

# Haystack Rock: In 1968, dynamite was used to discourage climbers

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It isn't clear why Quimby and others saw so much erosion last year. Still, the rock has always taken a beating — both from the ocean and from people.

## Dynamite

In 1968, a fish and wildlife crew blasted a lower ledge off Haystack Rock with dynamite, hoping to discourage rock climbers. Then there are the constant, natural forces of weather, wind and waves. The more extreme weather that comes with climate change is expected to exacerbate erosion on the coast.

And there isn't much anyone can do.

Haystack Rock was designated a national wildlife refuge in 1976 and as a marine garden in 1990.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife have a hand in managing parts of the rock, the marine garden and beach around it and the creatures that live there. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the part of the rock that is considered a national wildlife refuge and habitat for migratory and local birds, basically from the barnacle line up.

The federal agency does not actively monitor Haystack Rock — or any other of the state's roughly 1,850 protected rocks, reefs and islands — for erosion. But the recent changes at Haystack Rock are concerning and the agency plans to pay more attention in years to come.

"Definitely we are very concerned and want to keep the finger on the pulse on potential impacts for nesting seabird habitat," said Kelly Moroney, project leader for the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Haystack Rock and other rocky islands in Oregon — with the exception of the iconic Tillamook Rock Lighthouse — are considered wilderness areas. Under the federal Wilderness Act, one of the directions Moroney must follow is to promote natural processes like erosion.

"We would actually be precluded from implementing stabilization efforts," Moroney said. "Now, if there were an opportunity to do native plant restoration to



Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian

Haystack Rock is a popular destination, drawing thousands of people every year, but erosion is changing the face of the landmark.

help with protecting those habitats, that is an option."

"It adds complexity to the management of those islands for sure," he said.

What the agency and state and local partners can focus on for now is education, both to keep the public safe and to continue to preserve the natural resource.

Erosion at Haystack Rock will be a new message for the awareness program to communicate to visitors, said Lisa Habecker, the education and volunteer coordinator.

Typically, the organization talks about things like the history of the rock, the many animals that live there and the steps taken to preserve habitat for everything from mussels to puffins.

Erosion may prove to be a tricky message.

Last year, Haystack Rock Awareness Program staff and volunteers interacted with nearly 1 million visitors. They may talk to hundreds of people in a single hour at the height of summer.

But despite all the attention visitors pay the rock, many still ignore the signs that tell them to keep out of restricted areas. Kari Henningsgaard, the communications coordinator, has also noticed it seems difficult for them to take erosion dangers seriously.

"Because if people don't actually see the rockfall happening, it can be difficult for them to grasp the severity of the threat," she reasoned.

Staff and volunteers have used ropes to cordon off danger zones, which seem to work well as a communication and crowd management strategy. When there are questions

about why an area is roped off, most people seem to accept the explanation of rockfall. It helps that there is some recent evidence.

"There are also a couple of large chunks of rock that we often point out because, like missing puzzle pieces, you can easily see where they fell from," Henningsgaard said.

## Grooves and gouges

While occasional visitors may not have noticed any difference in the shape of Haystack Rock, the grooves and gouges that appeared last year stand out to people like Quimby and Habecker.

"I mean, we're out here every day," Quimby said. "We know this rock inside and out, all of us do. We know when things have changed."

And awareness program volun-

teers are realistic. The sea stack is battered by big storms every year. Each day the tides drag a little bit more of it away. The rock clearly isn't going to be around forever, though no one alive today will see it disappear.

Still, best to focus on the work already in front of them, Quimby said. It's hard enough just to keep visitors from messing up the tide pools or stomping through the marine garden.

"I think that the important thing is the here and now," Habecker said. "That's more important than, 'Hey, it's going to be around 3,000 years!' I want it around for the next decade and we're dealing with the stewardship effort to protect the creatures that live there now."

"Let's take care of now so there is something left later."



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