

Trail: State expects improvements to take several years

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Coast Trail winds through Fort Stevens, Ecola and Oswald West state parks.

The state has identified five trail gaps in Clatsop County — two in 2011 and three more recently. They include Hug Point, where a rocky outcropping is impassable at high tide; Camp Rilea, where the trail, which runs along the beach, is closed periodically due to artillery training; and areas where the trail turns onto local roads and U.S. Highway 101.

One of the newer gaps emerged in 2016 after a landslide snipped a portion of the trail that runs between Indian Beach and Ecola Point in half.

Park staff had allowed hikers to walk the trail up to the landslide, but the entire section is now closed at the trailheads.



Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian
Signs at Ecola State Park warn visitors of hazards on the trail.

People were not honoring the closure at the landslide, said Ben Cox, park manager for the Nehalem Bay Management Unit. One person even tied a rope to a tree to help people navigate around the slide.

"It was to the point where

people were going out and beyond the area closed and then we were getting complaints about the poor shape of the trail," Cox said.

The state's plans to address gaps in the Oregon Coast Trail will dovetail with work to reroute this section in Ecola State Park outside of the slide zone. Cox and his rangers examined a possible reroute in 2017. They had hoped to have a new trail available soon, but staff changes and other work delayed the project.

Since 2017, he and park staff have fielded questions from people looking to hike the entire Oregon Coast Trail. They encounter people who are using old information or tips gained from other hikers about where to camp — often in places where camping is not allowed.

But there are few options for hikers, Cox said. There

are stretches between camping and lodging options that hikers just can't make in a one-day trek.

As Wilcox and her team continue to look at how to improve the trail system, Cox anticipates conversations about where camping could be allowed might come up. For the section of the trail he oversees, he believes there could be an opportunity to work with cities and counties.

Yearslong work

The state expects the work of identifying gaps along the Oregon Coast Trail, improving safety and connectivity, adding signs and looking at the trail as a whole will take several years.

Elsewhere, some cities are already in the middle of addressing some of the problems.

Manzanita landed a grant several years ago to build a

trail connecting nearby Neahkahnie Mountain with the city, closing a gap identified in the 2011 plan. No access exists and hikers are forced to walk along the shoulder of Highway 101 to stay on the route.

In September, city leaders requested an extension of the state grant funding the work after unexpected changes — including a land transfer — delayed construction of the trail.

Neahkahnie is an important focal point for the community, Manzanita City Manager Cynthia Alamillo said. So besides improving the overall trail experience, she believes the connecting trail to Manzanita "will be a great amenity to our community."

A new website — oregoncoasttrailplanning.com — provides regular updates and also gives people several ways to submit feedback or information.

Deal: 'We're going to try to do it all'

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Spilling water has been ordered by the courts in the past, as recently as last spring.

But those orders have created friction between salmon recovery advocates and groups that say curbing the flow of water means less electricity — and that means higher rates for customers.

'Flexible spill'

This latest approach calls for "flexible spill," according to a joint statement released by the agreement's parties. In other words, dam operators would control the volume of water that gets released to help move fish downriver; more water when electricity demand is lower, less water when there's high demand for electricity. During those high-demand periods, more water would be sent through power-generating turbines.

These new strategies for spilling water past the dams would be in place for three years on eight dams on the lower Columbia and Snake rivers. The agreement "avoids litigation" during

that three-year period.

"I don't think this piece would be the solution, but it might be the start of a move toward a solution, and that's what I think we're all hopeful for," said Jim Litchfield, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, a group that has opposed increased spill in the past.

"At the same time, we are concerned about the unprecedented and scientifically unproven levels of new spill being contemplated by the agreement," said Litchfield, whose group represents utilities, ports, farms and other operations that support dams.

Fishing and environmental advocacy groups characterized the agreement an important incremental step in the right direction.

"The urgency for strong action remains, while Columbia Basin salmon remain on life support," said Glen Spain, Northwest regional director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

Tom France, regional executive director of the National Wildlife Federation, called the plan a step

to help both salmon and the endangered resident orcas of south Puget Sound. Their waning chance of survival has been directly linked to the historically declining population of Columbia and Snake river Chinook salmon.

"Much more will be needed, however, to protect endangered salmon — and orca — from extinction," he said in a statement.

The parties that agreed to the new spill strategy include the Washington, Oregon and the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho. Other parties include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, which operate the dams, and the Bonneville Power Administration, which markets hydro-power to utilities and other customers.

