

CANYON VIEWS

# Advocating for public schools on Capitol Hill

TASS MORRISON  
COMMENTARY

I was one of a 13-member Oregon delegation to the annual advocacy institute presented by the National School Boards Association in Washington, DC January 29-31, 2017. The delegation was made up of members of local school boards and was sponsored by the Oregon School Boards Association. Our mission was to discuss Oregon's public school education priorities with our congressional delegation.

NSBA provides this event annually and hundreds of local school board members from across the United States attended this year.

The first two days, Sunday and Monday, we attended sessions from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. presented by a variety of speakers, including government relations experts, media experts, education researchers, public policy experts and members of Congress. The third day we spent on Capitol Hill meeting with our representatives from Oregon, including Sen. Ron Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley; and representatives Kurt Schrader, Earl Blumener, Greg Walden, Peter DeFazio, and Suzanne Bonamici.

The key priorities for Oregon we addressed specifically are: Secure Rural Schools Funding; the

Every Student Succeeds Act; Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act (school lunch funds); Perkins Career & Technical Education Act; and Federal funding for Education, particularly the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act is particularly critical to schools in Oregon. This law provides assistance to rural counties and schools affected by the decline in revenue from timber harvests on national forest lands. Federal funding under this law has declined significantly in recent years: Oregon school districts received \$30 million in 2009; \$13.15 million in 2015. Nationally, payments have dropped from \$300 million to \$50 million. Marion County received \$524,202.30 for schools in 2015.

Both senators Wyden and Merkley have been strong advocates for this law and assured us they will continue fighting for Oregon's schools, according to the Oregon Department of Education.

Special education (IDEA) funding was also a critical focus of our discussion. Initially (the law was passed in 1975), Congress promised 40 percent of funding to schools

for serving students with disabilities; currently we receive 16 percent of the costs from the federal

government. All of Oregon's Congressional representatives are in favor of increasing this and, we were told, currently this has bipartisan support in Congress. There is also strong support from each of our Congress members for career and technical education programs in our schools including continuing the federal funding through the Perkins C&TE Act.

While we had positive conversations with our Congressional delegation, the "temperature" in general in Washington was tepid in terms of what can be expected from the Trump administration regarding public education. It was noted several times that Trump is following through on his campaign promises very quickly. If that holds true for his campaign stance on public schools (in his inaugural address he stated that public schools were "flush with cash" and our children were "deprived of all knowledge") there could be dire consequences ahead for funding for critical programs for our most vulnerable learners.

There was also a universal negative opinion among the school board members about Betsy DeVos' nomination for education secretary.

DeVos' nomination causes me a high level of concern because of the "school choice" conversa-

tion. We heard from several speakers at the advocacy institute discussing the strengths and weaknesses of private/charter schools in states that provide school choice through vouchers, etc. There is good efficacy research now and basically it reveals that private/charter schools are no better or worse than public schools; they work for some kids sometimes.

However, to divert public funds to private schools without the same accountability public schools must adhere to is a major concern and certainly unfair to our public schools. For instance, in private schools, if a student isn't successful, they "transfer" out; in our public high schools, they are counted as "dropouts." And, when they "transfer" from a private school and enter a public school, the funds do not follow the student - an additional financial burden public schools must bear.

Tass Morrison of Sublimity is a member of the North Santiam School District Board of Directors and vice president of the Oregon School Board Associations Board of Directors. She can be reached at tass.morrison@nsantiam.k12.or.us.

## Trails

Continued from Page 1A

Those two sides — and anyone else interested — can make their case beginning at 6 p.m. in room 124 of the North Mall Office Building (725 Summer St. NE, Salem). Revisions would amend the 2009 Silver Falls Parks Plan and govern recreational use for the next two decades.

"This is the public's opportunity to provide input on how the trails system currently functions for them or their user group," said David Stipe, planning and design manager for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. "It's people's chance to tell us what they think."

No major changes are planned for the waterfalls section of the park, Stipe said, although the department will take comment on it.

The meeting will focus mostly on tweaks to trails in the park's remote southeastern section, an area frequented by mountain bikers and equestrians. Both groups volunteer time and resources to building and maintaining trails at Silver Falls, but the contrasting styles of recreation have sometimes kept the groups at odds.

"The need for this update came to light as a result of issues between mountain bikers and equestrians during the last recreation season," Stipe said. "Both user groups have come to us with concerns and desires for the future."

The most high-profile concern, according to the Silver Falls Chapter of Oregon Equestrian Trails, was the recently completed Catamount Trail.

The group said the trail was originally designated for horseback riding but

that instead, OPRD worked with another group to create a trail designed for mountain bikers.

"There was a lot of blowback when Catamount came in," said Ellen Carter, treasurer of the equestrian group. "It had originally showed up on the master plan as a horse trail, and parks didn't let us know that the plan had changed."

