

Views from the Rock

Arcadia Beach drama unfolds over two decades

CANNON SHOTS
R.J. MARX



Residents of Cannon Beach may have a sense of déjà vu all over again as they read the headline of the local landowner wanting to bring an RV park to 17.6-acre parcel of forested land across from Arcadia Beach. The owner, James Smejkal, considers the property well-suited for his purpose, mostly because it is one of the only types of development allowed with the land's current zoning.

"Because of the high volume of campers that visit the Coast in the summer, I don't think there will be a problem," Smejkal said in August. "Planners designated it for park use because they saw it as a need."

Smejkal said he intends the project to be designed like another RV park he developed in Willowa County, which he described as "upscale."

Opponents say the installation of roads, water and septic systems in the steeply sloped area would eliminate the area's open space and jeopardize the health of the environment.

A long-ago land swap

How pristine park land across from the beach came to be a hot commodity for a developer is another story.

It all began as a land swap in 2002.

In the course of negotiations to acquire the new Stub Stewart State Park near Vernonia, landowner Smejkal pursued a trade with the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department.

When Smejkal gave the department 113 acres in Columbia County valued at \$157,000, and 30 acres in Willowa County valued at \$6,000 in exchange for the property in 2002, no one raised any eyebrows. Oregon State Parks ultimately gave roughly 20 acres east of Highway 101 — 90 percent of Arcadia State Park to Smejkal. Only the parking lot at Arcadia was retained in state ownership.

It was on the east side of the highway, wasn't providing beach access and there were no plans to develop it ever for recreation, Chris Havel, associate director of the Parks and Recreation Department, said in 2009.

"It wasn't playing a significant role," Havel said at the time. "So it was offered in trade."

Residents responded by attending public meetings in protest. They said they hadn't received any notice of the 2002 transaction.

"I still feel that land trade was inappropriate," former Cannon Beach Mayor Mike Morgan said this month. "The state was scrambling to put together as I recall that Stub Stewart State Park. This guy (Smejkal) happened to have some property adjacent to it and they just did a private kind of a deal, with no public process. Our entire council was pretty outraged that they would just trade away something without any kind of public hearing or notice to anybody."

In 2002, the Parks and Recreation Department considered the 17.5-acre property in terms of its contribution to the mission of state parks, Havel said this month.

"This property — on the east side of the highway with no real prospects for public recreation — wasn't a strong



Blue lines on this county aerial indicate approximately 17.5-acre parcel owned by James Smejkal across from Arcadia Beach.

contributor to the mission, which can be boiled down to providing great recreation experiences by protecting special places in a sustainable way," he said.

Limited options

In 2009, Smejkal proposed a zone change that would have allowed him to build eight homes on the property.

But the county denied his request, citing the need to protect the habitat of the marbled murrelet, a threatened seabird.

After his zoning application was rejected, the owner's options were limited.

An article in the Gazette February 2009 hinted at what might come next: "If the property's current zone is maintained, however, an RV park would be allowed as a conditional use."

Jump to eight years later and plans for an RV park are unfolding.

The opposition has returned. Cameron La Follette, director of the environmental advocacy group Oregon Coast Alliance, said the plan is not the best use for the property.

La Follette said the development lacks the infrastructure to support an urban project in a rural area, and that ultimately, the land should be back in public hands.

"Just because the parks system didn't have a plan for this plot didn't mean it was valueless to the public," La Follette said. "Put in a trail loop, install other interpretive uses. There are lots of things you can do there. But an RV park in this area is something we don't feel comfortable with."

The property, east of U.S. Highway 101 across from the Arcadia Beach Wayside, is zoned recreational management and agriculture-forestry.

Recreation management zoning comes with strict guidelines.

According to the county master plan, this zone is intended to be applied to existing public and private parks, particularly those that contain significant natural values. These areas are intended to accommodate the type of recreational development that ensures the maintenance of the site's natural values.

For sale?

