



MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

Rely on us.

TO: Commissioners Simpson, Helgeson, Manning, Mital and Brown
FROM: Karl Morgenstern, Property Management and Facilities Supervisor
DATE: August 25, 2016
SUBJECT: Update on Actions to Address Illegal Camping
OBJECTIVE: Information

Issue

Illegal camping along the McKenzie and Willamette Rivers has been increasing over the years. Illegal camping sites leave large amounts of garbage, human feces, biological hazards, and hazardous materials in areas next to waterways that can be washed downstream during fall/winter storms. EWEB has taken an active role to coordinate with other organizations to prevent camping from occurring and to clean-up those camp sites that were not able to be prevented in the first place. This is an update of these actions to date.

Background

Homelessness and illegal camping is a complex societal problem that no one entity can tackle. Multiple public agencies and non-profits in our area are struggling to manage impacts and find effective solutions with very limited resources. By all accounts, from frequent newspaper articles to partner agency and organization reports, 2016 has been the worst year for proliferation of illegal camping along waterways and in the urban areas in memory.

In the past, EWEB has been involved in coordinating and organizing periodic cleanups of illegal camps along the lower McKenzie River once or twice a year. The last cleanup in late February 2016 resulted in approximately 30 cubic yards of garbage and waste being removed from the riparian area in a well-coordinated effort among local agencies, landowners, river guides, and volunteers. EWEB realized that prevention of camps needed to take priority to reduce the need for expensive and time-consuming efforts to organize, cleanup, and dispose of large quantities of waste deposited along the river. Since this time, EWEB has taken a number of actions to develop systems that will aid in prevention and cleanup over time.

In August 2016, the Board requested that EWEB take a leadership role in coordinating community and partner efforts to prevent illegal camping along the areas waterways and cleanup camps that are discovered early in their development, realizing that in many cases, campers will return to the riverbanks. This memo is an update of those efforts to date.

Discussion

The following is a summary of efforts to date that EWEB has made to address illegal camping issues and coordinate our response and efforts with partner agencies and organizations:

1. In an effort to better track illegal camping activities, EWEB coordinated and funded LCOG to develop an application that can be used on smart phones and other mobile devices that allows for anyone to identify the location, condition, and status of illegal camps along the rivers. This allows tracking and monitoring to see over time where camping activity is occurring most frequently, and on whose property. Currently, nearly 44 illegal camps are identified and mapped, with 20 being cleaned up. EWEB was not able to track the actual costs of these cleanups, but based on past efforts likely ranges from \$30,000 - \$60,000. The camps are located on land owned by EWEB, City of Springfield, Willamalane Parks, International Paper, Wildish, City of Eugene, Oregon Parks, 4J School District, and CSC Holdings. Since many of these identified camps are on private property, access to clean up camps on private property has been limited. Funding for this application and weekly reporting by LCOG (approximately \$8,000) was not anticipated and therefore is not part of the 2016 Source Protection budget.
2. On April 28, 2016, EWEB staff organized a large meeting of agency and organization partners (Lane County, City of Springfield, City of Eugene, Sheriff's Office, ODOT, Oregon State Parks, Willamalane Parks, ODF&W, McKenzie Watershed Council, McKenzie River Trust, LCOG, Friends of Buford Park, Willamette River Keepers, Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District, Springfield Utility Board, Rainbow Water District, and others) to discuss better coordination around prevention of illegal camps and establishing regular quarterly cleanups. EWEB and LCOG introduced to the group the illegal camp mapping application to train the group, get feedback on changes, and show how the group can view and track camping activity over time. The group agreed that having LCOG manage this and provide weekly email notifications to the group and landowners about the status and location of camps identified would assist in removing illegal camps early before they become established.
3. The first coordinated quarterly cleanup was conducted on the Willamette River in July 2016 with the Willamette River keepers coordinating the effort. The cleanup was from Maurie Jacob Park to I-5 Bridge in Alton Baker Park.
4. EWEB has some initial conversations with Mike Kinneson at the City of Eugene (rest stop coordinator). The general feedback was that enforcement alone is not the solution, it needs to be coordinated with more safe places for people to sleep, increased investment in resources for assistance, drug treatment, and caseworkers, effective outreach, and more diligent patrolling to prevent new camps and direct homeless to necessary resources. EWEB is continuing conversations with a number of homeless advocacy organizations to gain better understanding of what potential strategies could be put in place to discourage camping along the rivers in the areas of outreach and education, support services, security and enforcement, etc. and see if there are gaps or needs that EWEB may be in a position to support. This will be an ongoing dialogue with multiple organizations and agencies.
5. EWEB has launched a large cleanup effort at its property for the Alternate Water Source intake site. This will include using a contractor due to potentially hazardous materials and vehicle carcasses that need to be removed. This effort will be followed up with vegetation management to remove blackberries and other invasives and trimming up limbs to open these areas up for Security to safely assess future activity that can be removed before camps get established. Depending on what is found during the cleanup, the cost of this effort is estimated at \$15,000-\$18,000. This funding was not anticipated and therefore not part of the 2016 Source Protection or Property Management budget. EWEB is coordinating with Wildish to remove camps on their adjacent land at the same time. Coordination of security patrols in the confluence area has occurred and will continue.

6. EWEB is in the process of entering an agreement with Willamette River Keepers to provide funding for their public education, volunteer and agency coordination and in support of their coordination of regular illegal camp cleanups for 2016-2017. Their efforts will include the confluence area of the Middle Fork and Coast Fork Rivers. This funding is included in the 2017 budget.
7. EWEB is initiating conversations with Oregon State Parks, Friends of Buford Park, The Nature Conservancy, Willamalane Parks, and Lane County to coordinate patrols in the confluence area and share resources. This will ramp up in the fall due to the busy summer season making it hard to schedule meetings. There is potential to have better coordinated patrols of all properties, coordinated and shared resources in cleanups (e.g., regular use of Sheriff crews), making a united front when dealing with the railroad to address their illegal camping problems, common signage and coordination with Sheriff for response to occupied camps, and outreach and engagement with other agencies and organizations to develop larger solution across the region.
8. On August 22nd, EWEB's General Manager attended a Springfield "leaders" meeting specifically formed to discuss preventative approaches to keeping illegal camps and littering away from water sources. The group, including leaders from City of Springfield, Springfield Utility Board, Springfield Police Department, Willamalane, and McKenzie River Guides discussed prevention, enforcement, and response options. As a follow-up, the Springfield City Manager is scheduling a meeting between EWEB and some local land owners (e.g. International Paper) near the Hayden Bridge intake.

These multiple efforts are in their beginning stages, but building relationships and coordinating resources is helping focus disparate efforts and leverage existing assets. For example, the City of Springfield has a camp clean up trailer that they are willing to loan out with the tools needed to safely clean-up sites, while Lane County is playing an invaluable role through its connections with the waste management department and Sheriff's Office work crews. Ideally, having regular coordinated cleanups to address areas where prevention was not successful will not only reduce the magnitude of future cleanups due to shorter intervals between these efforts but potentially break a cycle of habitual nuisance activities on our riverbanks.

EWEB has fielded multiple requests to provide access to utility property or to support getting utility services to other properties being considered for legal camping sites. Determining the proper role for EWEB as the provider of safe drinking water to our community will be an important policy decision point to consider as these requests are likely to continue.

Recommendation

This is for information only.

Requested Board Action

No Board action is requested at this time.