

NeCus' Park: Visioning plan will earmark former Native American land for preservation, education

By Dani Palmer
Cannon Beach Gazette

NeCus' Park will one day become a site dedicated to teaching the public about its native cultural background. The Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes, city of Cannon Beach and community organizations have come together to draft a vision plan.

"The place where the tide comes in," NeCus' was once home to both the Clatsop and Nehalem people who had a bi-cultural, bilingual village, said Dick Basch, vice chairman of the Clatsop-Nehalem tribe. It was visited by William Clark, Sacagawea and other members of their party as they traveled to see a beached whale, and occupied until the mid to late 1800s.

Less than two acres of land near the former Cannon Beach Elementary School, Basch said one of the goals of the property is to provide educational experiences to adults and children, like Fort Clatsop. He added that it'll "be nice to have another education spot where kids could learn traditional history and environmental priorities."

"When the site closed, that was pretty sad," said Greater Ecola Natural Area Chairwoman Katie Voelke, referring to the closure of Cannon Beach Elementary School in 2013. "There was some solace in that the site could be reincarnated."



ERICK BENGEL PHOTO

Public works employees Kirk Anderson (left) and Paul Phillips (right foreground) place the NeCus' Park sign atop its base near Fir Street last winter. Dick Basch (center background), Vice Chairman of the Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes, enjoys the moment, along with Diane Collier, the tribe chairwoman; Jan Siebert-Wahrmund, a Cannon Beach resident; and Robin Risley, a member of the Parks and Community Services Committee.

The visioning includes gardens of native plants for food, medicine, habitat enhancement and education, along with a canoe landing on the northwestern corner of the site with non-motorized boat access, she added. Canoe travel was a significant part of the Pacific Northwest tribes' cultures, used to hunt, fish and visit other communities to trade items. And travel

along the coast, especially around Tillamook Head, was treacherous.

"NeCus' was a good place to come in and rest and be safe," Basch said.

There will also be a natural play area with wood for fort-building, boulders for climbing and open meadows for rolling in, along with a small gathering area oriented toward the canoe landing, Voelke said. The

gathering area will contain rustic seating and accommodate school groups, community presentations, tribal gatherings and other educational opportunities, she added.

NeCus' is the home of tribal ancestors and a place that welcomes all visitors, tribal members or not, Basch said.

An elderly Native American woman once told him

that the "old ones" are still in the trees, waiting for the voice of the young ones to sing again. When tribal members do go to NeCus', they often sing or play drums. Basch said they can "feel the spirit of the old ones."

"It's a very powerful place for everyone, for the tribe," he added. "We feel a direct connection with the past."

He noted that the tribe began to speak with Seaside School District 10 about the property around 15 years ago. When Cannon Beach Elementary closed, the discussions became more serious. The city of Cannon Beach also expressed interest in the site, so the two parties teamed together. The city acquired the land from the county, and now holds a 50 percent undivided interest with the tribe, Basch said.

In the future, the tribes, city and community organizations intend to acquire the entire site, including land owned by the school district, to build a log house. Traditionally, native people sat in long, waterfront rows that served as several functions, including living spaces, storage areas, meeting halls and ceremonial purposes.

Voelke said they'd repurpose the gym, or deconstruct it and construct a model long house that could serve as a cultural museum, gathering place and classroom.

"We believe in honoring our elders," she said, "we believe in honoring our heritage."

Basch said they plan to begin installing interpretive signs along the trail in the park within the next six months. Several groups have provided money, such as the National Park Service, and the city has placed the visioning on the 2016-17 budget, but Basch said they still have significant funding hurdles to complete their goals.

Seeking elk, and finding them as officials tour region

Group visits Gearhart, Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area

By Katherine Lacaze
EO Media Group

More than a dozen Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commissioners and their staff gazed through telescopes set up in a field at the Reserve in Gearhart. They were seeking elk — and they found them during their day-long tour of fish and wildlife facilities along the North Coast on Sept. 3.

The Reserve was the first stop on the tour, a precursor to the commission's monthly meeting, Sept. 4 at the Best Western Ocean View Resort in Seaside. The subsequent tour through Clatsop County provided commissioners a ground-level look at some of places, facilities and issues they are responsible for as governor-appointed trustees of Oregon's wildlife resources.

In Gearhart, commissioners used the telescopes to view an elk herd which had separated from the main herd of about 70 elk seen roaming in the field in days prior.

In that area, the elk are "in their natural element, which is kind of low-density development and golf courses," said Herman Biederbeck, a wildlife biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The reserve is surrounded by two golf courses, Gearhart Golf Links and Highlands Golf Club. The North Coast Land Conservancy has 30 acres to the east of The Reserve at Gearhart that is part of the conservancy's Neacoxie Wildlife Corridor project, started in the 1990s, to create a reserve for wildlife resources along the Neacoxie River.

"The elk have their pros and cons, for sure, out here," Biederbeck said.