It appears unlikely the Parks Department will try to repurchase the property they traded away in 2002, Havel said this month. The department does still acquire and dispose of prop-

erty, and trades are among the options available for doing both things.

But, Havel added: "It would be highly unusual for us to reacquire property that disposed of because it wasn't contributing noticeably to the state park system. The question would be, what has changed? The reasons the property was a candidate for disposition in the first place are probably still true, but even if something dramatic has changed, becoming a priority for state park acquisition may take years and requires extensive study. Since the funds available for acquisition are very tight, the competition is fierce. We're focused more on a few ongoing projects and improving existing properties than new acquisitions."

There are better and likely faster ways to buy a property that don't involve state park acquisition, Havel said — private purchase by a nonprofit with complementary goals or other government agencies with a vested interest in future use of the property.

"If he can get eight houses on it it's probably worth \$800,000 or \$1 million," Morgan said. "Just roughly \$100,000 a lot. But if he has marbled murrelet problems, it may be worth much less than that."

Ideally, Morgan suggested, affected neighbors would get together and purchase it from him.

"It is in the best interest of the threatened marbled murrelet and people that care about the birds' dwindling critical habitat to try and purchase this land now," Mike Manzulli, president of the Oregon Coast Alliance and a member of the Ecola Watershed Council, said.

"Anything is for sale," Smejkal said this month. He said he had yet to be approached by potential purchaser.

This property is within the North Coast Land Conservancy's focus area, the Coastal Edge, right by the proposed Rainforest Reserve, North Coast Land Conservancy Executive Director Katie Voelke said.

"Being adjacent to state forest land and state park, and being great wildlife habitat, it becomes a good fit for conservation," Voelke said. "If Mr. Smejkal is a landowner interested in selling land for its conservation value, we'd be interested in talking with him about this land. To date we have not heard from him."

A public meeting on the development site takes place Thursday, Sept. 28, at the Cannon Beach Fire Hall, 188 E. Sunset Boulevard at 11 a.m.

Lucy's acrobatics win an apple pie

Our youngest dog, Lucy, is quite the scamp. We got her as a tiny infant who fit in the palm of my hand. A pedigreed Miniature Pinscher from a breeder in Seaside, next month she will be 2 years old and grown to full size. She is 11 pounds of energy; willful, entertaining, very loving, and a good companion. She is also always hungry — and very clever.



The pie, before the dog ate it.

She learns a lot from observing. One day when she was six months old, I noticed her paying close attention to my use of the kitchen step stool. Being of limited stature myself, I was using it to reach something on a high cabinet shelf. Lucy kept a close eye on the proceedings and also noticed my failure to put the stool away. A few minutes later she used the stool to launch herself on the kitchen counter to snag a stick of butter softening for a pie.

Last summer when we were renting a place in Gearhart, I got in the habit of walking her along the wide boulevard streets. After strolling past the grand palaces on Ocean Avenue, we'd walk along Cottage where I couldn't resist picking a berry or two from the large patch of blackberry bushes between 1st and 2nd Streets. Lucy, always keen about anything I put in my mouth, looked expectant. I started giving her a berry just to see if she would eat it. Pretty soon she learned to pick blackberries herself.

This summer in the front yard of the house we bought, we have fruit bearing blueberry bushes, as well as apple trees.

Lucy observed us picking blueberries and soon figured out she liked to pick and eat blueberries, too. When the first of the apples began falling from the trees, she sampled bites.

Last week my son's girlfriend drove out from Portland for a visit. In her honor, I baked a pie using apples from our trees. When the pie was done, I put it to cool on a counter I thought was safe. The girlfriend arrived hungry so we went out to lunch. I thought we'd have a slice of pie at home afterwards.

When we walked in the door an hour later, I wondered why the 13-year-old Lhasa Apso, Basil, was so hepped up. He was wagging his tail and very forward. Normally when I come in after being out awhile, he doesn't bother to get up.

"I'll just put some coffee on," I said to my son's girlfriend. As I was crossing the kitchen to fetch dessert plates, she said, "Oh my. Will you look at that?"

