2026 COBALT Session

October 5, 2026

U. S. Pilotage Regulatory History

- Section 4 of the Lighthouse act of 1789. (The ninth act of the first Congress)
  - Delegated Pilotage regulation to the States

  "That all pilots in the bays, inlets, rivers, harbors, and ports of the United States shall continue to be regulated in conformity with the existing laws of the States, respectively, wherein such pilots may be, or with such laws as the States may respectively hereafter enact for the purpose, until further legislative provision shall be made by Congress"
  - Upheld by the Supreme Court in 1854

  "The act of 1789 contains a clear and authoritative declaration by the first Congress, that the nature of this subject is such, that until Congress should find it necessary to exert its power, it should be left to the legislation of the States; that it is local and not national; that it is likely to be the best provided for, not by one system, or plan of regulations, but by as many as the legislative discretion of the several States should deem applicable to the local peculiarities of the ports within their limits."
- 1846 –Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots was Established

Some Basic Facts

- Oregon Pilot services have been regulated by the Board since 1846, preceding statehood
- Pilot Candidates must hold a federal pilotage endorsement and have been a vessel master
- There are between 60 and 65 Oregon pilots (the number fluctuates slightly from year to year)

There are 4 Designated State Pilotage Grounds

- Columbia River (42 licensees – 6 on limited licenses)
- Columbia River Bar (15 licensees)
- Coos Bay (3 licensees; 1 of whom serves as a backup)
- Yaquina Bay (2 licensees)

Why Oregon Pilots and not Washington Pilots?

- 1881 -The GLENEARNE Decision (Oregon District Court [Admiralty])
  - Pilots from either state licensed on the Columbia River can pilot ship on the Columbia River due to it being a State boundary line.
  - However, only Oregon Licensed Pilots can pilot vessels on the Willamette River or to the Port of Portland.
- 1986 -Decision by Washington State Legislature
  - It was determined that since only Oregon licensed pilots can pilot Oregon Waters (Glenearne); and the majority of shipping at the time was to Portland; and there were no existing Washington Licensed Pilots operating on the Columbia; that there was no need to duplicate the current Oregon licensing and regulatory system for the Columbia.
  - A large number of Oregon Pilots are Washington residents.
  - A duplicative system would not appreciably reduce rates or increase efficiency. (OBMP memo to WSL)

Why a Pilot Board?

- The Oregon Board of Maritime Pilots is the licensing and regulatory body for Oregon's designated State pilotage grounds.
- The Board is administratively supported by the PUC
- The Board's major responsibilities include:
  - Establishing license qualifications and training standards,
  - Setting rates for pilot service and licensing fees
  - Investigating maritime incidents involving piloted vessels.

Board Composition

- 9 member volunteer board:
  - 3 pilot representatives
  - 3 industry representatives (including one member from the ports)
  - 3 public members
- Appointed by the Governor, confirmed by the State Senate.
- 4 year terms, may serve up to two terms.
- Only public members may chair the board.
- A supermajority, or 7 of the 9 members must vote in favor of any Rate Making Order.

OBMP Meetings

- Full Board meetings are conducted every 2 months
  - Meeting alternate between in-person and virtually
- Committee meetings vary
- Meetings are announced by public notice
- Board and Committee meetings are open to the public
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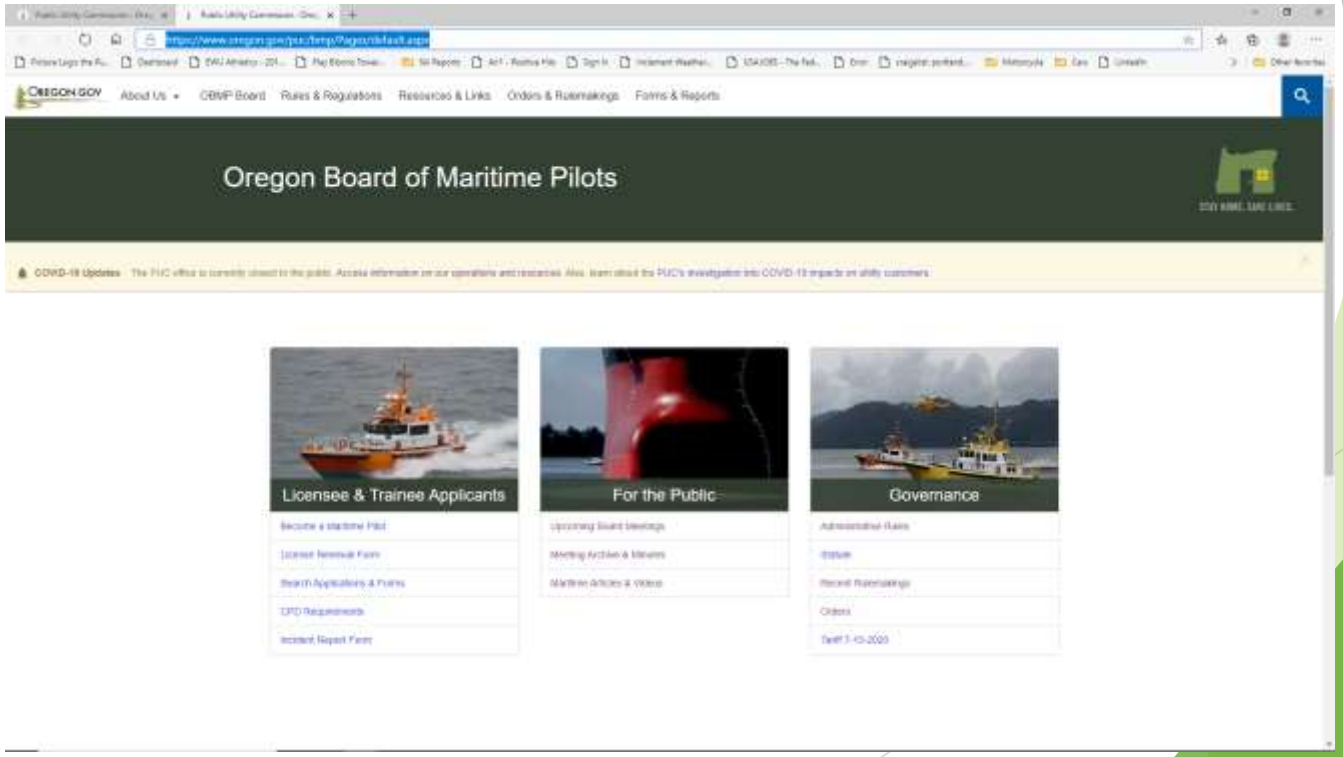

