

# BRACING FOR WINTER

## At Ecola State Park, small improvements could foreshadow bigger changes

By Katie Frankowicz  
EO Media Group



Visitors to Ecola State Park take in one of the many scenic views in the area.

As Ecola State Park braces for winter, some issues continue to haunt it, but changes intended to improve the park's offerings are on the way.

For years, the park has made do with one full-time ranger supplemented by a variety of part-time and seasonal staff. Some years park managers have had to go without a full roster of those extra hands. In the last few years, landslides and other unexpected disasters hit the park — a massive landslide snipped a popular trail between Ecola Point and Indian Beach recently — forcing rangers to adjust what tasks take top priority. Minor tasks have continued to pile up.

A trail reroute to Indian Beach and possibly an entirely new road into the park to avoid landslide areas — as first proposed in a 1975 master plan — are still a ways off. In the meantime, funding for a second full-time park ranger at Ecola and Tolovana will help staff tackle long-deferred maintenance and bring the 1,023-acre state park known for its sweeping views and lush forest trails closer to service level standards, said Park Manager Ben Cox.

Now, said Cox, “we’ve been able to focus a little more work there. Just little things here and there.”

A grant from the federal Recreational Trails Program for work in other state park areas that fall under Cox’s oversight will impact Ecola State Park indirectly.

“It does relieve a little bit of the financial pressure



A sign at the park ranger pay station at the entrance to Ecola State Park lets visitors know about the condition of trails.

**‘We are always concerned about the status of the road and the slide that’s occurring there...’**

Park Manager Ben Cox

and should allow us to spend some local resources on some of those trails within Ecola,” Cox said.

### Landslide

The trail work Cox has in mind would be separate from the reroute that’s necessary to reconnect a trail from Ecola Point to Indian Beach. That trail was severed by a landslide that sent a hillside of dirt, trees and undergrowth oceanward, creating an ocean view where there had never been one before.

A new route recommended by Ptarmigan P Trails, a trail construction company, would

take hikers around the slide area with a climb to a ridge far above. The proposed reroute is expected to cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000.

The original trail that hugged the cliff line has not been passable since last year. The park itself was open and closed sporadically throughout the spring as Cox and his staff dealt with issues related to several landslides.

Park rangers have kept the trail segment from Ecola Point to the slide open, but they have discouraged foot traffic through the slide area. Signs at the pay station above Ecola Point and at the trail

head in Indian Beach inform visitors that the trail is washed out and asks hikers not to try and cross the slide.

Dozens of people have clearly ignored the plea. The slide area is criss-crossed by narrow paths stamped with boot prints and animal tracks.

In May, one park ranger said the area looked like a bomb had gone off. It still looks that way, but the scar isn’t as fresh now. Undergrowth has crept back and, with the mild start to winter this year, persisted into December. Beyond the makeshift paths, the ground is soft and fractured. A shallow muddy stream cuts down the hill, spilling coppery water across the beach far below.

### Wear and tear

Last December, storms shut down access to Indian Beach and caused sinking and sliding along Ecola Park Road. Erosion around the Canyon Creek culvert became an issue, too. Such problems continue to haunt the park leading into the winter months this year.

The park receives an estimated 313,808 visitors each year, most of them arriving during the summer months when the weather is more inviting. Summer traffic wore away at repairs crews completed on Ecola Park Road in the spring. Areas where the asphalt was torn away and replaced with compacted gravel are now pockmarked by potholes. The park management had opted to repair the areas with gravel to make future fixes easier to address.

“We are always concerned about the status of the road and the slide that’s occurring there and how that can be impacted by a heavy rain event or heavy rain combined with strong winds,” Cox said. However, routine winter weather is not a huge concern, he added. The park has weathered many storms. Road conditions simply remain another thing for rangers to keep an eye on.



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A bird flies near a humpback whale and its catch in the Columbia River.

## ‘Whale Watching Spoken Here’

Cannon Beach Gazette

Gray whales are on the move south again this winter, and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is celebrating the annual event with Whale Watching Week, through Dec. 31.

Visitors to the Oregon coast will have the opportunity to glimpse some of the estimated 20,000 gray whales traveling south from Alaska to their final destination off the coast of Baja, Mexico.

Volunteers from the “Whale Watching Spoken Here” program will be stationed at 24 sites along the

Oregon coast during the event. From 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day, they’ll offer whale watching tips and facts about the animals. Each year from December to mid-January, gray whales swim 6,000 miles down the Pacific coast to reach calving lagoons near the Baja peninsula.

A map of the 24 volunteer whale watch sites can be found on whalespoken.wordpress.com. Camping, including yurts and cabins, is available at state parks along the coast. Visit oregonstateparks.org for information and to make a reservation.

## New Year’s Day hike at Oswald West State Park

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department partners with America’s State Parks to offer free guided First Day Hikes in state parks across Oregon on New Year’s Day.

A special hike hosted at Oswald West State Park to Kramer Memorial overlooking Short Sand Beach begins at 10 a.m., starting at the Oswald West Shop.

The terrain is considered easy, one-mile hike;

for children at least 8 years old. Dogs are permitted on a 6-foot leash. During the walk, learn about Matt Kramer, a reporter for the Associated Press, who used his talent with words to help win the day for Oregonians.

Participants should dress in layers, wear sturdy shoes, and bring water as well as a camera or binoculars for wildlife viewing. Register online at <http://bit.ly/OswaldWestFDH2018>.

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