The apple pie I'd so lovingly made with my own hands was a shambles. Someone had gouged the center out.

"Lucy," I said sternly. I knew it was her handiwork. She's the only one of my three dogs (the Chihuahua is 17) capable of the athletic feat of leaping from a chair on to the window seat and then to the counter where the pie innocently sat. She had eaten most of the middle of the pie, which contained six small apples, 1/2 cup of brown sugar, 1/4 stick of butter, and some graham cracker crumble. The Pillsbury pie crust I'd dusted with cinnamon was of no interest to her.

"Lucy," I said again. She didn't even have the decency to look ashamed. Instead she shot me an impish look, her expression saying, "I left you some. Put a scoop of ice cream on it and you'll be fine."

Which is more or less what happened. After my son's girlfriend left, and I gave my husband his dinner, we both had what was left of the pie with some Häagen-Dazs Vanilla Bean on it. It was fine. Really.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



PUBLIC MEETINGS

Thursday, Sept. 28
Cannon Beach Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Friday, Sept. 29
Emergency Preparedness Committee, 10 a.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Tuesday, Oct. 3
Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Monday, Oct. 9
Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District, 6 p.m., 188 Sunset, Cannon Beach.

Tuesday, Oct. 10
Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., work session, City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Tuesday, Oct. 17
Cannon Beach Public Works Committee, 9 a.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

What to look for when selecting an autumn wine

Football is back, harvest is underway, there are parking spots in town and it's clear that fall is upon us. I don't know exactly why, but I always look forward to the change of seasons. Maybe it's because I enjoy a new lineup of beverages.

As we move from summer to fall, we leave behind light, crisp and fruity wines like sauvignon blanc, albarino and grenache and transition to heavier wines with more tannin and higher alcohol levels. If you're looking for a couple of wines to try this season, here are a couple of my favorite fall wines.

For white wines, try Brandborg

UNCORKED RAMBLINGS
STEVEN SINKLER



Gewürztraminer with its wonderful classic aromas of citrus (think lemon with notes of pineapple) and ginger. Made in Elkton, this southern Oregon wine is off-dry with crisp acidity making it a perfect companion to Asian food or any other entrée with a little heat.

Pinot noir's earthy flavors make it a great fall wine and my favorite is our very own Puffin Pinot Noir.

Puffin Pinot Noir's complex flavors of red cherry, black cherry combine with a smoky earthiness that is sure to please. This pinot's flavors of smoke and earth give a nod to Burgundy while still fully representing the best of Willamette Valley. I enjoy a nice glass of pinot noir with pork tenderloin, turkey or mushroom dishes.

For those of you who like your red wines a little bigger, Angel Vine Columbia Valley Zinfandel is an excellent choice. Our staff loves this zin from Angel Vine and named it a Wine Shack "Wine of the Year" in the past. Made with fruit from the Columbia Valley, this delicious

zinfandel is packed with flavors of cherry and currant with hints of chocolate. This food friendly wine pairs nicely with a bowl of chili, grilled turkey or burgers.

Speaking of chili ... if you like chili as much as I do, give Lujon Syrah a try. Made with fruit from Walla Walla's Spofford Station vineyard, this purple colored Syrah is loaded with flavors of plum and savory smoked meat. I love this wine and find that it goes well with stews, grilled meats and yes, chili.

I'll give you one more fall drink to consider. I'd like you to try Atlas Blackberry Cider. Based in Bend, Atlas makes my favorite lineup

of ciders and their blackberry is delicious. Made with local fruit, this cider nicely blends tart blackberries and fruity elderberries, to create a glass of off-dry deliciousness. This cider packs a punch of fruit flavors without any hop flavors that often ruin the cider experience for me. We have this on tap at Provisions 124 and its crispy blackberry flavors make it a crowd pleaser. Atlas Blackberry cider goes nicely with a wide range of foods or enjoy it by itself.

Whichever beverage you enjoy this season, please do so responsibly. Don't drink and drive. We'll see you at The Shack or Provisions 124.

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