Bonneville Power Administration spokesman Dave Wilson said the plan could keep everyone out of court for the next three years.

"The new approach is collaboration rather than litigation, working together the states, tribes, federal agencies," he said. "We're going to try to do it all."

Dam removal

Some, including the federal judge who previously presided over the case, and more recently, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, have called for research or consideration for the removal of dams on the lower Snake River. It's an idea that's been discussed as way to save salmon and ensure they are plentiful enough for orca survival in the Northwest — especially if more incremental steps don't work.

Todd True is an Earth-Justice lawyer who has represented environmental groups in legal action over the dams and salmon. He said it would be great if, after the new agreement's three-year period, the government can come up with a long-term solution to protect salmon and orcas.

"Scientists have been saying for decades that's the single biggest step we can take to put salmon on the path to sustainable populations," True said. "So that is front and center and it's an issue we think we need to come to grips with and address."

Port: 'It should be for the greatest good'

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who likened the possibility to giving the agency's future away. "I'm going to be totally against giving away or selling any property," he said.

Rohne broached the idea of having tenants like Englund Marine & Industrial Supply or Bornstein Seafoods buy the land under their buildings, or of selling tenants at the Astoria Regional Air-

port the buildings they lease. He pointed to the development at North Tongue Point, where the Port Commission ended an unprofitable lease early so boatbuilder Hyak Maritime could begin developing a shipwright cluster.

"Tongue Point is being used productively, and I think that's a greater win for our community," Rohne said. "It doesn't need to have our stamp on it, to maintain an institution

for the sake of maintaining an institution. It should be for the greatest good."

Commissioner Robert Stevens said he would be more open to selling buildings but holding onto land. Commissioner James Campbell said there are some buildings he would like to see in private hands to avoid maintenance costs.

The Port Commission also renewed a contract for

Gary Kobes, who manages the airport. The commission approved funding the design and bidding portions of two new airport improvement projects that will be largely paid for by Federal Aviation Administration grants. The commission recently approved spending up to \$230,000 on a local match to avoid losing several million dollars worth of federal grants.

Marina: Repair to causeway could take a long time

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After the state's recommendation, Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, ordered the causeway closed just before Thanksgiving, keeping utilities on and allowing tenants to use skiffs to reach their boats. The abrupt closure has left boat owners upset with the Port over the handling of the marina and a lack of maintenance.

The state recommended a similar closure in 2010 over the same concerns. The Port hired Bergerson for temporary fixes to keep the causeway open, but did not have the permits to use treated timber.

Bergerson's repairs at the time were meant as a five-year Band-Aid, but are now nine years in and badly rotting, said the company's co-owner, Greg Morrill. He agreed with the state's concern about portions of the causeway holding up, much less supporting vehicles or pedestrians.

"I'm not saying that's the end of the structure, but in its current state, that's why it has to be shut down," Morrill said.

Cost to repair

Morrill estimated between \$200,000 and \$250,000 for immediate repairs, along with between \$250,000 to \$375,000 over the next five years to maintain the repairs and pedestrian access.

The Port has been contemplating whether to continue repairing the failing causeway, which staff has estimated would require \$4 million to replace. Morrill estimated between \$6 million and \$8 million.

Port commissioners suggested temporary fixes to the causeway, from floating pontoons to a lighter aluminum deck with a lesser need for support. Commissioner Dirk Rohne asked Morrill for his recommendation. Morrill asked the Port what its long-term goals are for the marina.

"There are Band-Aids

that will work to keep it open, extend the life a little bit longer," Morrill said. "But it's still just a Band-Aid. As happy as I would be to take the Port's money to put Band-Aids on indefinitely, you need to look at a solution beyond a Band-Aid."

The East Mooring Basin has attracted interest from a development group led by Floyd Holcom, owner of the adjacent Pier 39 waterfront complex. The group hopes to put the marina under private management and develop more slips, floating homes, retail and a potential cruise ship dock.

The Port has looked at the partnership as a way to inject private capital into fixing the marina. The area has been added to state enterprise and federal opportunity zones offering property tax incentives and an ability for investors to avoid capital gains taxes.

Shuttle service

Even a temporary repair



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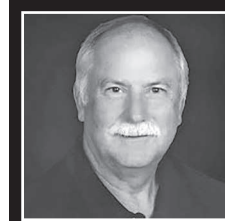
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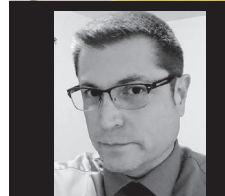
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