

# New movie inspired by Oregon's dunes

By JAMIE HALE  
*The Oregonian*

The sweeping sand dunes of the planet Arrakis, home to the spice melange and giant sand worms, may sound strangely familiar to those who have explored the central Oregon Coast.

Because while the world imagined in classic sci-fi novel "Dune" may be entirely alien, Pacific Northwest author Frank Herbert first dreamed it up on a visit to the Oregon Dunes just outside Florence.

First released in 1965, "Dune" is once again in the public consciousness thanks to a new major film adaptation, due out Oct. 22 in theaters across the U.S. and on streaming service HBO Max. The new movie, directed by Denis Villeneuve, has an all-star cast including Timothée Chalamet, Oscar Isaac, Zendaya, Rebecca Ferguson and Jason Momoa. While the new movie was filmed in Europe and the Middle East, Herbert, born and raised around Tacoma, Washington, was originally inspired by the sweeping dunescapes of the Pacific coast.

In 1957, Herbert was a struggling author, living with his family in Portland following a stint working as a speech writer for failed U.S. Senate candidate Phil Hitchcock, according to "Dreamer of Dune," a biography written by his son, Brian Herbert. Frank Herbert had already published one successful novel, "The Dragon in the Sea," but his other stories failed to find an audience and the family struggled to make ends meet.

That year, Hitchcock told Herbert of an exciting ecological project on the central Oregon Coast, where government researchers were experimenting with European beach grass in the Oregon Dunes, a 40-mile stretch of oceanfront dunes between Florence and Coos Bay, hoping to stabilize



The Oregon Dunes are located on the central Oregon Coast.

Jamie Hale/The Oregonian

sections are also reserved for hikers, including the beautiful Dellenback Dunes, the popular Oregon Dunes Day Use Area and other spots, all managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

There have also been efforts in recent years to remove invasive beachgrass and restore the sand dunes to their original state, most notably the campaign by the Oregon Dunes Restoration Collaborative, made up of local governments and tribes, federal agencies, politicians and environmentalists, which formed in 2016, 30 years after Herbert's death.

The collaborative argues that the complex ecosystem in the dunes requires free-blowing sands to function, and that wildlife is threatened by the effects of invasive beach grass. Their goal is to protect and restore the dunes in what would likely be a decade-long project.

"For the dunes to exist, the sand needs to move," Bill Blackwell, a representative of the Oregon Dunes Restoration Collaborative, told the Siuslaw News in 2018. "If you're out there, you can see it will look different from one day to the next. With the vegetation stabilizing things, the sand can't move, which stabilizes the dunes and simplifies processes."

The ongoing state of the Oregon Dunes is mirrored with eerie similarities in "Dune," in which Arrakis undergoes several transformations throughout Herbert's six-book series. Readers can discover the fate of that planet, but the fate of our dunes is yet to be seen.

Those who want a sense of "Dune" in real life can find it at any of the many day-use areas throughout the Oregon Dunes. You won't find spice or sandworms there, nor righteous armies led by a Messianic figurehead, but you might find an inspiring landscape unlike any other in the Pacific Northwest.

**FRANK HERBERT PENNED A STORY ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE AT THE DUNES CALLED 'THEY STOPPED THE MOVING SANDS,' BUT IT WAS NEVER PUBLISHED. INSTEAD, THE AUTHOR BEGAN A YEARSLONG PROCESS OF RESEARCH AND WRITING THAT CULMINATED IN HIS LANDMARK SCI-FI EPIC 'DUNE.'**

the shifting sands.

The dunes were notoriously unstable, constantly shifting and moving in the strong winds that blew in off the Pacific Ocean, threatening the new communities popping up along the coast. The beach grass, which was first introduced on the Oregon Coast in the 1880s, had been used to tame "the sand demon" up the Pacific coast and along the Columbia River, according to a 1904 article in The Oregonian.

Herbert penned a story about his experience at the dunes called "They Stopped the Moving Sands," but it was never published. Instead, the author began a yearslong process of research and writing that culminated in his landmark sci-fi epic — a novel that used science fiction as a canvas to air his philosophies on ecology, religion, the dangerous allure of charismatic leaders and our overreliance on scarce natural resources.

In "Dune" the scarce natural resources are both water (a rarity on the desert planet) and the spice melange, a nat-

ural substance that prolongs life and gives its users limited powers of prescience. When war breaks out in the desert over the coveted spice — which has also become necessary for space travel — it's not hard to read between the lines.

"Science fiction writers tend to take a long-term view," Herbert told an Oregon Journal reporter in 1977, following publication of the third book in his "Dune" series, "Children of Dune." "We're writing possible future histories."

Herbert was an early envi-

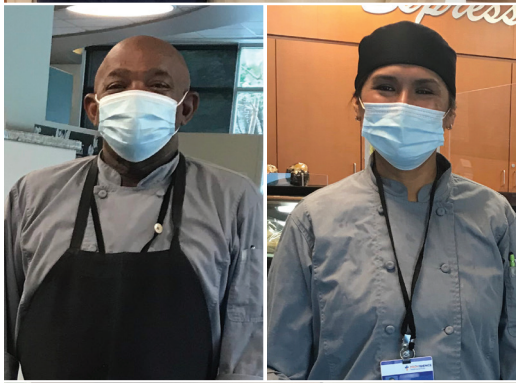
ronmentalist and a staunch critic of fossil fuels. He was also deeply connected to the Pacific Northwest landscape, spending his childhood exploring the forests of the Olympic Peninsula and paddling around the Puget Sound, according to "Dreamer of Dune."

That life experience, paired with his extensive research of desert cultures and his time in politics, laid the foundation for "Dune." While the book received little fanfare when it first published in 1965, the book eventually became one of the most cel-

ebrated science fiction novels ever, winning both the Hugo and Nebula awards for science fiction and fantasy writing, and selling millions of copies worldwide. It was previously adapted into a Hollywood film directed by David Lynch and starring Kyle MacLachlan, released in 1984 to lackluster reviews. Meanwhile, the Oregon Dunes that provided that first spark of inspiration were evolving as well.

With the sands stabilized, U.S. lawmakers first considered designating the Oregon Dunes as a national seashore in 1958, along with the Sea Lion Caves north of Florence. The effort failed, but the dunes were eventually designated as a national recreation area in 1972, following efforts from U.S. Rep. John Dellenback, the Oregon Republican for whom a section of the dunes is now named.

The Oregon Dunes has since become a playground for riders of off-highway vehicles, like ATVs, dune buggies and dirt bikes, with ample room to explore. Some



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