

process and unearthed the largely undocumented story of Oregon's publicly owned beaches.

And what an inspiring story it is, one that animates my life every day, probably because I walk on the beach every day.

In 1912, years before U.S. Highway 101 opened, Oregon Gov. Oswald West rode a horse on a mail trail over Arch Cape and Neahkahnie Mountain on the North Oregon Coast. He later claimed the experience inspired him to, "(come) up with a bright idea ... so I drafted a simple short bill."

**I met the beach,
we fell in love,
and it has since
become the
greatest creative,
spiritual and
sensual force
in my life.**

The bill was a mere 66 words long, and when it became law in 1913 it declared the wet sands areas of the beaches, "a public highway and shall forever remain open as such to the public."

In his memoir published in 1949, West wrote, "Thus came public ownership of our beaches. In the administration of this God-given trust, a broad protective policy should be declared and maintained." West's visionary law inaugurated a unique relationship between a state's citizenry and a specific natural resource (our beaches) that stands virtually unparalleled in the country. He also wrote, "No local selfish interest, through politics

or otherwise, shall impair this great birthright of our people."

Oregon's great birthright is its ocean beaches — publicly owned ocean beaches — and this ideal remained unassailable until a half century later when an unprecedented challenge arose to threaten the legacy.

In the summer of 1966, an elderly couple and their nephew were kicked off the beach by a motel owner as they picnicked in front of the owner's Cannon Beach motel. The owner claimed the couple was trespassing on his private property. They might have been the first Oregonians in

the state's history to experience such a shock, and this affront touched off the epic 1967 legislative battle over the control of the dry sands areas of the beaches not covered by West's 1913 law nor detailed with any precision in deeds.



Gov. Oswald West

