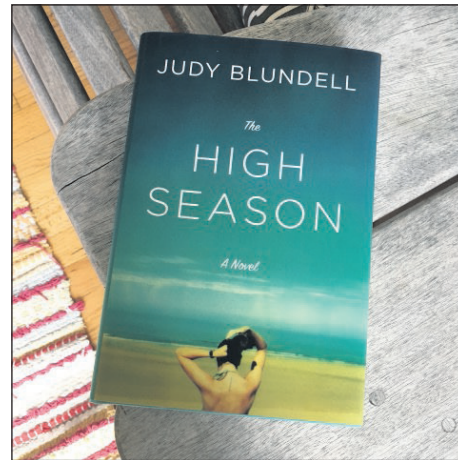
"You have school teachers who in summer months become Uber drivers, and people renting out their homes Memorial Day to Labor Day to live in a trailer just to get the summer income," my friend said. "People going to extraordinary lengths just to hold on to their financial place in American life."

"The High Season" is told from three female points of view: Doe, a Millennial; Gem, a teen; and Ruthie, a Baby Boomer. The third, unspoken character, is the heavy weight of seductive privilege and its potential for abuse.

"Ruthie loses her job, her house, her husband, and track of her teenage daughter all in the course of a few summer weekends," Ms. Blundell said. "She makes the absolute wrong choice in an effort to get everything back."

My husband and I often joke if only we had someplace else to live for the summer, we would do well to rent out our house. We have friends who just sold their Seaside house and for the time being, are living in their trailer. I asked the husband how that's going and he shrugged.

"It's OK for a week at a time, but..." and then his voice trailed off.



EVE MARX

A pre-season beach read that may resonate with local audiences.

I grew up in a summer resort town on the east coast. I'm no stranger to the pressure of making an entire year's income in three frantic and exhausting months. Summer is the high season and for retailers the opportunity to climb out of the hole of debt or stagnation they've endured all winter. It affords homeowners to make double or even triple mortgage payments or cover costly home repairs. Bring in intrigue and the seduction of privilege and just about any beach town has the potential to be a novel or an HBO series. Have you ever watched "The Affair"?

I haven't finished reading "The High Season" yet. Truth to tell, I can scarcely bear to put it down. If you're looking for a summer read that hits close to home, even if it is set on the opposite coast, check it out.

Pick it up at Beach Books, 616 Broadway.

## LETTERS

### Don't smoke on the Prom

I am writing about smokers on the Promenade. I run along the Promenade three days a week. The smokers walk, stand and sit right on the promenade. They throw their cigarette butts on the ground as well. I don't see any signs posted indicating they should not be smoking within 20 feet of others on the Promenade. I have to inhale smoke during my run as well as families with children and other non-smokers having to inhale smokers. Just wanted to let you know so maybe signs could be put up for smokers to go away from the Promenade to smoke.

Sandra Garvin  
Seaside

## MEETINGS

**MONDAY, June 11**  
Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

**THURSDAY, June 14**  
Seaside Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Avenue.

**Cannon Beach Academy**, 5:30 p.m. 3718 S. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach.

**Gearhart Planning Commission**, 6 p.m., 698 Pacific Way, Gearhart.

**TUESDAY, June 19**  
Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, Bob Chisholm Community Center, 5:15 p.m., 1225 Avenue A., Seaside.

**Seaside School District Board of Directors**, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin, Seaside.

**Seaside Planning Commission**, work session, 7 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

**WEDNESDAY, June 20**  
Seaside Tourism Advisory Committee, 3 p.m., 989 Broadway.

**THURSDAY, June 21**  
Seaside Transportation Advisory Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

SEASIDE  
**Signal**



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### Seaside Signal

The Seaside Signal is published every other week by EO Media Group, 1555 N. Roosevelt, Seaside, OR 97138. 503-738-5561 seasidesignal.com Copyright 2018 © Seaside Signal. Nothing can be reprinted or copied without consent of the owners.

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The Seaside Signal welcomes letters to the editor. The deadline is noon Monday prior to publication. Letters must be 400 words or less and must be signed by the author and include a phone number for verification. We also request that submissions be limited to one letter per month. Send to 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive, Seaside, OR 97138, drop them off at 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive or fax to 503-738-9285, or email rmarx@seasidesignal.com

### Subscriptions

Annually: \$40.50 in county • \$58.00 in and out of county • e-Edition: only \$30.00

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