He and local wildlife photographer and naturalist Neal Maine talked with commissioners about the ways elk present a challenge for ODFW. As the Clatsop Plains get increasingly developed, elk and humans have more run-ins, creating some precarious situations for both.

Maine shared a number of photographs that showed what can happen when elk



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Members of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and staff members look for elk on the North Coast Land Conservancy's habitat to the east of The Reserve At Gearhart during the group's tour Sept. 3.

interact with humans and their infrastructure. In one photograph, a young woman scurries away from an elk she angered by approaching the animal and its calf to take a picture with them. Some residents spend money on landscaping and making their yards attractive, which makes them more appealing for elk, as well, Maine said. Additionally, the animals create traffic hazards by occasionally crossing U.S. Highway 101 and other roads.

Citizens have differing opinions about the elk and how to deal with them. Some people like the elk; some people have interests, generally commercial, that aren't compatible with giving the elk free range. Because of the strong contrasting opinions, the department tends "to deal with elk issues on an individual, case-by-case basis," Biederbeck said.

Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area

Farther inland, at the Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area in the Oregon Coast Range mountains, the department manages a different elk population.

The area, which now encompasses about 1,114 acres, is meant to protect and enhance habitat to benefit native wildlife species, reduce wildlife damage to surrounding properties and provide the public with an opportunity to observe wildlife in a natural setting, ac-

ording to the department's website. At the wildlife area, the department provides a winter habitat and supplemental feeding for Roosevelt elk and black-tailed deer, Jewell Meadows Wildlife Area Manager Bryan Swearingen said.

A part of the department's management plan at the wildlife area is to keep the elk population artificially low, or about 225 when the land's capacity is approximately 400, Swearingen said. Additionally, the department provides supplemental feed in the wintertime to mitigate the animals' negative impact on the land uses of adjacent properties, which are owned by Weyerhaeuser company, Stimson Lumber Company and the Oregon Department of Forestry.

A portion of the wildlife area, near Fishhawk Creek, is designated for refuge. Some tracts are open to the public for hunting.

The department uses members in helicopters to assess the elk population. In the future, the department plans to partner with Oregon State University and use the wildlife area as a control area for testing elk census work using unmanned aerial vehicles.

They would like to get the data "in a way other than having people in helicopters," which is costly and carries a risk factor, Biederbeck said.

The group will use the wildlife area to calibrate

and test equipment before jumping the program to the Youngs River basin as another control site, Biederbeck said.

The Federal Aviation Administration allows universities and agencies to use UAVs, or drones, under strict restrictions. The group is in the process of getting authorization that would allow them to fly one or more UAVs over the Youngs River basin.

Success is dependent on the group being able to capture imagery with a high enough resolution to detect and classify the elk. That data will be compiled for population models.

Western snowy plover

The commissioners also discussed western snowy plovers, which are federally recognized as a "threatened" species and have been spotted on the beach near Gearhart. In recent years, the bird species' number has increased across the coastline, Biederbeck said.

"The success of the snowy plover program, especially on the south coast, is starting to be recognized," he said.

About 10 years ago, conservationists became very concerned about the bird population. Protecting habitats, mitigating human issues and taking out ground predators — such as coyotes, raccoons and skunks — have played roles in helping the species reemerge.



R.J. MARX PHOTO

Elk are prevalent throughout the county, especially in Gearhart.

Proposed rule changes

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission considered the 2016 sport fishing regulations and revisions to the Oregon Conservation and Nearshore strategies during its meeting Sept. 4.

Many of the sport fishing regulation changes are being considered as the result of the department staff's eight-month effort to streamline and simplify rules for trout and warmwater fishing, according to a news release from the department.

Some proposed changes include:

- Streamlining the number of different seasons, gear restrictions and bag limits in order to have more consistent rules for similar water bodies across the state.

- Removing the April trout opener and opening these water bodies to year-round fishing.

- Setting the May trout opener at May 22 each year, ensuring that trout fishing statewide would always be open Memorial Day weekend.

- Removing bag limits for warmwater fish in the Columbia, John Day and Umpqua rivers.

Additionally, the commission approved a 10-year update of the Oregon Conservation Strategy, including the Oregon Nearshore Strategy component. The documents, which are broad strategies to conserve the state's native fish, wildlife and marine resources, are to be submitted as required to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by Oct. 1.

The commission also updated the rules for commercial bay clam harvest. Based on recent landing and stock assessment data, department staff proposed adjustments to commercial landing quotas, minimum sizes, species taken and allowable harvest areas as an integrated package of shellfish management actions.

A complete list of the proposed changes for 2016 is on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife website.

For instance, Oregon State Parks will close beaches or cage nesting areas to allow nesting. The department is working on updating population data for the species.

The group also visited Youngs River Bay, west of Astoria, to discuss the Columbia River Estuary Study Task Force, tide gate replacement and levee removal.