

Protections: Coalition aiming for a balance

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The birds’ global population is small. Like many residents of the intertidal zone, they are vulnerable to human disturbance, particularly at popular sites near Cannon Beach where low tides in the summer provide a hard-to-resist opportunity for people to wander and explore.

This year, Goossen saw some of the lowest black oystercatcher chick survival rates she’d ever recorded. She feels she is constantly asking people to stay off the rocks or keep their dogs away from nesting sites. For the most part, she said, they just don’t realize the impact they are having.

Now a local group hopes to take advantage of an update to Oregon’s Rocky Shores Management Plan to place these areas under state protections similar — though less stringent, in some cases — to those that apply at sites like Haystack Rock and Cape Falcon Marine Reserve.

This week, the North Coast Rocky Habitat Coalition presented their plans to propose new protection designations for Tillamook Head, Ecola Point and Chapman Point to the Cannon Beach City Council. They were looking for feedback and support as they prepare to submit final plans to the state in December.

Visitation to the coast continues to increase, they noted. Some areas not included under the state’s plan in 1994 are feeling the pressure more now than in the past and new protections are necessary.

These sites are important for thousands of seabirds, which are the most threatened group of birds globally, noted Joe Liebezeit, staff scientist and avian conservation manager at Portland Audubon.

The designations could also provide some additional help to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, whose budget took a major hit because of the coronavirus pandemic. Though the designations do not necessarily come with resources for enforcement or education, they open the doors for community groups that rally around the sites to apply for other types of funding.

The rocky shores coalition, led by Margaret Treadwell, the coordinator for the Friends of Cape Falcon Marine Reserve, is still refining proposals for the three



Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian
Margaret Treadwell, left, of Friends of Cape Falcon Marine Reserve and the North Coast Rocky Habitat Coalition, discusses issues at Ecola Point with a Cannon Beach resident and coalition member on a site visit in September.

Clatsop County sites and plans to hold several public virtual meetings to collect community input.

They’re striving for a balance, she told the city councilors: Something poised between allowing people to enjoy the area while still protecting the creatures that call it home.

Protection options

The coalition believes a marine conservation designation, which comes with the highest level of protections and restrictions, would make sense for Tillamook Head. This dominant landmark at the south end of Seaside and an entry way into Ecola State Park was considered for designation under the rocky shore plan in the ‘90s.

Though a hiking trail leads up and over Tillamook Head, much of the area is inaccessible, punctuated by steep cliffs and crashing waves below. The headland provides refuge to over a thousand birds and houses nine sea bird colony sites.

Chapman Point, a headland that marks part of the northern boundary of Cannon Beach and the beginning of Ecola State Park, features rocky islands populated by nesting seabirds and shorebirds to the west and beachfront properties rising out of the dunes to the east.

In the middle is a nub of protected land, the very tip of the headland that people are not supposed to hike, climb and clamber on but which, to many summer visitors, presents an irresistible opportunity to do exactly all of those things.

Because of the point’s easy accessibility and proximity to Haystack Rock — you can see the iconic rock

distantly to the south — the rocky shores group is expecting to ask for a marine education designation. The designation, also known as a marine garden, could come with harvest restrictions.

There are already a number of locals who live at the north end of Cannon Beach and who are concerned by the level of human activity they witness in these fragile areas, Treadwell said. Many of them also walk the beach at low tide.

“It’d be great to build on that concern and activity to make a more formal and probably mostly volunteer group to do education out there,” she said. She envisions a “light-weight” version of the education and outreach that already occurs at Haystack Rock.

“Part of the magic at Haystack Rock is you’re both letting people know what impacts they can have and preventing that while giving them opportunities to learn,” she said.

Volunteers and employees with the Haystack Rock Awareness Program routinely set up scopes when puffins return to begin seasonal nesting at the rocks.

“They can see the birds they’re being asked not to get too close to,” Treadwell said.

Kelli Ennis, the director of the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, said she expects her organization to be a partner to any community group that forms around Chapman Point, providing training, outreach and other types of support.

‘A ghostly place’

At Ecola Point, just north of Chapman Point, the rocky shores group is proposing a marine conservation or marine education designation.

The point can be a ghostly place — a feeling punctuated by the drawling, lonesome cries of gulls or the frantic piping calls of black oystercatchers raising an alarm.

