

Port finishes \$150,000 repair work

Bergerson Construction repairs East Mooring Basin structure

By KATIE WILSON
The Daily Astorian

People are forever slapping Band-Aids on the East Mooring Basin causeway.

Hopefully the most recent one sticks.

The Port of Astoria, via Bergerson Construction, are wrapping up repairs at the bridge/causeway off 36th Street, replacing critically worn and rotting bents, caps, posts and bracing.

"I think it's a lot stronger Band-Aid than any we've done so far in the past," said Port Commissioner Bill Hunsinger. He remembers going out there one year when the rails along the causeway were so rotten, you could break through them with your hands, he said.

The rails were later repaired, but there was more work to be done.

The structure that the Oregon Department of Transportation calls "a bridge" and others call "a dock" or causeway was first built in 1949 and neither the years, nor the Columbia River, have been gentle to it. Different people have fixed different pieces and many of the bigger fixes have only occurred in the past several years, Hunsinger said.

"(The repairs) were long, long overdue," Port Executive Director Jack Crider said. "We were extremely lucky we didn't have a major accident."

The first step in any repair project like this is to conduct an inspection. It would have cost the Port close to \$25,000 (if not more) to hire an engineer who could inspect the causeway and compile a study, Crider said. Fortunately for the Port, the bridge falls under the Oregon Department of Transportation's public use category. The department inspected the bridge at no cost to the Port.

In its inspection conducted last year, ODOT found that the timber superstructure of the nearly 945-foot bridge was in "serious condition" and the substructure was even worse. The deck was sagging in several areas and many of the crossbeams had "significant decay." Weight on the bridge was limited to 9,000 pounds and ODOT recommended that this be changed to 3 tons.

The Port took the study and Bergerson Construction was contracted to begin repairs using untreated wood to replace the most critical areas identified by ODOT.

The repairs cost close to \$150,000, Crider said, money that came out of the Port's reserve account and operating funds. The untreated wood has a lifespan of about 10 years at best, Crider said.

The next step is to finish the other bents and, he said, "ultimately figure out a total replacement for the whole structure" - easily a \$4 million to \$6 million project.

"There's a lot of commercial use to those docks and that means a lot of money for the Port," Hunsinger said. Anywhere between 50 to 60 boats frequent the docks at the East Mooring Basin and Crider says it is one of the Port's "critical structures."

"At least it will be open back to the public," Hunsinger said.

Not only are the bridge and its side docks used heavily by commercial fisherman, the causeway is also the perfect spot for tourists who want to get a close look at the sea lions that sprawl fat, glistening and content all along the side docks.

"It's a real attraction," Hunsinger said. "People also cast off for sturgeon there."

The Port of Astoria meets tonight at 6 p.m. at 422 Gateway Ave. and is expected to discuss the causeway repairs, as well as hear updates on leases with Westerlund Log Handlers and metal scrapping company West/East Demolition.