

# Gearhart, Warrenton plot ways to cope with elk

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
The Daily Astorian

North Coast leaders struggling to address elk-related issues in their communities hope an organization with ties to the governor's office will be able to help.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife often finds itself responding to elk-related questions in Clatsop Plains, an area that includes sections of Gearhart and Warrenton, where interactions between elk and people have become a safety concern.

But public opinion on elk varies widely. Any management of the animals would involve a diverse collection of government agencies, organizations and private property owners with very different goals and objectives.

"It's hard for any one agency to come up with a cohesive game plan that everyone will buy into," said Herman Biederbeck, state wildlife biologist, at a meeting in Gearhart on Wednesday, Jan. 9, with representatives of Oregon Solutions.

The state owns almost no land in the Clatsop Plains, he said, so the ability of the state to manage that area is "basically nil. ... There's no way that ODFW can do it alone."

But working with Oregon Solutions, based out of Portland State University's National Policy Consensus Center, may be one way for diverse groups to develop a cohesive management plan.

The organization met with Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer and Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown, law enforcement, state fish and wildlife employees and other stakeholders to discuss the growing number of elk in and around the two cities.

Karmen Fore, the director of Oregon Solutions, and her team plan to talk with more stakeholders and determine whether tackling the elk issue should become one of the organization's projects. The organization could also ask Gov. Kate Brown's office to officially designate the work an Oregon Solutions project, opening up potential state funds.

Oregon Solutions often plays the role of mediator, but also enters the scene when communities are struggling to determine oversight and responsibility of an issue.

One example is the



Jeff Ter Har/For Seaside Signal

Elk caught on a home security camera in Gearhart.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A herd of elk rests in a field near Warrenton.

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Herman Biederbeck, state wildlife biologist

group's involvement after flooding in Vernonia in 2007 destroyed the town's middle school and high school. Rebuilding the schools was vital to the town's survival, but was too much for a single group — or someone like a school principal — to coordinate.

Warrenton and Gearhart leaders told Fore and Michael Mills, program outreach manager with Oregon Solutions, that the elk herds pose public safety risks and damage private property. Last month, an elk clambered over the hood of a Toyota Prius that had

stopped to let a herd cross state Highway 104. The elk slipped and smashed into the windshield.

Neither Mayor Brown nor Mayor Balensifer believe they would find widespread community support for culling the herds. But Balensifer said Warrenton is interested in discussing a variety of options, including controlled hunting.

Brown noted Gearhart is still interested in looking at the possibility of relocating animals, even though state wildlife officials have said this would not be possible.

Most elk-appropriate habitat in Oregon already has plenty of elk. Some of the animals even came originally from Clatsop Plains stock, noted Chris Knutsen, northwest watershed manager for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Transporting elk is no longer considered biologically or socially responsible, Biederbeck added. There is always the chance of transferring disease along with the animals.

John Putnam, northwest director for the Oregon Hunters Association, said it is important to explore all solutions.

Human behavior — feeding the elk, stopping to take

pictures of them — has helped to create the problem, habituating the animals to the presence of people. "But we need to keep all options on the table," he said.

It is unlikely the elk will ever be gone for good, no matter what solutions com-

munities may attempt. But on a scale from zero to a million elk, stakeholders still do not know what their communities are willing to tolerate.

"We don't even really know, from a public perspective, what an acceptable number is," Knutsen said.

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# Don't feed the bears — or the elk

No-feeding ordinance moves to council vote

By R.J. MARX  
Seaside Signal

Spurred by safety concerns, the Gearhart City Council on Wednesday, Jan. 3, unanimously agreed to consider rules prohibiting the feeding of elk and other wildlife.

Bebe Michel, a resident, came before the council in July seeking ways to minimize elk and human interactions.

In response, city councilors and staff held a work session before drafting and finally delivering the ordinance Wednesday.

The proposed ordinance borrows from similar code enacted in Warrenton, which prohibits "allowing food or other attractants" to be placed on public or private property with the intention of luring or feeding wildlife, City Administrator Chad Sweet said.

"The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife thought this would be a good start to trying to help our problem," Sweet said. "Even though we don't know of any specific feeding here locally, in other communities it does become an issue, with people feeding elk apples and other food."



John Dudley/For Seaside Signal

As elk become more emboldened, Gearhart officials hope to discourage interactions with humans with a no-feeding ordinance.

The ordinance would allow feeding songbirds or squirrels, provided that the food is contained in a feeder which is designed to avoid access by other wildlife.

Violation of the ordinance would bring a penalty of up to \$500, but officials hope they'll find compliance before issuing fines.

Mayor Matt Brown called the rules a "good common-sense first step." "There's not a lot of things we can do as a city," he said. "The ODFW is in

control of the management, but they suggested this is a good first step to protect the citizens from that type of contact."

The ordinance will return for a first council reading in February and a second one in March. If approved, it would become law 30 days later.

The city will join Warrenton and the Department of Fish and Wildlife with representatives of Oregon Solutions at a meeting at 10:30 a.m. Wednesday in Gearhart. The meeting is to "see if they'll take up our

cause," Sweet said of managing elk on the Clatsop Plains.

Both Mayor Brown and Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer are expected to attend.

The mission of Oregon Solutions — a partner with the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University — is to develop sustainable solutions to community-based problems through collaborative efforts. "It's not just a Gearhart issue," Brown said. "It's not just a county issue — it's a state issue."