

Tourism: It's important to bring as many people to the table as possible

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Reid hopes to use the network's existing audience and marketing tools to encourage environmental stewardship and limit some of the negative impacts of travel, such as traffic.

The county has renewed a contract with the chamber's Lower Columbia Tourism Committee, allocating \$95,000 for tourism marketing. The money comes from lodging taxes.

One method is asking visitors to take a pledge to respect the local community. The Oregon Coast Visitors Association has guidelines with its code of the coast, which details tide pool etiquette, hunting and fishing rules and other topics.

Reid suggested further sharing the pledge through social media and advertising campaigns and attaching it to hotel confirmations.

"Done well, (campaigns) are not just for tourists. They're for locals, too," he said. "We start to see our environment that we're living in differently, as well. We start to reappraise how special it is and we treat it differently, as well. And so we set the tone, we set the expectation and everybody wins," he said.

He also hopes to address transportation issues associated with tourism, such as cars crowding communities like Cannon Beach. At this point, the groups are focusing on messaging around carpooling and encouraging tourists to use public transportation.

Reid said he is optimistic about the programs and the collaboration between stakeholders and emphasized the economic significance of the



A coffee cup lid is stuck in the grass at the edge of Coffenburg Lake.

Lydia Ely/The Astorian

tourism industry.

Travelers spent \$115.8 million in the Astoria-Warrenton area in 2019, and \$63.5 million in 2020, a decrease due to COVID-19, according to an economic analysis by Dean Runyan Associates.

County Commissioner Pamela Wev said she supports opportunities for visitors to have experiences that connect them to the environment.

One example is the region's Trailhead and Beach Ambassadors program, launched in 2020, where volunteers patrol popular sites like tide pools watching for mistreatment and offering their local knowledge.

"We've been taking a look

at other places in the county that attract a lot of tourism to the natural environment, to have ambassadors there to say, 'OK, you're getting on a trail, do you have water? Do you have a map?' And being able to supply them with the information that they need, about how far a trail is and how long it is and how difficult because we don't necessarily want to mark all that stuff," she said.

Wev said she's interested in expanding volunteer opportunities for visitors, too.

"We know there are people who would be willing to come out for a weekend and spend a few hours pulling up noxious weeds, and maybe we'll give them something in return," she said, sug-

gesting hotel or restaurant vouchers as options.

"We're working on all that, and hoping that we can create an environment that people come to, not just to lay in the sun, because we're finding out that a whole lot of people really want to do other things. And if some of that can be in service to the environment, then they're even more interested," she said.

Emily Akdedian, the North Coast stewardship coordinator for Trailkeepers of Oregon, organizes volunteer team cleanups and trail maintenance.

She said people often travel from Portland, Salem, Eugene and southern Washington state specifically to volunteer for the program.

This year has already had a strong showing, but Akdedian hopes sustainable tourism initiatives will get vacationers interested, too.

"I know people are really interested in regenerative travel ideas. And our coastal trails, I think especially during the pandemic, were hit so hard by visitation," she said. "I think that also kind of jump-started these conversations about, 'OK, well, then how do we get more folks involved in actually taking care of the trails, because they need it so badly.'"

'Leave it better'

The North Coast Tourism Management Network will be hosting the trailkeepers and other community groups

later this month at a public meeting to discuss potential volunteer opportunities for tourists.

Karen Olson, the network's manager, said it's important to bring as many people to the table as possible.

"The sustainable tourism vision is that not only will people not do harm, but they will fall in love with the coast, and that they will want to leave it better than they found it," she said. "There's all kinds of angles and initiatives and ways to work that out."

The network addresses some issues directly. After visitors left human waste at campgrounds and on trails last year, the network created an interactive, online map of public bathrooms that is accessible through QR codes posted at popular sites.

Since its publication last summer, Olson said the site has been visited around 9,000 times.

Olson said that the bathroom map is one of the few short-term projects. Most of the challenges associated with tourism will require management over the long haul.

"People aren't going to stop wanting to visit, and so the challenges change the dynamics of the communities for those who live there, and that's not always smooth sailing," she said. "So I think it's the message that helping tourism, helping visitors experience the coast in a sustainable way is beneficial for all of us."

"We're not in this alone, and we're all going to work and try to make it easier for people to do the right thing," she said.