A perpetual mist seems to wrap around the rocks. White harbor seals sometimes lounge on the outer rocks like strange, pale mermaids. A beachcomber squinting from the shore may find them already staring back, well aware of a human presence, wary and watchful.

For the first time in several years, those same rocks are also dotted with specks of purple and orange — sea stars making a comeback after a mysterious wasting disease decimated their populations on the West Coast.

While many people have already shown their support for the group’s proposals, some wonder if formal protections will simply shine an unwanted spotlight on areas, putting them on a new kind of map and increasing the number of visitors seeking them out.

It is something the weighs on Treadwell’s mind.

“A lot of people I bring that up to say, ‘Look, people are going to come anyway and it’s better to get ahead of it and protect places than worry that you’re bringing attention to them,’” she said. Also, she added, they’re already here.

On an early morning tour the group took of Ecola Point and Chapman Point in September, a low tide revealed wide stretches of tide pools. Despite the early hour, they saw visitors and locals alike pick their way among the rocks. People wandered next to the cliffs of Chapman Point and leaned in to investigate anemones. They tossed balls and sticks to their dogs.

Debate: ‘Please, do your research this election’

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gone for our grandchildren, and those living-wage jobs that depend on them will disappear.”

If the bill resurfaces at the Legislature, the Democrat said, “I will be reaching out to all of our stakeholders, sitting down with them and working to come up with a compromise — something that works for everyone.”

Referencing her experience bargaining contracts as a public-sector union leader, Boothe-Schmidt said she believes people with different perspectives can reach a compromise, “as long as no one gets up and walks out, like the Republicans did.”

Weber, a Republican who has opposed cap and trade, described the policy as a “massive bill” that was repeatedly amended: “It was hard to understand, it was going to be hard to deliver to the people.”

To Weber, climate change is a worldwide issue that “needs to be addressed on a world scale.”

“What we can do in this area, where we are sequestering so much carbon anyway in all of the trees we grow in the area, would only be a pin drop in relationship to the harm it could possibly do to the small businesses,” she said. “It was something that was too aggressive and it was at the wrong time.”

Reflecting on whether she would have walked out with fellow Republicans, Weber said, “There comes a time when you have extreme circumstances, and extreme circumstances call for extreme measures.

“I can’t tell you for sure that I would have walked out, but I support the ability to be able to do that,” she added.

Weber also clarified her position on the Second Amendment sanctuary, a ballot measure in Clatsop County in November that would prohibit county resources from being used to enforce local, state and federal gun laws. She did not take a position on the measure when asked during the Tuesday forum in Astoria.

Boothe-Schmidt opposes the measure.

“It’s very convoluted,” Weber said after learning more about the policy. “I am for the Second Amendment and the rights that are given to us in the Second Amendment concerning guns and owning guns, but this issue that’s coming before the voters is unrealistic.”

The candidates also had an opportunity to address campaign advertisements being sent to voters. Boothe-Schmidt refuted a letter from Tillamook County Sheriff Jim Horton sent by the Weber campaign, stating: “I do not and never have said I wanted to defund the police.”

“Please, do your research this election,” she implored voters.

Weber claimed she found it equally offensive that she was being accused of wanting to defund education and “to fire people who are gay.” She expressed concern for the residual effects of negative ads.

“It would be a wonderful gift if this did not have to happen,” she said.

The election forum, held at City Hall, was sponsored by the Seaside chapter of the American Association of University Women and the Seaside Signal. The moderator was R.J. Marx, the editor of the Signal and the South County reporter for The Astorian.

Port: City always wanted a shared vision for west side

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City officials recently met with Will Isom, the Port’s executive director, at the Chinook Building, an aging commercial complex at the West Mooring Basin the Port is emptying out in the hopes to rehabilitate.

The city informed the Port it would need a new waterfront master plan before any money from the Astor West Urban Renewal District would be released to help rehab the building.

Isom on Tuesday shared with Port commissioners a copy of a 2007 presentation about the Crandall Arambula plan, which he said the agency had already spent six figures on despite never adopting.

“Many of the elements of that plan are things that we either have contemplated in our strategic plan, or items that, as a staff, we have talked about,” he said.

