



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Vehicles entering and exiting Ecola State Park must traverse several patches of rough road.

Park: Rangers keeping eyes on road conditions

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Landslide

The trail work Cox has in mind would be separate from the reroute that's necessary to reconnect a trail from Ecola Point to Indian Beach. That trail was severed by a landslide that sent a hillside of dirt, trees and undergrowth oceanward, creating an ocean view where there had never been one before.

A new route recommended by Ptarmigan Trails, a trail construction company, would take hikers around the slide area with a climb to a ridge far above. The proposed reroute is expected to cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000.

The original trail that hugged the cliff line has not been passable since last year. The park itself was open and closed sporadically throughout the spring as Cox and his staff dealt with issues related to several landslides.

Park rangers have kept the trail segment from Ecola Point to the slide open, but they have discouraged foot traffic through the slide area. Signs at the pay station above Ecola Point and at the trailhead to Indian Beach inform visitors that the trail is washed out and



A sign at the park ranger pay station at the entrance to Ecola State Park lets visitors know about the condition of trails.

asks hikers not to try and cross the slide.

Dozens of people have clearly ignored the plea. The slide area is criss-crossed by

narrow paths stamped with boot prints and animal tracks.

In May, one park ranger said the area looked like a bomb had gone off. It still looks that

way, but the scar isn't as fresh now. Undergrowth has crept back and, with the mild start to winter this year, persisted into December. Beyond the

makeshift paths, the ground is soft and fractured. A shallow muddy stream cuts down the hill, spilling coppery water across the beach far below.

Wear and tear

Last December, storms shut down access to Indian Beach and caused sinking and sliding along Ecola Park Road. Erosion around the Canyon Creek culvert became an issue, too. Such problems continue to haunt the park leading into the winter months this year.

The park receives an estimated 313,808 visitors each year, most of them arriving during the summer months when the weather is more inviting. Summer traffic wore away at repairs crews completed on Ecola Park Road in the spring. Areas where the asphalt was torn away and replaced with compacted gravel are now pockmarked by potholes. The park management had opted to repair the areas with gravel to make future fixes easier to address.

"We are always concerned about the status of the road and the slide that's occurring there and how that can be impacted by a heavy rain event or heavy rain combined with strong winds," Cox said. However, routine winter weather is not a huge concern, he added. The park has weathered many storms. Road conditions simply remain another thing for rangers to keep an eye on.



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Warrenton will require developers of subdivisions of 20 lots or more to provide a neighborhood park.

Warrenton: Wider road requirement applies to any new road construction

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New local roads are now required to meet a pavement width of 36 feet rather than the range of 28 to 36 feet more typical in Warrenton.

In many discussions about the past new developments in the works or under construction, Fire Chief Tim Demers said he was concerned about fire engines being able to turn around in streets and access the new buildings in

case of fire.

Wider streets will also allow cars to park on both sides of the road. In some neighborhoods, cars ride up onto the sidewalk to park — a misguided effort to park on the street but keep the road clear that eliminates the ability for pedestrians to use the sidewalk, city commissioners have noted.

The requirement applies to any new road construction, including work done by the city.

Cannon Beach: 'We're just not catching up'

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But many of the councilors questioned a rate increase that would only partially finance projects. Some worried without full funding from rates, the system would not be maintained and would eventually depreciate. Others raised questions about whether commercial outfits were paying enough under the current rate structure.

"We have this need — it is well-established — and we are only going to get half of it funded? That doesn't make sense to me," City Councilor Mike Benefield said. "If we don't have the funds, we're going to be back to square one when our water system isn't paying for itself."

The city plans to hold a public hearing in February before implementing any changes. But for now, the city is considering approving just the first year of rate increases proposed in the five-year plan, which would increase the cumulative water, wastewater and stormwater base rate by 16 percent from this year to next — about an \$8 difference for the average residential ratepayer.

City Manager Bruce St. Denis and Public Works

Director Jim Arndt recommended revisiting the issue after designing a five-year capital project schedule. The plan would impact rates annually by accelerating or slowing increases depending on what projects are planned for each fiscal year.

"Instead of locking into a rate schedule, let's vet the projects by the board and the committee and talk more clearly about what we need in terms of cash flow and rates," St. Denis said.

A different approach

Approving the plans and the rate increase to fund it stalled earlier this year after committee members raised concerns about how projects were prioritized and discrepancies within the rate study completed by Civil West Engineering Services.

Since May, the committee worked with Arndt to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of funding the whole master plan versus just a percentage and different rate structures and payment phase-in options.

The committee opted to recommend financing only the water and wastewater master plans partially in an effort to lessen the overall impact to

ratepayers and incentivize the city to find alternative funding through grants and bonds.

The committee also thought funding only half the plan would encourage the city to prioritize financing the most urgent projects.

"The (public works committee) has reservations about the priorities and the reasoning and explanations for some of the projects," the committee wrote in a letter to the City Council. "We are recommending you adopt the plans because they are a good starting point for evaluating our water and wastewater systems."

But Arndt cautioned councilors that while the city always seeks out grants to fund projects when applicable, funding less than 100 percent would likely not keep up with depreciation of the system over the 20-year life of the plan.

"After 10 years of no increases, we're just catching up," Arndt said.

Benefield and Councilor George Vetter said they felt the increase was relatively nominal in comparison with what could be accomplished with the revenue if the plans were funded fully.

"If this is what it costs to

have water, then this is what it costs. Why pull from other sources other than rates?" Vetter said.

Restructuring

While agreeing with the needs of the system, Mayor Sam Steidel was wary of any more increases that could impact ratepayers, and suggested exploring ways for the city to use lodging tax revenue to help fund projects.

"The number of day-trippers we have is an abuse on the system," Steidel said.

Councilor Nancy McCarthy also questioned whether a different type of rate structure could be explored to make sure commercial customers were "paying their fair share."

Bob Reid, a member of the Public Works Committee, agreed with McCarthy's inquiry, arguing the commercial outfits that attract thousands each year play a role in the degradation of the water and sewer system.

"If you charge commercial businesses, they pass it onto the tourists, which are largely the reason why we have to support a system built to support 10,000 people for a town with only 1,700 residents," Reid said.