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Cyclists ride to Oak Bay hall to keep up pressure for bike lanes

JEFF BELL
Times Colonist

About 50 cycling advocates cycled from the University of Victoria to Oak Bay Municipal Hall on Monday, keeping up their campaign for safe cycling routes in the municipality.

They reached the hall in advance of the 7 p.m. Oak Bay council meeting, where councilors received a report on possible changes along the McNeill Avenue corridor, which Mayor Kevin Murdoch said could range from traffic calming to bike lanes.

Monday's ride was the second in a series of events planned on council days by Critical Mass Ride Oak Bay, said organizer Jane van Hoorn.

Van Hoorn said she was motivated by council's decision not to open up bike lanes on Henderson Road at all times. They're currently only open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Monday to Friday.

She said Oak Bay has no bike lanes that are "contiguous or continuous."

Cyclists also want to see a crackdown on parking in bike lanes.

Coun. Hazel Braithwaite said the view of residents of Henderson Road have to be considered as well. Some have expressed concern about the availability of street parking, including when they host gatherings at their homes.

Braithwaite said the Monday-Friday hours for the Henderson Road bike lanes "seems to work pretty well right now," but added that opening the lanes further could be a possibility at some point.

Braithwaite said as a councillor, she has to represent the "general interest of everybody," adding locations where students ride bikes to school deserve particular attention when it comes to safety.

"We do have a really good active-transportation plan in place that is going to be implemented," Braithwaite added. "I think that around the council table there's good support for active transportation in our community."



The Critical Mass Ride Oak Bay makes its way on Henderson Road on the way to Oak Bay Municipal Hall. DARRIN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

Van Hoorn countered that the plan has been "on a shelf" for 12 years.

Murdoch said he has talked to group members about their safety concerns.

"We're all on the same page

when it comes to the goals here."

The cyclists will hold another ride when Oak Bay council meetings resume after the summer break, van Hoorn said.

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Fine for hazardous vessel in Saanich a first for Canadian Coast Guard

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The Canadian Coast Guard has issued its first-ever fine for a hazardous abandoned vessel.

Ryan Brackenbury was fined \$15,000 on June 27 for failing to comply with coast guard directions to remove Akoo, a 27-foot white-hulled cabin cruiser aground in Cadboro Bay that has been determined to pose a hazard to the marine environment and public safety.

Brackenbury has 30 days to pay the penalty or apply to the Transportation Appeal Tribunal of Canada for a review hearing.

Paul Barrett, regional superintendent of the Canadian Coast Guard's compliance and enforcement branch, established in April, said he hopes the owner appeals.

"It will allow us to test both our rigour, our casework, and really establish that case law related to the Wrecked, Abandoned, or Hazardous Vessels Act," he said.

The federal government announced last week that the coast guard will be fining owners of hazardous boats or wrecks.

The coast guard can write fines up to \$50,000 per violation, and additional fines could be administered daily until the violation ceases. For corporations, fines could be even higher, with a daily fine limit of \$250,000.

If found guilty in court, corporations could be fined \$6 million and individuals could face fines of \$1 million and up to three years of prison, though no case so far has gone before the courts.

Barrett said the coast guard usually gives boat owners about a week to comply with directions.

"If they fail to achieve what's in those directions, that's where other compliance tools may come into effect," he said.

The Wrecked, Abandoned, or Hazardous Vessels Act came into effect in 2019, and made abandoning boats illegal in Canada.

The act enshrines into federal law the international agreements Canada committed to in 2007 at the Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks, putting the responsibility of removal costs on vessel owners.

Before then, there were few consequences for abandoning wrecks.

"People would just abandon the vessel when they no longer wanted it and they couldn't sell it," Barrett said, adding that there are "too many" abandoned boats along B.C.'s coast, though most cases are in waters off the south island and on the Fraser River.



The owner of the Akoo, a 27-foot white-hulled cabin cruiser aground in Cadboro Bay in Saanich, has been fined \$15,000 for failing to remove the vessel. ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

In the capital region, hazardous vessels are typically found near Brentwood Bay, Sidney and Cadboro Bay.

On the West Coast, the coast guard is monitoring about 1,500 vessels that have been reported to have been wrecked, abandoned or hazardous. About 350 new cases are added every year, Barrett said.

Every vessel begins degrading the moment it enters the water. "If somebody is not properly taking care of it, it will inevitably end poorly," he said.

The federal government has said that about 500 boats have been removed through its Oceans Protection Plan since 2016.

It spent about \$4.5 million remediating these vessels in 2022.

This year, the coast guard has \$1 million for remediation, which can range from simply putting a containment boom around the vessel to a full salvage and disposal by contractors.

