

Don't fly your drone near Haystack Rock



A visitor to Hug Point films a sunset using a drone.
EDWARD STRATTON/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Drones can pose conflicts with wildlife

By Hannah Sievert
The Daily Astorian

When Melissa Keyser started working at the Haystack Rock Awareness Program in 2014, managing drones around the famous sea stack wasn't in her job description.

Over the past few years, though, the number of drones buzzing around the rock has jumped from around one a week to one or two flights a day.

Scientists are using drones more and more for research, tracking all kinds of wildlife. But as drones become more popular with people as playthings and high-flying cameras, they can cause nesting birds to fly away and leave chicks and eggs susceptible to predators. Sometimes, birds mistake drones for rivals and attack. On crowded days, drones can be a hazard when flown too close to people enjoying the beach.

"I've seen a drone 5, 10 feet above my head, which to me is too low when you're at the beach," Keyser said.

The Haystack Rock Awareness Program and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department are looking at new strategies to balance the technology with wildlife protection.

The emphasis is on education. Drones are prohibited near Haystack Rock because it is part of a national wildlife refuge, and drone operators can face fines for disturbing wildlife.

Keyser said most drone operators are unaware of the restrictions, so the awareness program typically does not report them immediately.

In some instances, staff can't even find a drone operator causing a disturbance because drones can be controlled from remote locations. One time, a drone that flushed birds from the rock was being flown from a nearby hotel room.

"Whenever we approach someone who has violated a rule, it's not like they're a criminal," she said. "It's

really just a lack of knowledge. We totally understand this technology has grown so rapidly but the education hasn't kept up."

New signs on the beach explain that drones must stay 2,000 feet from Haystack Rock. The awareness program has also provided guidance to staff on how to handle drone encounters, and has taken to social media and newsletters to remind people of proper drone use.

Still, the effort doesn't seem to be enough. Apps for drones don't list Haystack Rock as a national wildlife refuge, although they do mark other no-fly zones like airports. Awareness program staff only work at the rock during low tide, leaving much of the day without anyone to manage drones.

Keyser hopes drone apps will eventually include wildlife refuges. Greater knowledge of the possibility of fines could help prevent wildlife disturbances.

"(The fines) would deter a lot of people, but they don't even have that knowledge," Keyser said. "It's still totally insufficient even with the people we talk to and the messages we put out. It's still not enough."

The state Parks and Recreation Department has also had to develop new policies. Drones are generally legal to use in most state parks, except in areas where flights could endanger wildlife or pose risks to people or property.

A drone policy development group is working on an umbrella

policy for all recreational drone use that will be easy for park visitors to understand.

Katie Gauthier, the legislative and policy coordinator for state parks, who serves on the drone policy group, said the policy will be flexible enough to meet the unique needs of each park.

"We wouldn't have drones in every park for sure based on the park's conditions," she said. "But it's those conditions that we're still looking at developing."

A draft policy should be completed this fall, with the goal of having the policy in place by 2019.

Right now, it is up to park managers to decide whether drones are allowed.

Nehalem Bay State Park was ruled a drone no-fly zone because of the nearby airport and the nesting birds in the area.

Ben Cox, park manager for the Nehalem Bay Management Unit, may rule Short Sand Beach in Oswald West State Park a no-fly zone because of the high concentration of people who visit.

Still, Cox tries to make drone use happen safely when possible.

"I try to figure out how to make this happen for the person so they can have an experience and not be bound up in regulations," he said. "Oftentimes there's a misconception that the government looks to limit or hinder. I look to allow unless I can't. I want to make sure I'm not saying 'no' for no good reason."



HANNAH SIEVERT/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Signs posted at Haystack Rock indicate the drone policy.



BRENNIA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

New location of Cannon Beach Fitness.

Hoping to expand with more kid-friendly options

Fitness from Page 1A

But actually owning a gym didn't come across their mind until Baker was on the phone with Nofield for an unrelated reason, before he flippantly asked if she'd be interested in owning his gym.

With Baker running the spa full time and Molyneux working as a tech consultant for Global Reach Pacific, neither had the bandwidth to go in the project alone and

decided to pursue a partnership.

With both owners having kids enrolled in the academy, Molyneux said she hopes expanding the gym to incorporate more kid-friendly opportunities and play a piece in the larger puzzle to attract more families in Cannon Beach.

"This is truly a passion project for us," Molyneux said. "We wanted to give back to the community."

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