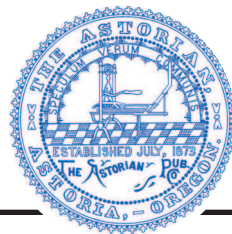


# OPINION



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## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

# How Seaside won Corps permit for school construction



Photos by R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

School district construction oversight committee members inspect the campus building site.

*'IT'S IMPORTANT WE OPEN THE SCHOOL AND BE READY TO MOVE IN 2020.'*

Jim Henry | project manager

When the Army Corps of Engineers issued a permit for water work in September for the Seaside School District's campus construction in the Southeast Hills, officials and construction crews issued a collective sigh.

With labor, equipment and a schedule all but written in stone, Corps approval was the trigger for a full push to meet the fall 2020 opening date for students at the new campus.

Pristine water comes down from the hills past the campus and into the Neawanna River.

While the Department of State Lands deemed wetland impacts as "minimal ... to intermittent, non-fish bearing headwater streams," in a separate approval delivered in early July, the Corps did not sign off on the plan, sending the school district back to the drawing board.

The school district's first application proposed permanent placement of soil, concrete and stone within a wetland and more than 2,000 linear feet of stream "considered essential fish habitat."

Corps engineers failed to sign off on the application, pressing the school district to come up with another solution.

To meet Corps concerns, the district "swapped" an equal amount of stream area off-site.

The Corps signed off on the plan in mid-September. The permit came in two days after the in-water work deadline, so drainage work won't take place until next summer.

Because of the delay, Project Manager Jim Henry said, "this is going to be a busy site."

### What's in the permit?

Known by the weighty title "Compensatory Stream Wetland Mitigation Plan," the document — acquired by the Seaside Signal after a freedom of information request — details how the district will work with the federal government to satisfy Corps requirements.

It may not be the most enticing opening, but it's worth about \$100 million to the school district and its taxpayers: "You are authorized to perform work in accordance with the terms and conditions specified below."

What follows is about 200 pages of NWP-2018-142, the joint permit application familiarly known as "the JPA," with enough information to fill a couple of college textbooks.

The school district's mitigation plan uses a "combination of on-site, in-kind and off-site, out-of-kind compensatory mitigation to offset project impacts," according to the permit application.

Mitigation work at Seaside Heights will take place east and northeast of the Heights parking lot, where a small ditch is being improved and widened with appropriate wetlands plantings.

North of the proposed sports fields is a stormwater management system to handle the drains under the sports field improvement area, channeling it through a sediment and settling swale before allowing the stormwater to run off into the China Creek tributary.

The system is designed to drain about the same area of ground at a level of turbidity at least 90 percent as clean as water historically drained to the tributary prior to the work.

Offsite measures include an environmen-

tal easement on undeveloped property behind the district bus barn on U.S. Highway 101 near the Neawanna River. A little more than a quarter-acre will be protected by deed restriction to protect river habitat behind the bus barn on Neawanna Road. Other land will be cleared of knotweed and other invasive species and deeded as a conservation area in perpetuity.

"We're not doing any work that would be on the tidal area," Henry said. "We'll be working from the top of the bank inward."

The district's mitigation proposal includes a combination of stream enhancement at Coho and China creeks — which feed into the Neawanna River — and wetlands protections to meet regulatory concerns.

To complete the work for the Corps, the district will need a survey for the easement agreement, an invasive species removal plan, an approved species planting plan and an erosion control plan to have in place while the work is being done, Henry said.

The district will document precipitation and photographs of the outfall areas to present to the Corps, the Department of State Lands and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

### What's ahead

Hoffman Construction will implement the mitigation work, both onsite and offsite. The contractor will install erosion control measures to protect drainages and start demolition, including stump removal and clearing.

Once the base rough grading is complete, the contractor will begin site grading to construct the access roadway and water quality improvements. Standard erosion control measures will be in place to protect the adjacent waterways.

Plantings will be installed through March, including bulbs, trees, shrubs and temporary irrigation.

Meanwhile, at the state level, the Department of State Lands — which also monitors water and runoff — is in the middle of rules changes regarding their mitigation policy. These changes could reduce conflicts in findings when reviewed by multiple agencies.

While the Corps and Department of State Lands have independent authority in Oregon with distinct decision-making and rule-making processes, both agencies coordinate to help ensure a "timely and transparent overall regulatory process," according to the department's Ali Hansen.

Revised state rules will not take effect until Feb. 1 at the earliest; the district's new plan is not subject to re-review by the state, Hansen said. Permits issued prior to then, or complete applications received prior to then, are not subject to the new rules.

Up next, a status report must be submitted to the Army Corps by Dec. 15 and mitigation monitoring plan submitted within a year.

Monitoring reports will be submitted every year for five years, ending Sept. 19, 2023.

"It's important we open the school and be ready to move in 2020," Henry said.

R.J. Marx is editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette, and covers South County for The Daily Astorian.



R.J. MARX



Construction workers at the Seaside campus.



Heavy rains test mitigation measures at the campus.

Crane lifts rebar and other material onto the site.

