

spend the summer ON THE LAND

Discover the natural history and biological diversity of the local area with the North Coast Land Conservancy's guided walks to fens, bogs, coastal prairies and dunes this summer

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A handful of sure-footed hikers pause on a promontory below Neahkahnie Mountain, its basalt flanks rising always suddenly from the sea and disappearing today in a summer fog above. Around them, nesting cormorants hug the cliffs; guillemots gather on the rocks below; a sea lion swims in the swells.

"I had no idea this was here," someone marvels. "I love to hear people say that," says their guide, Katie Voelke, the executive director of the North Coast Land Conservancy.

Even those who, for decades, have explored the North Coast's back roads and trails enjoy new discoveries when they join the North Coast Land Conservancy's summer On the Land outings.

Growing conservation

This day Voelke has joined Nadia Gardner, organizer of the Friends of Cape Falcon Marine Reserve, to describe the connection between land and sea, where a unique opportunity exists to protect contiguous natural habitat stretching from offshore seas to coast range summits. The NCLC has recently assumed conservation of 387 acres of forest and subalpine meadow on Onion Peak, part of what the NCLC calls the "Coastal Edge," that mountain range with its watersheds that stretches between Tillamook Head and Nehalem Bay. Voelke envisions, like Gov. Oswald West and State Parks Superintendent Samuel Boardman before her, a natural reserve spanning it all.

When harvest prohibition starts in January 2016 in the Cape Falcon Marine Reserve, 12 square miles of ocean habitat will adjoin the protected land of Oswald West State Park. The North Coast Land Conservancy hopes one day to expand and connect its Onion Peak reserve to create a remarkable quilt of connected and protected natural habitat.

Since 2012, Oregon has designated four other coastal marine reserves — at Cascade Head, Otter Rock, Cape Perpetua and Redfish Rock — but none of these have the potential to adjoin such significant and diverse conserved habitat.

"The North Coast Land Conservancy's local role in private land conservation — seeking to link together other protected areas such as state parks and marine reserves — makes it possible to take a systems approach to conservation, rather than a willy-nilly one," explains Voelke. "The greater the connectivity of natural systems, the greater resiliency those systems will have through time."

The balance of accessibility

Everyone who loves wilderness feels the tension, though, between public access and habitat conservation. "I feel it myself all the time. I love to tromp around outside, but it's difficult to decide where that's appropriate," says Voelke. "We don't want to mistakenly love places to death."

Access to NCLC's protected habitat is, therefore, limited. Some of it is fragile. Some of it unsafe. Some of it is seldom visited even by land conservancy staff. (None of it, however, has been taken from public access, since the land



Carla Cole discusses a hemlock tree during an NCLC On the Land foraging event July 7.

NCLC manages was always private in the first place.) In an effort, though, to responsibly invite the public into some of its conserved land, over the next few years NCLC will be building a public trails network at Circle Creek, its largest habitat reserve.

Voelke worked as a field biologist for the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife before joining NCLC in 2005. She grew up among the oak trees east of Sacramen-

to, California. Those trees are gone now. "I feel so strongly about conservation because the land I grew up in has been developed, paved and lost to conservation forever. I don't want to see that happen to the North Coast."

Discover hidden gems

Though opportunities to visit conserved land are limited (and, as yet, none exists to explore the reserve at Onion Peak) the North Coast Land Conservancy invites the public to discover other "hidden corners" of its conserved land by participating in its On the Land outings. Naturalists expert in each specific habitat guide the two-hour trips to fens, bogs, coastal prairies and dunes to describe the natural history and the biological diversity protected there.

Remaining On the Land outings in July include a trip to the Butterfield Fen, a 500-acre wetland rich in native cranberry, insect-eating sundew and sphagnum moss. Bring your lous and magnifying glasses. Then legendary local naturalist, founder of the North Coast Land Conservancy, Neil Maine leads a patient, observant trip to the Sitka spruce swamp near Circle Creek. You might bring a folding chair and binoculars.

In August (registration is now open) various outings will take hikers to examine NCLC's restoration project at Warrenton's Clear Lake, to wander through the recovering forest at the headwaters of Boneyard Creek, to observe new, evolving wetland near Thompson Creek and to stroll the transition from open coastal prairie to ancient Sitka spruce forest beside Neacoxie Creek.

As summer's end approaches, September outings will enjoy birding and wildlife spotting at Whalen Island in the middle of Sand Lake estuary, or behind the dunes at the Neacoxie Wildlife Corridor. On the Land also offers one more chance to observe up close the new wetlands at Thompson Creek. Maybe the first coho will be running by then.

Each outing is free but limited to small groups of 15 or so. Register in advance online at nclctrust.org or by calling the North Coast Land Conservancy office at 503-738-9126.



Carla Cole, natural resources project manager with Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, holds duckweed during an On the Land foraging outing July 7.



Mike Paterson shows Toby Hussa, 7, and his father, Jason Hussa, a sample from a pond in the Seaside Mill Ponds during a North Coast Land Conservancy On the Land event.



Toby Hussa, 7, smiles as he holds a snail he caught from a pond at the Seaside Mill Ponds during a North Coast Land Conservancy On the Land event.



A sculpin caught from a pond at the Seaside Mill Ponds.

'I feel so strongly about conservation because the land I grew up in has been developed, paved and lost to conservation forever. I don't want to see that happen to the North Coast.'



Carla Cole, natural resources project manager with Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, shows some of the plants that can be foraged near Creep and Crawl Lake during the North Coast Land Conservancy's On the Land foraging event July 7.

On the Land

www.nclctrust.org
503-738-9126

Registration required
Free

July 22 – Land-Sea Connection	Aug. 6 – Clear Lake Walk
July 28 – Botany in Butterfield Fen	Aug. 8 – Boneyard Ridge Hike
Aug. 3 – Circle Creek Watch	Aug. 15 – Stanley Marsh Walk
	Aug. 25 – Neacoxie Forest Walk
	Sept. 10 – Whalen Island at Sand Lake Walk
	Sept. 19 – Birding in the Dunes Walk
	Sept. 30 – Stanley Marsh Walk



Toby Hussa, 7, watches a small fish caught from a pond at the Seaside Mill Ponds during a North Coast Land Conservancy On the Land event.