The old plan envisioned a retail shop at Bornstein Sea-

foods, an esplanade east of the Astoria Riverwalk Inn where the Port has torn down the former Seafare Restaurant, a public boat ramp, an extension of the Astoria Riverfront Trolley to Pier 3 and the strip of parkland that runs along the western edge of the pier.

“I think it makes sense to use that plan as a starting point, and sort of work on amending that, rather than start from scratch,” Isom said.

City Manager Brett Estes said both parties had the Crandall Arambula plan on their minds when the city and Port met at the Chinook Building. The city has always wanted a shared vision for the west side, Estes said. In that spirit, the city offered to use urban renewal dollars to update the Port’s waterfront master plan.

“I had suggested that this could be something that we would put on the table to help see this move forward,” Estes said.

Plant: Application goes before Planning Commission on Nov. 12

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“Unless the proposed fish meal processing facility can eliminate any smell that attracts birds, its operations have the potential to be a serious safety issue for Life Flight Network and other airport users.”

Clayton referenced Warrenton’s municipal code, a section of which allows industrial and commercial operations near the airfield, “provided the use does not result in the creation of bird strike hazards.”

Plant design

Scoular’s development team on Thursday tried to ease the concerns of planning commissioners, describing a self-contained plant design costing \$6 million to \$8 million with no outside storage that has worked in British Columbia and Alaska for 20 years.

Thomas Wortmann, the managing director of corporate development at Scoular, said the doors would be sealed during operation and the air in the facility circulated through scrubbers to take out odor and chemicals. The fish scraps will be delivered in sealed totes, he said, and product would be moved between the warehouse and trucks in an indoor loading dock.

Adam Dailey, an engineer on the project, said the operation is also going through an approval process for federal Clean Air Act requirements.

“It’s certainly a very clean operation,” he said. “And I



The Astorian
Life Flight Network, which has been based at the Astoria Regional Airport since 2015, has concerns about a proposed fish meal plant nearby attracting birds and endangering aircraft.

believe they’re doing everything that they can. There will be no birds hanging out, waiting for food, because there won’t be any food.”

But planning commissioners still wanted the company to address the concerns of the airport’s helicopter services.

“Until I know that the Coast Guard and Life Flight come together with you guys, and you guys all feel comfortable with this, I couldn’t in good faith feel like I could approve this,” said Paul Mitchell, the chairman of the Planning Commission.

Commissioners also wanted Scoular to finalize a development agreement with the Port and Warrenton to limit the amount of tidal runoff coming from the airport and inundating Warrenton’s nearly tapped-out wastewater treatment system. The Warrenton and Port commissions both approved the agreement Tuesday.

The airport has been send-

ing out between 4 million and 6 million gallons of wastewater a year, according to the city, despite only taking in about 1 million gallons of treated water. The fish meal plant will pump out another 20,000 gallons of wastewater a day.

Without being mitigated, it could move up an expansion of the city’s wastewater system expected to cost around \$5 million and be completed between 2023 and 2024.

Before the plant starts running in the summer, the Port has agreed to spend more than \$300,000 installing pressurized sewers to keep out tidal water. The Port Commission on Tuesday approved the engineering costs of the project.

“The tenant’s value to the Port is too great to ignore or otherwise let go ... that’s my impression in what I’ve heard from the Port,” Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer said of the project on Tuesday.

Outbreak: Cases occurred over four weeks ago

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Other measures include increased cleaning and sanitation, reinforcing remote working and shift rotations where possible, screening job sites and taking extra precautions when social distancing is not possible, he said.

According to Hoppes, the virus cases occurred over four weeks ago.

Clatsop County declined to provide more information about the virus cases.

The Astorian had contacted Hoppes and Skanska about potential virus cases in September after receiving tips from people who believed there were positive cases tied to the contractor. The people, who asked to

remain anonymous, wanted more information and were concerned about the potential spread of the virus.

Both Hoppes and Skanska declined to confirm the virus cases at the time.

Since late May, the Oregon Health Authority has disclosed workplace outbreaks when five or more virus cases are tied to workplaces with at least 30 employees.

Michael McNickle, the county’s public health director, has taken different approaches to reporting workplace virus cases since the pandemic began. But he recently told The Astorian he would try to follow the health authority’s standard on disclosure.