Core Responsibilities

License and Train Pilots

- Qualify & select pilot trainees and apprentices
- Set training and licensing standards
  - Trainees are trained by the respective pilot group
- Issue initial state licenses after training and examination
- Oversee annual license renewals which verifies pilot compliance with licensing standards
- Verify required continuing professional education

Core Responsibilities

Set Rates for Pilot Service

- The OBMP is one of the few rate-setting entities in state government
- Rates have to be in effect for at least two years
- A rate proceeding begins when a petition is filed by a stakeholder and accepted by the Board
- An administrative law judge from the Public Utility Commission conducts the proceeding, writes a proposed order, which the Board can accept, amend or reject

Core Responsibilities

Investigate Maritime Incidents

- Any reportable maritime incident that occurs while a pilot is directing the navigation of a vessel
- An incident is defined as:
  - An accidental grounding;
  - An intentional grounding that creates a hazard to navigation;
  - An unintended allision or collision with any object;
  - Loss of life related to the operation of the vessel;
  - Any occurrence resulting in damage to the vessel or other property reasonably expected to be in excess of $75,000
- The OBMP coordinates investigations with the Coast Guard.

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Reportable Incidents

Serious Incident (Category I)

- Property damage exceeding $200,000; or
- Loss of life or serious personal injury; or
- Allision with a Bridge; or
- Release of more than 50 gallons of oil or other hazardous substance in the water; or
- Drug/alcohol involvement by a pilot; or
- Any factor that results in widespread public interest

Minor Incident (Category II)

- Any reportable incident that does not meet the criteria for a Category I incident

