

Shores: Populations, tourism have changed

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Now the state is in the process of updating the sea plan, incorporating new information, concerns and interests that will inform how such areas are managed and protected for years to come.

A working group tasked with gathering public input held workshops along the coast in February and March. They visited Cannon Beach last week. If there was any question about the year, one thing is now very clear: It's not 1994 anymore.

"A lot has changed between 1994 and today and lot of that has to do with how we understand our near shore and the research in our near shore," said Charlie Plybon, chairman of the working group and Oregon policy manager for the Newport chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, a nonprofit environmental organization.

Maps are out of date. Certain sections of rocky shores that used to see few visitors are more popular now. Populations and tourism have changed, ballooning on the North Coast where major highways funnel people directly from the valley to the beach. Technology has changed. Drones swing low over tide pools and skirt cliff sides.

People document visits to Cannon Beach and Ecola State Park on social media — hashtag Haystack Rock, hashtag Pacific wonderland. There's a regular rotation of articles listing the top 10 "secret beaches." There's a better understanding of intertidal areas' importance and vulnerability.

"The fact that people still appreciate these areas and value these areas ... that seems relatively unchanged," Plybon said.

At the Cannon Beach workshop, attendees pointed out



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

People visiting the tide pools near Haystack Rock in Cannon Beach are frequently urged to minimize their impact on the environment.

how the growing popularity of fat bikes — bikes with thick tires able to be ridden across sandy beaches — has brought people to areas they may have never thought to access if the only option was to walk.

"There are potentially more people accessing these places in different areas," said Andy Lanier with the state Department of Land Conservation and Development. "Whether that's through a new way of transporting yourself there or just that there's more people visiting in general."

Sea birds and other creatures

Cannon Beach and Arch Cape residents worried about the impacts on sea birds and marine creatures hope an updated rocky shore management plan could offer more protections. Though the rocky shores plan includes six different management categories, only three are actively managed: the designations for marine garden, habitat refuge and research reserve.

Certain rocky shore areas people might expect to have

some kind of protection under the state plan, places like Falcon Cove, are listed as "not yet designated."

Melissa Keyser, a member of the working group and coordinator of the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, noted that three years ago, she and volunteers would only see a few drones on the beach. There were concerns such activity could impact nesting seabirds. Last year, they saw a drone a day.

Beyond drones, there are concerns about people harvesting off rocky shores. As certain types of foraging increase in popularity, some of the generous harvest levels allowed by the state could start to eat into intertidal residents like mussels, said Nadia Gardner, an Arch Cape resident and environmental advocate.

Up and down the coast, working group members heard about growing human populations, upticks in tourism and an increase in the use of drones.

"Hearing that, I think, was important," Lanier said. "I don't know that it was neces-

sarily surprising given population growth and the growth of our cities and counties, but I also think there's been a concentrated drive to increase tourism on the coast because that's one of the ways our coastal economy is supported. I think there's some recognition by folks in the audience that that's a double-edged sword."

Open, fluid

It's important that the working group didn't go into these public meetings with a draft plan or main topics of discussion, said Deanna Caracciolo, a policy fellow with Sea Grant, who has been helping lead workshops and gather information. Instead, the workshops were open, fluid. That was intentional.

"We want to make sure everyone has a voice in this update," she said.

The state is in the first stages of a public scoping process, gathering and assessing public comments. Work on a draft plan amendment will begin in the summer and will likely carry through January.

Middle school: The new academic wing is estimated to cost \$13.6M

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After vetting several concepts with middle school leadership, the solution of a compact, three-story academic wing with identical learning communities on each level became the preferred solution, McCracken said.

"It just really improved the site around that existing classroom wing — more condensed, reduced travel times, was a really effective learning environment," he said. "And so we came to a solution within a couple hours."

The new academic wing is estimated to cost \$13.6 million, including demolition of the old building.

Each learning community would include five classrooms about 200 square feet larger than existing classrooms, a science lab and restrooms all arrayed around a central learning commons.

Secured waiting areas would be added between the outside and interior of the middle school to control public access to the learning communities, McCracken said, and teachers would be able to lower blinds and lock doors to secure individual classrooms.

The proposed modernization of the middle school also includes \$15.6 million worth of improvements to the cafeteria, library, bathrooms, offices, outdoor play areas, track, utilities and communication throughout the existing building.

Such an investment would require the school district to bring the entire middle school up to modern building codes, McCracken said.

If a bond was passed in November that includes the middle school project, planning would begin next year. Construction would begin in 2020 and finish in 2021.

The district's long-range plans also include up to \$17 million in security improvements and modernizations at Astoria High School, and nearly \$7 million at John Jacob Astor Elementary School. The improvements would be staggered to maximize the use of local construction companies, McCracken said.

