

OPINION

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Letters to the editor
and press releases:

E-mail:

pressreleases@thesiuslawnews.com

To contact the editor:

editor@thesiuslawnews.com

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Dunes City's septic story: Protecting the water supply

GUEST VIEWPOINT

BY CAMERON LA FOLLETTE, LAND USE DIRECTOR
OREGON COAST ALLIANCE

Dunes City is currently struggling with a major problem: how much septic maintenance is enough when the town's residents, all of whom are on septic, live around some coastal lakes which also provide the drinking water. True, some residents get their water from groundwater wells or streams in the area, but all the waters are hydrologically connected. Failing septic can easily leach effluent into the groundwater or Woahink and Siltcoos Lakes. Dunes City has no filtration system for its drinking water.

City Council is set to consider two bills that would drastically alter the existing Ordinance 203, which created the septic maintenance program. The existing law requires an initial mandatory pumping and inspection of all septic systems, and also requires Dunes City to keep records of the septic program. The record-keeping has not been fully implemented, but current data shows that as of summer 2011 there are about 781 septic systems in Dunes City, of whom about 69 percent have complied with the law. There has

been some confusion; some of those who have obeyed the law have had their septic systems pumped but not evaluated; others the reverse. But 69 percent is a fairly good showing of compliance, and indicates that people in Dunes City do care about the water quality of the lakes on which they depend for drinking water, recreation, fishing and other amenities.

It is especially noteworthy that of the 534 households that have complied thus far, 65 had failed septic systems, or needed replacements or repairs. That certainly indicates Ordinance 203's success in protecting Dunes City's drinking water supply.

These basic figures should be kept in mind when considering the two bills now before City Council. Ordinance 211a would repeal Ordinance 203 and replace it with an education program to ensure

septic maintenance. Ordinance 210a would keep some of the features of the current law, but eliminate its most effective tool: the requirement for mandatory pumping at the initial inspection.

Both of these proposals would unravel Dunes City's proactive law. The repeal would do so directly, setting up in its place a vague, and completely unspecified, education program "to ensure adequate septic system maintenance." But there is no link, nor any attempt to forge one, between any educational program and septic maintenance.

Proposal 210a is more subtle. The principal means of discovering where a septic system needs repairs or replacement is by initially pumping it so that cracks or other problems can be seen by the inspector. Removing that one requirement greatly reduces the program's effi-

cacy. This mandatory pumping requirement is controversial among some Dunes City residents.

But there are other ways to look at it, rather than as a governmental intrusion or an unjustifiable financial burden on the homeowner. Dunes City is a community, and all residents share the water — whether it comes from the lakes or the hydrologically connected groundwater or streams.

As a common resource, it must be protected by all for the benefit of all. This means that all residents bear a small expense for the common cause of clean drinking water.

Dunes City, with its existing septic ordinance and data showing nearly 70 percent compliance, shows what can be done by a community focused on protecting its critical water resources for the good of all. Oregon Coast Alliance hopes the City will continue this proud achievement — and perhaps build on it by adding an educational component to Ordinance 203 in order to expand understanding and willingness of residents to work together for the common good.

YESTERDAY'S NEWS

MOMENTS IN TIME The History Channel

- On Nov. 8, 1847, Bram Stoker, author of the horror novel "Dracula," is born in Clontarf, Dublin, Ireland. Stoker's villainous, blood-sucking creation, the vampire Count Dracula, became a pop-culture icon and has been featured in hundreds of movies, books and plays.

- On Nov. 10, 1903, Mary Anderson receives patent No. 743,801 for her "window cleaning device for electric cars and other vehicles to remove snow, ice or sleet from the window." Anderson tried to sell it to a Canadian manufacturing firm, but the company said the device had no practical value.

- On Nov. 11, 1921, three years after the end of World War I, the Tomb of the Unknowns is dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia when an unknown American soldier is buried. A 2-inch layer of soil brought from France was placed below the coffin so that the soldier might rest forever atop the earth on which he died.