

Overcoming obstacles along the Pacific Coast Trail

Landslides, gaps create hazards

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Daily Astorian

Dissuaded by snow and dangerous river crossings, some backpackers ditched the popular Pacific Crest Trail in early 2017 and turned to the shorter, less well-known Oregon Coast Trail.

But though the trail was declared “hikeable” in 1988, hikers looking to walk it from end to end struggled to navigate gaps between segments and faced unclear signs, few legal camping options and, in general, a trail that wasn’t quite ready for them.

Now the state is looking for solutions.

This month, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department held several open house presentations across the state to gather feedback from stakeholders about the trail. The outreach followed guidance established in a law passed by state Legislature in 2017 that requires the department to work with other state agencies, local governments, nonprofits and organizations to develop an action plan.

The effort builds on previous connection strategies, like a 2011 plan that identified 31 gaps in the trail that ranged from natural hazards like creek and river crossings to stretches where hikers have to hop onto highway shoulders to reach the next section.

Though the state has worked over the years to address the gaps, Robin Wilcox, a senior state parks and trails planner, estimates over



A section of the Oregon Coast Trail in Ecola State Park has been closed after a landslide washed it into the ocean.

20 remain today. Some of them are more recent obstacles, like a landslide in Ecola State Park that sent a portion of the trail into the ocean.

There are other issues, as well, tied to changes in property ownership and questions about how best to maintain the trail’s different sections.

These types of challenges are common with any long trail system, said Chris Havel, the associate director for Oregon State Parks.

“That’s always the case with long trails,” he said. “You get the first 70 percent, 80 percent figured out ... but even portions of the Pacific Crest Trail went unresolved for decades.”

400 miles

The Oregon Coast Trail runs for nearly 400 miles, though the actual distance can vary depending on how a person chooses to hike. The trail is not continuous, interrupted by highways,

towns, property lines and the ocean. In some places, hikers must time their trek with the tides as the trail drops down from forested hills to sandy beaches, around rock outcroppings and back up again.

In fact, most people experience the trail through day hikes at state parks, perhaps not even realizing they are walking a piece of a much larger system.

“You know, honestly, I think one of the main challenges still is that people don’t even know the Oregon Coast Trail is a thing, that it exists and why it could be important for them,” Wilcox said in a presentation to state House lawmakers in May.

“That is an exciting opportunity.”

On the North Coast, the Oregon Coast Trail winds through Fort Stevens, Ecola and Oswald West state parks.

The state has identified five trail gaps in Clatsop County — two in 2011

and three more recently. They include Hug Point, where a rocky outcropping is impassable at high tide; Camp Rilea, where the trail, which runs along the beach, is closed periodically due to artillery training; and areas where the trail turns onto local roads and U.S. Highway 101.

One of the newer gaps emerged in 2016 after a landslide snipped a portion of the trail that runs between Indian Beach and Ecola Point in half.

Park staff had allowed hikers to walk the trail up to the landslide, but the entire section is now closed at the trailheads.

People were not honoring the closure at the landslide, said Ben Cox, park manager for the Nehalem Bay Management Unit. One person even tied a rope to a tree to help people navigate around the slide.

“It was to the point where people were going out and



A 10-man crew from the South Fork Forest Camp chainsawed, mowed and raked its way over Tillamook Head, clearing the trail for the state Parks and Recreation Department in 2016.

beyond the area closed and then we were getting complaints about the poor shape of the trail,” Cox said.

The state’s plans to address gaps in the Oregon Coast Trail will dovetail with work to reroute this section in Ecola State Park outside of the slide zone. Cox and his rangers examined a possible reroute in 2017. They had hoped to have a new trail available soon, but staff changes and other work delayed the project.

Since 2017, he and park staff have fielded questions from people looking to hike the entire Oregon Coast Trail. They encounter people who are using old information or tips gained from other hikers about where to camp — often in places where camping is not allowed.

But there are few options for hikers, Cox said. There are stretches between camping and lodging options that hikers just can’t make in a one-day trek.

As Wilcox and her team continue to look at how to improve the trail system, Cox anticipates conversa-

tions about where camping could be allowed might come up. For the section of the trail he oversees, he believes there could be an opportunity to work with cities and counties.

Yearslong work

The state expects the work of identifying gaps along the Oregon Coast Trail, improving safety and connectivity, adding signs and looking at the trail as a whole will take several years.

Elsewhere, some cities are already in the middle of addressing some of the problems.

Manzanita landed a grant several years ago to build a trail connecting nearby Neahkahnie Mountain with the city, closing a gap identified in the 2011 plan. No access exists and hikers are forced to walk along the shoulder of Highway 101 to stay on the route.

