

# Plans for Salmonberry Trail *continued from front page*

trail project, called the Salmonberry Trail, would be the largest in Oregon. It would connect to other trails in the region, including the Banks-Vernonia Trail, and could become a national and international draw for the region and the state.

“The alignment of the rail line and this potential trail is spectacular in terms of its views and what people can see, and there are really some magnificent vistas,” says State Senator Betsy Johnson, a proponent of the trail and an active member in the current planning and development process. “This is an opportunity to create something where people can come and, not just to look at something, but come and have an experience.”

Those efforts to convert the rail line are ongoing, although, as anyone who witnessed the development of both the Banks-Vernonia Trail and the Crown Zellerbach Trail (known as the CZ Trail from Scappoose to Vernonia) can attest, trail development projects of this size and scope can take years, and usually decades, to complete. The massive amount of planning, coordination, and engineering needed can be daunting and glacial in progress.

The proposed 86 mile long Salmonberry Trail would follow the Banks-Vernonia State Trail to the area near Stub Stewart State Park, then head west through Timber, entering the Tillamook State Forest and traveling over the Coast Range. It would pass through the rugged and remote Salmonberry River Canyon to the confluence with the Nehalem River, following it to the town of Wheeler at the Nehalem Bay, before turning south and following Highway 101 to Tillamook. In Banks the trail would connect to the Tualatin Valley Scenic Bikeway, the Banks-Vernonia State Trail, and in Vernonia to the CZ Trail, creating a network of trails that connect the Portland Metro area with the coast.

“I see the Salmonberry Trail as the crown jewel in this network of multi-use trails throughout northwest Oregon that could have national and international appeal and draw,” says Senator Johnson. “This is a uniquely Oregon opportunity that draws on the natural strength of our connectivity between the coast and urban Portland. It could appeal to multiple users, be managed and funded cooperatively, and be an opportunity to attract people to our little corner of the world for an experiential recreational

opportunity.”

Currently the Salmonberry Trail is considered dangerous and remote, and is closed to public use because of damage to tunnels, trestles, and rails that have not been repaired or maintained. The Port of Tillamook Bay, which owns the rail corridor, has posted no trespassing signs, and violators could be cited.

While the trail is not useable at this time, the Salmonberry Coalition was formed to begin the process of planning this massive undertaking, and produced the Salmonberry Corridor Concept Plan in the fall of 2014. The Concept Plan’s vision states that the development of a multi-use trail in the region, “has the potential to connect urban and rural Oregon while tapping into a wide network of existing recreation trails and parks, educational opportunities and heritage sites. This will create strong economic opportunities for Northwest Oregon and help revitalize communities along the rail corridor, including Banks, Timber and the small towns along the coast from Wheeler to Tillamook.”

“People have been in and out of the Tillamook Forest in that area for decades, using it to hunt, using it to recreate, using it for commerce when there was logging in the Tillamook Forest,” says Senator Johnson. “It is a productive opportunity, and I use productive in all senses of the word. Over the years, as more emphasis has begun to fall on these multi-use trails and we’ve see the success of the Banks-Vernonia Trail and now the Crown Zellerbach Trail, we’re really starting to think about connectivity.”

Indeed, the trail route offers access to several state parks, additional adventurous recreational opportunities like canoeing, and kayaking, access to excellent steelhead fishing along the Salmonberry River, and hunting and hiking in the Tillamook State Forest.

Finding ways to create opportunities to share use is just one of the many hurdles the trail planning and development team will have to overcome as the process slowly moves forward. “There is some friction between these multiple user groups,” says Senator Johnson. “I still harbor the belief that we can all get along and design different opportunities along the trail that meet all their needs.”

The development of the Salmonberry Corridor Concept Plan was funded through a grant from Cycle Oregon. Participants in the coalition that produced the concept plan include Senator John-

son, Washington and Tillamook Counties, Oregon Equestrian Trails, The Port of Tillamook Bay, Oregon State Parks, Oregon Department of Forestry, the cities of Garabaldi, Nehalem, Manzanita, Rockaway Beach, Tillamook and Wheeler, and Columbia Pacific Economic Development District, to name just a few.

The Concept Plan identifies four distinct sections of the trail: the Valley Segment, a 25 mile section from Banks to Cochran in the Coast Range; the Salmonberry Segment, an 18 mile section which is the wildest and also most damaged part of the trail that travels through the Salmonberry River Canyon to the confluence of the Nehalem River; the Nehalem Segment, a 17 mile section from the confluence to Nehalem Bay; and the Coastal Segment, a 26 mile section that runs along the coast from Wheeler to Tillamook.

While planning for the trail is slowly moving forward, and the actual development is starting to take shape, Senator Johnson emphasizes that nothing is set in stone yet and no final decisions have been made. “Some of the renderings we have are highly conceptual and are there to give people a sort of visionary sense of what might be. There are still issues about the alignment and how it traverses different areas of the rail corridor. For example, around Tillamook there are some dairy farmers that are not enamored with the idea of having tourists travel right through working dairy operations. This remains very much a work in progress.”

The project has been identified as “regionally significant” by the North Coast Regional Solutions Team, making it a political priority at the state level. It has also been deemed an Oregon Solutions Project by the Oregon Governor’s office.

Jim Johnson, who formerly served as the Interim City Administrator for the City of Vernonia, and currently works for Oregon Solutions, is one of the Project Managers for the Salmonberry Trail project.

According to Johnson the entire right-of-way for the trail is owned by the Port of Tillamook Bay, which simplifies some of the issues in developing a trail of this magnitude, but because of all the different jurisdictions that the rail line travels through, there remains quite a bit of work to do. “You can imagine having to coordinate all these governmental agencies and get them going in the



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same direction,” said Johnson. “But that is what we do well at Oregon Solutions - creating cross sector collaborative working arrangements.”

Vernonians may remember that the Vernonia Schools was an Oregon Solutions project that received assistance in identifying a location for the new campus, as well as help with funding specific parts of the project, including changes by ODOT to the roadway approaching the Missouri Avenue intersection that leads to the new school.

Johnson says Oregon Solutions has been part of several distinct, what are termed “catalyst projects,” (a smaller stand-alone project that is part of the larger overall project and helps it move forward) related to the Salmonberry

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