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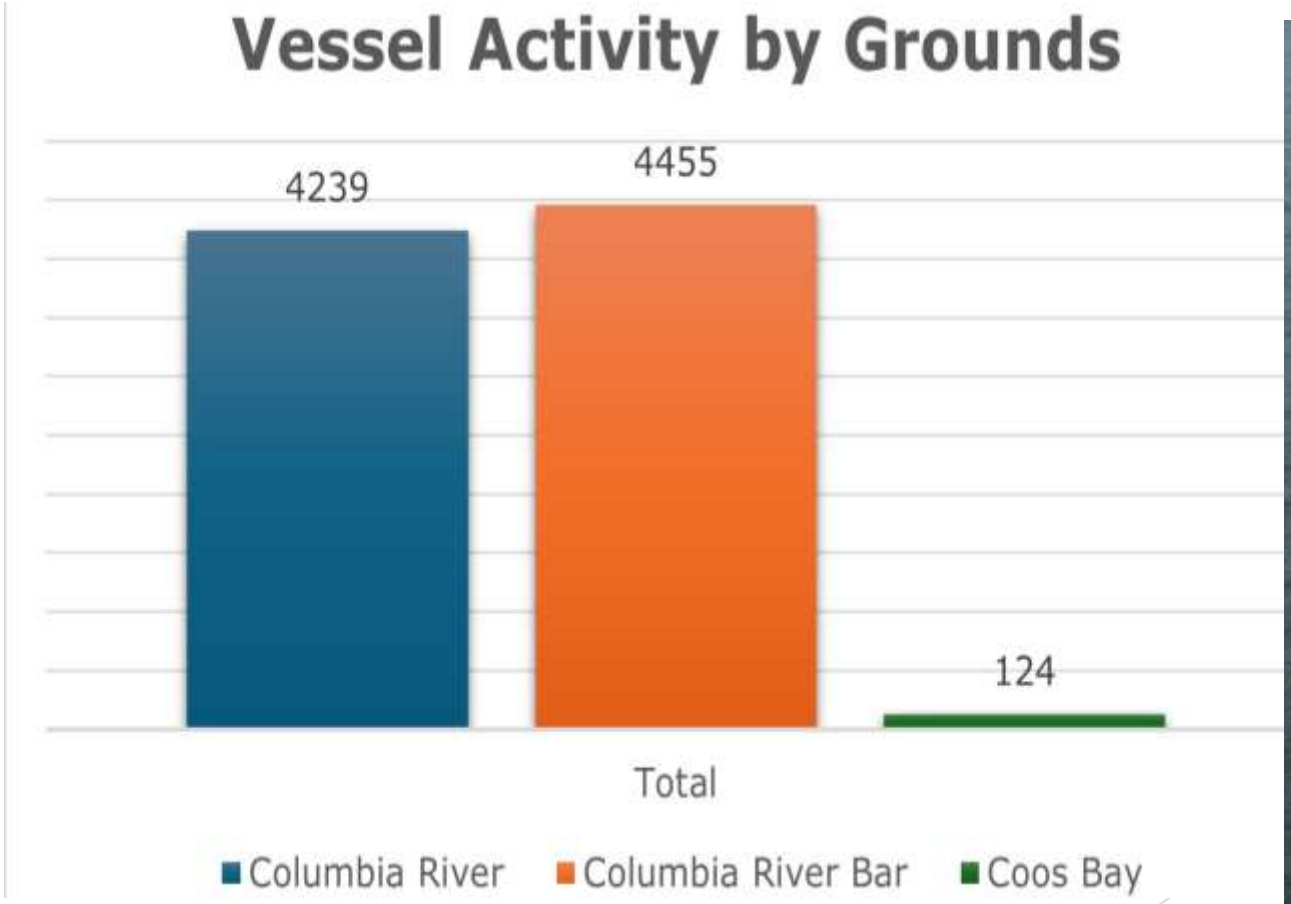
USCG/OBMP Investigations

- OBMP's role is to investigate the actions of the Pilot to establish if any licensee error or misconduct was involved
- Cooperation, communication, and vessel boarding coordination
- Prevents redundant interviews and investigative actions

Vessel Movements

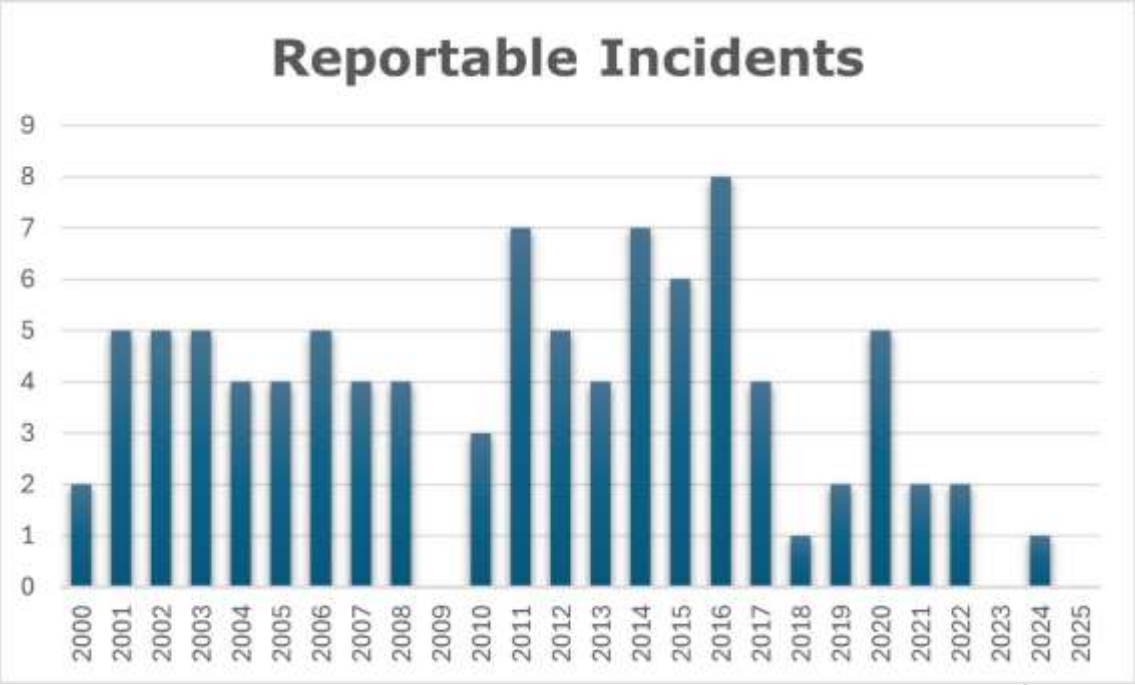


Incident Statistics

2023
- 0 incidents

2024
- 1 allision w/ pilot error

2025
- 0 incidents



Questions?

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