The coast guard also recently contracted Oak Bay-based Barnacle Systems Inc. to help remotely monitor abandoned and derelict boats across the country with specialized equipment.

Before the enactment of the law, annual funding had hovered around \$350,000, Barrett said.

Now, he and his recently formed team of 13 are tasked with ensuring compliance on the West Coast.

The team also works with Indigenous Coastal Guardians to help with compliance. The Kómoks Guardian Watchmen are currently helping to issue a direction to a vessel owner close to the nation, Barrett said.

"Making sure that owners are responsible and liable for things is important. I don't think the average taxpayer wants to be paying to deal with somebody else's problem," he said.

The vast majority of hazardous vessels belong to individual owners, ranging from 40-foot commercial fishing vessels to 25-foot pleasure craft.

For the older wrecks, it can be difficult to track down the owners, as many of them are not required to be registered with the Canadian Registry of Vessels.

"People might sell their boat for \$1 to some other guy and just write the agreements on the back of the napkin," Barrett said.

But not all hazardous vessels are abandoned playthings of casual mariners. A smaller portion of the vessels are being used for shelter.

Brackenbury was likely living on the Akoo when it ran aground, Barrett said.

"Of course, we have to be sensitive around the social issues that can be connected to those cases," Barrett said.

John Roe, founder and director of the Dead Boats Disposal Society, said he's in total support of the Canadian Coast Guard.

"I do feel sorry for him, but somebody has to be held responsible," Roe said of the vessel's owner.

Roe, who has been pulling abandoned boats and cars out of waters and forests for close to three decades and calls himself the head "dead boat hunter," said the boating industry needs to be part of the solution.

"Years ago, we had this problem with cars being abandoned all over the island, all over the backwoods," Roe said.

That's no longer the case because of legislation.

According to the Transportation Ministry, if an unoccupied vehicle is not blocking traffic, police will not issue a notice on advising that the vehicle will be towed within 72 hours if not removed.

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Dallas Road brush fires show how dry conditions are, Victoria Fire says

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A late-night brush fire on the weekend along the Dallas Road waterfront spread due to "f tinder-dry conditions" and took two and a half hours to extinguish, the Victoria Fire Department says.

The glow from the fire early Sunday could be seen more than a kilometre away, the department said in a Facebook post.

The fire, which burned an area about 23 metres by 60 metres, could have spread to nearby Beacon Hill Park, the post said.

Acting Battalion Chief Brent Hoepfner said the grassy areas along Dallas Road are vulnerable.

He said the department responded to six grass and beach fires in the 48 hours from Friday morning until Sunday morning, followed by a brush fire Sunday night at Cedar Hill Road and Hillside Avenue and at least two more on Monday.

Hoepfner said the public needs to be vigilant at this time of year. Beach fires and all open burning are banned in Victoria at all times, he said.

The fire danger is extreme

in all parts of Vancouver Island, said Coastal Fire Centre information officer Nick Donnelly, but there have been no recent lightning-caused fires, as other parts of the province have seen.

"We've been relatively spared, relative to the rest of the province, in the last few days," he said.

There were five wildfires on the island as of Monday afternoon, with four deemed to be under control and one classified as held.

The latter is the Newcastle fire near Sayward that started in late May and is holding steady at 230 hectares.

Those under control include the 229-hectare Cameron Bluffs fire, which caused the closure of a stretch of Highway 4 for several days last month; the road has since reopened to single-lane alternating traffic.

Also deemed under control is a 164-hectare fire in the Klawna Valley near Nitinat and two fires that are less than half a hectare in size — one west of Sooke near Otter Point and one northwest of Campbell River.

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Search for missing hiker suspended

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Renewed efforts to find a hiker who went missing in December were suspended after two days of scouring the wilderness near Charters River in Sooke failed to turn up anything.

The original search seven months ago lasted nine days.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue redeployed on Saturday in what they said was a "connected and refined area of interest" but failed to find anything.

Sooke RCMP had suspended the search, police said in a statement Monday.

"We would like to acknowledge the significant efforts of Juan

de Fuca Search and Rescue and all other assisting SAR agencies during this search period, particularly through challenging terrain during very warm weekend weather," said Sgt. Kevin Shaw in a statement, adding that the RCMP will continue their investigation.

A powerful windstorm hit Vancouver Island the night McDevitt went missing. She had been due to fly to North Carolina the day after her hike to visit family.

Her grey Subaru Forester was found in the fish hatchery parking lot after she was reported missing.

The December search of the Sea to Sea Regional Park was led by Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue and included up to 170 volunteers and 17 search agencies.

Anyone with new information on McDevitt's disappearance is asked to call Sooke RCMP at 250-642-5241.

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