The school district has overall found nearly \$81 million worth of long-term building needs. That includes more than \$61 million in construction costs and \$19 million for planning, management, permitting and temporarily housing students during the project.

"We're not saying you're running an \$80 million bond," said Tom Bates, another architect advising the district.

The next steps are prioritizing the proposed projects in the long-range plan, finishing phone surveys of the public, holding another community meeting next month, meeting with students next month to gather their input and bringing back a recommendation to the Astoria School Board in May.

Manager: Has managed the fair since 2016

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employee in attendance at the public meeting following the executive session.

Mattinen had been on medical leave in the past, but was placed on administrative leave last week. She left the fairgrounds Thursday with a number of items from her office in hand.

"It's an HR matter. It's really a private matter. All I can say is she is on leave and we are working with Kathi," Steele, the county's interim human resources director, said today.

Mattinen declined to comment following the meeting.

John Lewis, the fair's maintenance supervisor, is managing the fair in Mattinen's absence, along with one administrative assistant.

Mattinen has managed the fair since 2016, following management turnover in the past decade. In addition to the Clatsop County Fair, two of the largest annual local galas — the Astoria-Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival and the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival — take place at the fairgrounds, along with several other events.

The fair used nearly all of its \$438,000 materials and services budget in the first six months of the fiscal year. County commissioners in February approved the use of \$100,000 in contingency money through June. The fair's total budget is \$1.4 million.

Unforeseen maintenance issues, an unusual management structure, a high volume of staff turnover and poor spending choices have all been pointed to by employees and board members as reasons for the overspending. The board had discussed putting special projects — including one that

would install new heaters in the arena and another to renovate the farm house — on hold.

Festival: About 100 people expected

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biking-enthusiast Matt Weintraub, the Fat Bike Festival was chosen as the only new event last year to receive a grant from the Tourism and Arts Fund.

"Time and time again I've seen positive effects of cycling in communities," Weintraub said. "I thought it'd be amazing to try and do something different like this in the community I live and work in."

Since his departure from the chamber last year, Oregon Rides, a promotional organization for biking, has taken over coordinating the event. Fat biking, a growing trend across the nation, is picking up especially quickly in Oregon due in part to the state's abundance of public beach access, event organizers Elliott and Daniella Crowder said.

The Crowders hope the inaugural festival will evolve into an annual event, and eventually spark new interest along the entire coast.

"The focus is getting people out, enjoying themselves on the beaches, and fat biking is a way to do it," Daniella Crowder said.

While growing in popularity, one of the challenges about getting the first event off the ground will be awareness and education. Oregon Rides plans to bring in a fleet of fat bikes to engage as many interested people as possible, since

fat bike ownership is low and somewhat costly.

Right now, organizers are expecting about 100 participants, with the majority of those registrants between 35 and 50 years old.

"We want to emphasize this isn't a race. This is for fun. It's not about who is the fastest, or who can wear the most spandex," Daniella Crowder said.

Environmental concerns

April was chosen in part due to a low tide schedule, as well as a way to give tourists another reason to come during the town's off-season.

Some residents in the community have taken issue with the timing of the festival, however, as it coincides with when shorebirds are migrating and feeding in intertidal areas like Haystack Rock.

The event also overlaps with Cannon Beach's long-running 12 Days of Earth Day, which is timed with when tufted puffins come to nest. Some worried a high volume of bikers could scare birds attempting to feed and nest, Haystack Rock Awareness Program director Melissa Keyser said.

"We had a lot of concerns at the beginning," Keyser said. "This (event) kind of moves all the way down our beach. We were concerned where they were going to ride the bikes and what the impacts could be. We wanted to make sure there

was no loud music or balloons or something to deter them."

In response to these concerns, the Chamber of Commerce partnered with the awareness program and the Surfrider Foundation to help educate bikers on how to avoid sensitive wildlife areas, as well as creating route maps to go above the high-tide line. Event organizers have also coordinated with environmental groups to schedule a fat bike cleanup ride on the final morning to help mitigate any impact the bikers may leave.

Elliott Crowder said fat bikes have a minimal environmental impact, with the thicker tires creating less pressure on the surface.

"I think people will be pleasantly surprised by the fat bikes," Daniella Crowder said. "By Sunday morning you won't even see the tracks. It's like a footprint in the sand."

With the awareness program helping educate bicyclists during the festivities and being included in some of the planning process, the impact could be relatively small.

"But, it's still a 'we'll see' situation," Keyser said. "Because this event hasn't taken place on Oregon beaches before, we don't know what the full ramifications of this event will be. There could be unanticipated effects."

"But it looks like as of now all of the precautions are being taken."



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