Bonamici: 'Hopeful for a better future'

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Bonamici said she works on the House Committee on Education and Labor, which seeks to provide school meals that are healthy and age-appropriate. She encouraged Mickelson to write a letter to the school board or talk with school administrators about his concerns.

"Thank you for bringing that up ... I will take that to heart when we work on the school nutrition programs," she said.

Ian O'Brien, the high school's assistant principal, who helped coordinate the event, asked Bonamici to talk about how what the students say and ask may make an impact.

The congresswoman recalled a time when students testified at the state Legislature about the mixed messages they were receiving at school — they were learning about the importance of nutrition in class while there was unhealthy food in the vending machines. She considered the student voices to be influential in the legislative process.

"That's what we do as representatives, is we represent people, and we write legislation and pass it," she said. "... We listen to our constituents, who are the people we represent, and we bring those ideas with us."

Asked how she felt about Oregon lifting the indoor mask mandate at schools and other places at the end of March, Bonamici encouraged everyone to listen to health experts as the coronavirus pandemic continues.

"It's been a difficult time, but I'm really hopeful for a better future, and I know you are all going to be part of that," she said.

Cruise ships: A number of riverboats are also slated to visit



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The Regatta rode out parts of the coronavirus pandemic at the Port of Astoria.

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The high expectations come as the past few cruise ship seasons were derailed by the coronavirus pandemic. Two cruise ships docked at the Port in 2021, but both were crew-only vessels waiting out pandemic restrictions.

The loss of cruise ships during the pandemic took a financial toll on the Port, which can see over \$1 million a year in revenue from the visits.

"The cruise ship industry is extremely important to the economy of this area, this city, this region," Frank Spence, the president of the Port Commission, said. "... Hopefully we will regain that because all of the businesses

and certainly our government is looking forward to coming out of this epidemic and making some money."

While the Port waits for oceangoing vessels to arrive, a number of riverboats are planning to visit the city at the 17th Street Dock starting in March.

"It's been a roller coaster. It's really been unbelievable, and I really feel bad for (the cruise lines). To continue to modify and adapt protocols to articulate how serious they are and how safe the ship is, is very expensive," Conner said. "... It's been very, very difficult but, right now, I think we are all seeing some daylight at the end of the tunnel."

Protest: The disruption mirrored far-right protests at other state capitals

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Lyles was facing more than a dozen felony charges for his role in the Dec. 21, 2020 protest against COVID-19 restrictions as state lawmakers opened a special session on pandemic response. The protest turned violent and led to property damage and assaults on police and journalists.

The plea agreement was announced as Lyles was about to stand trial. Prosecutors dismissed charges that involved riot, assaulting police and additional counts of unlawful use of a chemical irritant.

In an interview with The Astorian after the court proceeding, Lyles acknowledged that he used bear spray at the protest. "A hundred percent, I did that," he said.

Lyles said a video will surface that exonerates him of some of the other charges. He praised his attorney, Spencer Todd, and said the state did not do its job and "took 14 months of my life."

"Regardless of a person's politics, the system's fair for everybody — or it should be



Dirk VanderHart/Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon State Police declared an unlawful assembly at the Oregon State Capitol on Dec. 21, 2020 as far-right protesters stormed the building.

fair for everybody — and this is not a guy getting away with something," Todd said. "This is a guy taking responsibility and accountability for the conduct that he actually did."

In the months after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in 2020, Lyles was often among the counterdemonstrators at Black Lives Matter protests on the North Coast. At local

demonstrations and on social media, he aligned with others on the far right who were vocal in their support of former President Donald Trump and critical of pandemic restrictions.

The disruption at the special session in Salem in December 2020 mirrored far-right protests at other state capitals tied to pandemic response and Trump's November 2020 election defeat.

The protests were precursors to the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol meant to delay the electoral vote count in Joe Biden's presidential victory over Trump.

Several others have pleaded guilty to charges linked to the Salem protest. The state House of Representatives also voted last June to expel Mike Nearman, a Republican from Polk County, who opened a west-end door to the Capitol and allowed protesters inside.

Lyles said he was among the protesters who breached the Capitol thanks to Nearman. At the time, the Capitol was closed to visitors as a precaution against the pandemic.

Nearman, the first state lawmaker in Oregon history to be expelled, pleaded guilty in July to first-degree official misconduct.