

Health Division, DEQ Reports on Lincoln County

Governor's Ceremonial Office

Wednesday, January 17, 1973 -- 2 p.m.

REMARKS BY GOVERNOR TOM McCALL

This is one of the most important news conferences I have ever held -- important because it bears so dramatically and pivotally on the quality of life in this State.

We have at hand today firm evidence that the quality is not what it should be, or even what we think it is.

As an example, raw sewage is flowing from at least 34 locations in Lincoln County onto ^{your} the beaches -- ^{and mine} your beaches.

In most cases it has been going on for at least four years.

I am presenting today the results of the most comprehensive survey of a single county ever undertaken by the Health Division and the Department of Environmental Quality.

I called in mid-November for these studies because pressures for growth ~~brought~~ on Lincoln County and its cities obviously are creating problems for the future and denying future buyers-of-property the complete protections to which they are entitled.

If the report that 34 locations are allowing untreated sewage to roll onto the beaches is not shocking enough, then let me say that we are all-but-positive that there are even more. And if that is not grave enough to attract attention, then consider that (of 1,005 lots platted in Lincoln County during the last two years) development is prohibited on 562-of them until community sewage treatment facilities are available.

Thirty-nine of 60 water systems studied in Lincoln County do not provide safe sources of adequate amounts of drinking water. Only four systems are approved for extension of service, and two of these are severely limited in the number of new consumers who may be served.

The study of community sewer systems in Lincoln County by the Department of Environmental Quality reports that existing sewer systems often don't work. Pumping systems fail and overflow, and sewage flows into the ocean without treatment.

Lincoln County became the subject of these studies for only one reason: It is where the pressures by an avalanche of tourists and by developers for development is the greatest of any Oregon county. We have been working with -- not on -- many people in Lincoln County to try to resolve the difficulties so that proper development will continue, and improper development will be stopped.

I asked in November for a moratorium on issuance of building permits in Lincoln County without the concurrence of the Health Division and the Department of Environmental Quality. The response was not reassuring.

Contrast that reaction with the plea of the commissioners of Jefferson County last month *They came and asked for a moratorium on subdivision approval to give them time to draft and adopt planning and zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations.*

The commissioners sought (and were granted) time to meet serious land-use problems.

Time also has been granted to Lincoln County, and local efforts have been made. But the work done has not resolved the issues, *partly because of the pressure from voters.*

It has been suggested that the State is using its powers to come down hard on a single county without regard to the rest. Contrary to this notion, we have taken even more stringent action elsewhere.

In the past six months, 20 subdivision and water systems have been forbidden from extending water services until they provide proper treatment and storage facilities, and meet other regulations.

These include developments in Umatilla, Wallowa, Washington, Clackamas, Lane, Coos, Douglas, Clatsop and Curry Counties.

The Department of Environmental Quality also has restricted sewage-line connections in Washington, Clatsop and Tillamook Counties, and in Jacksonville, Grants Pass, Mount Angel, Milwaukie and a dozen other areas.

Two sanitary districts soon will receive similar notification.

In all of these locations no major subdivision may be developed without improvement or enlargement of sewage treatment plants that would provide service needed by the subdivision.

Sanity must exist in the way we grow. No growth should occur without knowledge of future impact.

If environmental protection is not an adequate reason, then consider the escalating costs of repairing (or replacing) the deficient, vulnerable sewer and water systems being installed in some areas today.

Furthermore, prospective purchasers of commercial and residential property should have a right to expect that they will be able to build and have occupancy of their buildings.

In many parts of our State, this expectation is not insured by property purchase, and may never be realized except at great cost.

It is not true that every person has a guaranteed authority to do with his property what he sees fit.

The rights of others also are due consideration.

I will submit to the Legislative Assembly tomorrow a special message on land-use planning. It will cover the requirements we must adopt for ourselves in the areas of water and sewer services, planning and zoning. And it will address itself to the subject of what we can and cannot do with the land and other natural resources that we enjoy and that we must, by all means, protect.

We want to assist all cities, counties, water supply and sanitary districts -- all Oregonians -- to provide the services that are necessary.

In the meantime, we intend to make demands upon individual polluters, such as in Lincoln County, through a permit system. Permits requiring compliance will be issued to all polluters, including state parks with malfunctioning septic systems. If the ^{State} Highway Division is unable to meet the requirements for compliance, then the ^{Park} will be closed.

This is not precipitous action. Some of those polluting now are the same who were polluting in 1968.

Some continue to pollute by refusing to connect to a sanitary-service line that is literally at their doorstep.

Precipitous action would be to deny occupancy at once of more than two dozen Lincoln County motels, restaurants and homes along the beach in Lincoln County.

We do not want to close any businesses or parks, or put locks on any homes. It is clearly a responsibility of the voters of Lincoln County to assure that this does not happen, and a further responsibility to prepare the way for controlled growth.

The County Commissioners have tentatively scheduled an election for May to create a countywide service district to "wholesale" water and provide sewerage facilities. This is an impressive forward step.

Even so, we have been (and continue to be) concerned that zoning in Lincoln County often authorizes a land use that is incompatible with sewer and water planning.

An overall plan must include a determination of where sewer services will be available, and how water will be made available.

It is well understood that improved water and sewer services, such as those envisioned in current Lincoln County plans, place added demands on fragile and diminishing land resources. The key to proper growth and development is land-use planning -- planning that includes considerations for the public health.

Oregon Statutes require that all counties and cities in the State must develop and adopt a land-use plan and zoning by December 31, 1971. If the local governments fail, then the law requires the Governor to assume the planning and zoning responsibility.

Several local governments were given extensions of the initial deadline because of promises that progress would be made. Lincoln County's deadline was extended to December 31 of last year to enable completion of zoning of about 50 per cent of the county.

Reports from County Commissioners and county planning staff members indicate that Lincoln County has not met the deadline and insufficient progress has been made toward the goals.

This, coupled with findings of unhealthy water and sewer conditions, and the knowledge of the fragile nature of Oregon coastal land and water resources, compels me to schedule a public hearing in Salem for February 20, 1973. The purpose of this hearing is to provide Lincoln County and city officials and citizens an opportunity to present testimony as to why the State of Oregon should not assume land-use planning and zoning responsibilities in Lincoln County.

Until that hearing is scheduled and a decision rendered, the moratorium on issuance of building permits requested by me on November 13, 1972, will continue in force.

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