

# Proposed Oregon bike trail unnerves farmers

Growers are concerned about conflicts with farm practices

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

CARLTON — Farmer Scott Bernards has more than one reason to be nervous about bicyclists and joggers regularly traveling a stretch of abandoned railroad next to his field.

With the negative attention given to pesticides in recent years, converting the decommissioned railroad into a hiking and biking trail could complicate spray operations, Bernards said.

“What if I don’t even see them?” he said.

Expecting him and other farmers to shut down sections of the proposed 17-mile “Yamhelas Westsider Trail” between Gaston and McMinnville when applying pesticides is also unrealistic, Bernards said.

“I never know exactly when I’m going to spray,” he said.

As the “rail to trail” proposal gains steam among Yamhill County officials and supporters, several local farmers have been pushing back against the project.

A chief concern is the reac-

tion that urban trail users will have upon encountering common farming practices to which they object for environmental or philosophical reasons.

“Farming is hard enough without people from Portland telling us what to do,” said Chris Mattson, whose property is bisected by roughly 1,000 feet of the railroad.

Aside from potential conflicts with farm operations, Bernards, Mattson and other growers are worried about the prospect of increased trespassing, fire danger and vandalism.

Mattson said he’s fenced off his property abutting the railroad because of problems with teenagers drinking, riding all-terrain vehicles and dumping trash on his property.

If the railroad becomes an official trail and attracts even more visitors, Mattson said he’s worried it will be inhabited by transients similarly to the Springwater Corridor Trail in Portland, which is known for homeless camps.

Supporters of the rail-to-trail proposal say these concerns are overblown given the rural nature of the area.

“This is not Springwater,” said Ken Wright, a winemaker in Carlton who supports the project.

The nearby 21-mile Banks-Vernonia State Trail — an abandoned railroad purchased by the state more than four decades ago — hasn’t



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Farmer Scott Bernards speaks about why he’s nervous about the potential conversion of an abandoned railroad into a hiking and biking trail next to one of his fields near Carlton.

caused increased crime or attracted transients, he said.

“It’s more of a visceral reaction than a reality,” Wright said. “Those concerns are not justified by history.”

Conflicts between trail users and landowners also haven’t materialized, he said. “There have been no issues with farming practices up there.”

New visitors to the area would spend money on restaurants and lodgings, strengthening Yamhill County’s business community, Wright said.

Clearing brush from the overgrown railroad track would actually reduce fire hazards, and volunteers could help with the work to contain costs, he said.

There’s also a legitimate reason why grant dollars from the state Department of Transportation should be invested in the project: Bicyclists who already use Oregon Route 47 are regularly killed on the narrow state highway, he said.

“They don’t want bikes on these roads. It’s just death

waiting to happen,” Wright said.

Roughly \$2.3 million in grants has been raised in support of the project, which is also in contention for another \$1.2 million in grants from ODOT, he said.

Yamhill County officials have offered to purchase nine miles of the railroad from its current owner, Union Pacific Railroad, but those negotiations are ongoing, Wright said.

Capital Press was unable to reach a representative of Yamhill County as of press time.

The Oregon Farm Bureau has argued that Yamhill County’s commissioners should first complete the land use process and issue a conditional use permit for the trail before spending money on the land.

The bureau disagrees with the county’s view that it would be premature to begin the land use process before the county buys the railroad, said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the farm bureau, in a letter to the commissioners.

“Constructing a bike path near agricultural lands creates a host of potential conflicts and liability concerns which the county has yet to address,” the letter said. “These concerns should be addressed before the county invests more resources in this project.”

# Human-caused warming burns more Western forests

By KEITH RIDLER  
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — A new study of Western forest fires confirms what is already apparent — wildfire seasons are getting longer and more destructive.

But researchers with the University of Idaho and Columbia University also say humans are to blame.

The study says human-caused global warming contributed an additional 16,000 square miles of burned forests from 1984 to 2015.

Researchers say the 16,000 square miles represent half of the forest areas that burned over the last three decades.

“We’re no longer waiting for human-caused climate change to leave its fingerprint on wildfire across the western

U.S.,” John Abatzoglou, the study’s lead author and an associate professor of geography at the University of Idaho, said in a statement. “It’s already here.”

The authors of the study, published online in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, say it’s the first to try to quantify how much human-caused climate change has increased wildfires in Western forests. Some other factors that had to be considered as contributing to the increase, the report said, included a legacy of fire suppression in the West, natural climate variability, and human settlement.

The study found that longer and hotter dry spells are causing Western forests to dry out and become more susceptible to wildfires.

Specifically, researchers said, spring and summer tem-

peratures have warmed by 2 to 2.5 degrees since 1950. Researchers said that warming accounts for 55 percent of what they call “fuel aridity” from 1979 to 2015. The study attributed the other 45 percent to natural climate variations.

The study found that since 2000 there’s been a 75 percent increase in forested lands with elevated aridity and nine more days each year with dry forests especially susceptible to wildfires.

“Anthropogenic climate change has emerged as a driver of increased forest fire activity,” the report says.

Park Williams of Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, and a co-author of the study, said the report

provides a better understanding of the effects human-caused global warming has on Western forests.

“This knowledge will allow us to make more educated fire and land management decisions,” he said.

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