Stipe said the Catamount incident was an "oversight" and that park officials had jumped at the chance to work with the Salem Area Trail Alliance, a nonprofit that funded and did much of the volunteer work in creating Catamount Trail.

"Park staff engaged an enthusiastic and available user group but missed the equestrian use designation in the plan when moving forward with the project," Stipe said in an email. "This oversight is one reason for the need to update the trails sections in the adopted parks plan."

In planning the future, Stipe said one proposal could be limited use designations for the trails. One section could be mountain bike and hiker only, while another might be equestrian and hiker only, he said.

Other tweaks could include adding directional restrictions, which might permit mountain bikes to only ride uphill in a given direction. That might help equestrians worried about mountain bikers speeding downhill, coming around the corner and startling a horse, Carter said.

"Our biggest thing is just the speed," she said. "We can deal with a deer jumping out of the bushes, but what's worrying is someone coming around the corner really quickly."

"Overall, our hope is to reduce conflicts and just be able to feel relaxed

### Silver Falls State Park Trails Plan

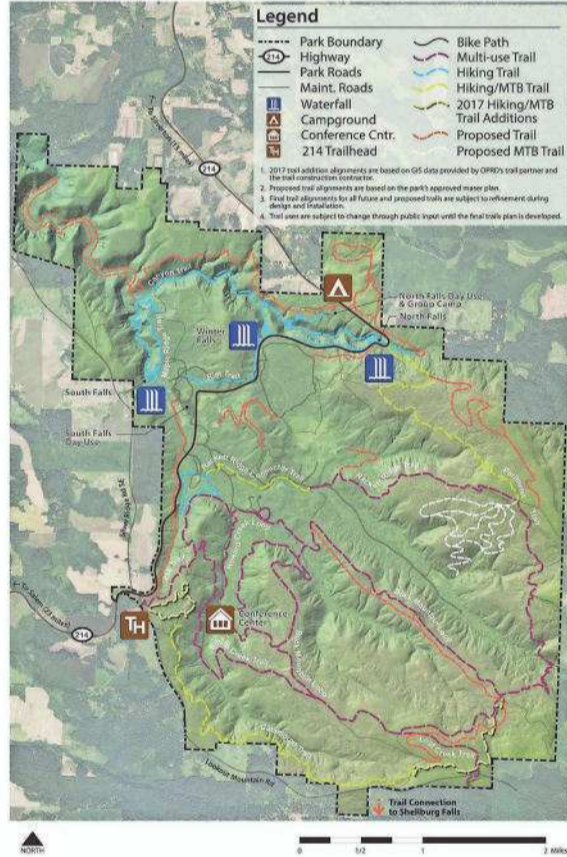


PHOTO COURTESY OF OPRD

A proposed trail map for Silver Falls State Park will be open for comment at a meeting Wednesday in Salem.

when we ride. I think we can all get along if we're willing to listen to what other people want."

Beth Dayton, a mountain biker and lead with Salem Area Trail Alliance, agreed.

"This is a golden opportunity for all interested parties to think outside the box and dream of what the backcountry trails could become that would better suit the needs of all users," she said in an email.

For more information about the meeting, contact Stipe at 503-986-0740 or david.stipe@oregon.gov.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for eight years. He is the author of

the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.

# Women organize book giveaway to celebrate the 'love of reading'

CHRISTENA BROOKS  
SPECIAL TO THE APPEAL TRIBUNE

Celebrating "the love of reading" in February, two local women are organizing a free book giveaway for all kids at the community dinner on Wednesday, Feb. 15.

Every Wednesday night, the First Christian Church and volunteers from around the Silverton area provide dinner to hundreds of local people. Many are children; so Lisa Morris and Rebecca Kuenzi, both mothers and educators, plan to give each child at next week's dinner a free book of their choice. All are brand-new and range from board books for babies to chapter books for teenagers.

Morris and Kuenzi sell for Usborne Books and have donated their commissions to the giveaway. Now they are seeking donors to help buy the books at cost; Usborne will also match all donations at 50 percent. Contribute online at <https://www.youcaring.com/silvertoncommunitydinner-kids-741121> or in person through Silverton Friends Church. Donations made through the church are tax deductible.

"Book ownership is so important and empowering for children," Morris said. "We want to bless these children by offering them the free gift of an Usborne book in addition to dinner."

The pair hopes to make the book giveaway a monthly event, if donations meet costs. The free community dinners are held every Wednesday at First Christian Church, 402 N. First Street, from 5 to 7 p.m.

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A focus of Wednesday's meeting will be resolving issues between mountain bikers and equestrians, two groups that have sometimes found conflict over trail use at the state park.

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