In September, city leaders requested an extension of the state grant funding the work after unexpected changes — including a land transfer — delayed construction of the trail.

Cannon Beach, Seaside wrestle with the topic of food carts

By **BRENNA VISSER**
Cannon Beach Gazette

Mike Selberg wants to be able to serve cocktails with the spirits he creates at the Cannon Beach Distillery.

In order to do so, Selberg would have to have a kitchen that satisfies Oregon Liquor Control Commission standards — a costly renovation. Instead, he would like to bring in a food truck for his parking lot, which would satisfy the kitchen requirement and offer a new food option in town.

But there is no way to do that legally in Cannon Beach, which generally prohibits food trucks outside of the weekly farmer’s market.

For years, cities like Astoria and Portland have courted the food truck movement. But smaller communities like Cannon Beach and Seaside are beginning to question whether food trucks should be part of their culinary scenes.

A large sector of the local restaurant industry objects to food trucks, seeing them as an unfair form of competition and out of step with community character. Many business owners in these tourism-dependent towns say they are already struggling to make enough money in the busy season to carry them through the year.

But others see food trucks as a way to usher in more diverse food options and opportunities for a younger generation of business owners, and believe cities should get ahead on



Vendors at a food truck await customers at the Cannon Beach Farmer’s Market in 2017.

writing codes that adapt to a growing trend in a way that will limit their community impact.

Spread thin

In November, more than 25 Cannon Beach businesses that offer food met to give major feedback on the subject, mostly in opposition.

The potential for food trucks to take up parking spaces that are already at a premium was a major issue. Many also claimed it wasn’t fair to allow new businesses that wouldn’t have to pay the same kind of rents and property taxes as brick-and-mortar businesses — a problem especially dramatic along the downtown core, where property values are high.

“I’ve been closed for over a month and a half because of staffing shortages ... losing thousands of dollars, and then I’m hearing this?” said John Sowa,

of Sweet Basil’s Cafe. “It raises the hair on the back of my neck.”

Cannon Beach and Seaside share similar fears that the small towns have restaurant markets that are already spread too thin, with 44 food establishments in Cannon Beach and 75 in Seaside.

“I would suggest to this body that the restaurant pool in the city is stretched pretty far,” Doug Wiese, of Dooger’s Seafood, said at a July work session. “Every person that stops in there and eats is one more meal that does not get taken sitting down in one of our restaurants.”

The relationship between food trucks and brick-and-mortar restaurants doesn’t have to be adversarial, said David Reid, the executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

“I think the food trucks came in and filled a void that existed: the quick lunch

meal,” Reid said. “Initially, it didn’t feel like it was taking from competitors — it was filling an additional need.”

Seaside City Councilor Seth Morrissey feels this pattern could be the case in Seaside, too. Morrissey plans to introduce a new ordinance that would allow food carts to operate only on private property and require owners to connect to city water, power and sanitary systems, as well as require permanent restrooms.

Requiring food cart pods to provide infrastructure is a way to make sure the owners are invested in the community, in contrast to temporary carts looking to just profit during the summer, he said.

Morrissey recognizes the concerns about competition, but sees food cart pods benefiting residents, who often can’t find a spot at a restaurant in the summer anyway. Because most are owner-operated, he feels food carts wouldn’t exacerbate the region’s employee shortage.

“Competition is a good thing. It provides better, diverse options,” Morrissey said. “I don’t see the pie as limited.”

‘We’re not Portland’

Morrissey’s plan has met with mixed reviews by the City Council, but for the

most part, he feels the community is supportive. The pushback is more intense among the older generation of restaurant owners, who started their businesses within a different economic and cultural context.

“Investments are huge for brick and mortar,” Morrissey said. “Food carts have low barrier to entry. It gives local people a chance to try an offering and see if it’s right,” he said. “The younger generation is looking to do our own thing.”

In Cannon Beach, there is some consensus that food carts could be allowed for special events or circumstances with the right permits and standards. For many business owners, though, the core of the issue comes down to image.

“We’re not Portland,” said Shelley Crane, owner of The Oil & Vinegar Bar. “We never want to be Portland.”

During a Tuesday work

session on the topic, the Cannon Beach City Council decided to look into clarifying language in their event ordinances that could permit food trucks, but appeared to steer clear of considering food trucks for regular operation.

“I don’t know that it’s worth it since only a small number want to see it happen,” City Councilor George Vetter said.

But for Selberg, the food truck discussion should center more around Cannon Beach’s future business owners.

“No one wants to take away business from anyone else. But this makes opening a business more accessible for young people. Maybe it will encourage younger families to come and stay in Cannon Beach,” Selberg said. “There is a way to make this all work. I encourage everyone to be open-minded.”



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