

New protections sought for coast's rocky shores

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — When considering possible new state protections for popular rocky outcroppings near Cannon Beach, Tabea Goossen can think of three priorities.

“No. 1: Leashing dogs. No. 2: Leashing dogs.”

And No. 3? Take a guess.

Goossen has patrolled the beach from Chapman Point north of downtown to Indian Beach in Ecola State Park as a local citizen scientist for nearly four years, observing the activities of a distinctive shorebird: the black oystercatcher.

These shorebirds sport a brilliant orange beak and are an important indicator of the health of intertidal ecosystems — the tide pools where they and their chicks forage for food and the rocky areas that become fully exposed at low tide where they roost and build their nests.

The birds' global population is small. Like many residents of the intertidal zone, they are vulnerable to human disturbance, particularly at popular sites near Cannon Beach where low tides in the summer provide a hard-to-resist opportunity for people to wander and explore.

This year, Goossen saw some of the lowest black oystercatcher chick survival rates she'd ever recorded. She feels she is constantly asking people to stay off the rocks or keep their dogs away from nesting sites. For the most part, she said, they just don't realize the impact they are having.

Now a local group hopes to take advantage of an update to Oregon's Rocky Shores Management Plan to place these areas under state protections similar — though less stringent, in some cases — to those



The North Coast Rocky Habitat Coalition is trying to designate new protections for Ecola Point, Tillamook Head and Chapman Point.

that apply at sites like Haystack Rock and Cape Falcon Marine Reserve.

This week, the North Coast Rocky Habitat Coalition presented their plans to propose new protection designations for Tillamook Head, Ecola Point and Chapman Point to the Cannon Beach City Council. They were looking for feedback and support as they prepare to submit final plans to the state in December.

Visitation to the coast continues to increase, they noted. Some areas not included under the state's plan in 1994 are feeling the pressure more now than in the past and new protections are necessary.

These sites are important for thousands of seabirds, which are the most threatened group of birds globally, noted Joe Liebezeit, staff scientist and avian conservation manager at Portland Audubon.

The designations could also provide some additional help to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, whose budget took a major hit because of the coronavirus pandemic. Though the

designations do not necessarily come with resources for enforcement or education, they open the doors for community groups that rally around the sites to apply for other types of funding.

The rocky shores coalition, led by Margaret Treadwell, the coordinator for the Friends of Cape Falcon Marine Reserve, is still refining proposals for the three Clatsop County sites and plans to hold several public virtual meetings to collect community input.

They're striving for a balance, she told the city councilors: “Something poised between allowing people to enjoy the area while still protecting the creatures that call it home.”

Protection options

The coalition believes a marine conservation designation, which comes with the highest level of protections and restrictions, would make sense for Tillamook Head. This dominant landmark at the south end of Seaside and an entry way into Ecola State Park was considered for des-

ignation under the rocky shore plan in the '90s.

Kari Henningsgaard, the communications coordinator for the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, examines tide pools near Ecola Point during a site visit in September to discuss possible protections for rocky shore areas near Cannon Beach.

Though a hiking trail leads up and over Tillamook Head, much of the area is inaccessible, punctuated by steep cliffs and crashing waves below. The headland provides refuge to over a thousand birds and houses nine sea bird colony sites.

Chapman Point, a headland that marks part of the northern boundary of Cannon Beach and the beginning of Ecola State Park, features rocky islands populated by nesting seabirds and shorebirds to the west and beachfront properties rising out of the dunes to the east.

In the middle is a nub of protected land, the very tip of the headland that people are not supposed to hike, climb and clamber on but which, to

many summer visitors, presents an irresistible opportunity to do exactly all of those things.

Because of the point's easy accessibility and proximity to Haystack Rock — you can see the iconic rock distantly to the south — the rocky shores group is expecting to ask for a marine education designation. The designation, also known as a marine garden, could come with harvest restrictions.

There are already a number of locals who live at the north end of Cannon Beach and who are concerned by the level of human activity they witness in these fragile areas, Treadwell said. Many of them also walk the beach at low tide.

“It'd be great to build on that concern and activity to make a more formal and probably mostly volunteer group to do education out there,” she said. She envisions a “light-weight” version of the education and outreach that already occurs at Haystack Rock.

“Part of the magic at Haystack Rock is you're both letting people know what impacts they can have and preventing that while giving them opportunities to learn,” she said.

Volunteers and employees with the Haystack Rock Awareness Program routinely set up scopes when puffins return to begin seasonal nesting at the rocks.

“They can see the birds they're being asked not to get too close to,” Treadwell said.

Kelli Ennis, the director of the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, said she expects her organization to be a partner to any community group that forms around Chapman Point, providing training, outreach and other types of support.

'A ghostly place'

At Ecola Point, just north of Chapman Point, the rocky shores group is proposing a

marine conservation or marine education designation.

The point can be a ghostly place — a feeling punctuated by the drawling, lonesome cries of gulls or the frantic piping calls of black oystercatchers raising an alarm.

A perpetual mist seems to wrap around the rocks. White harbor seals sometimes lounge on the outer rocks like strange, pale mermaids. A beachcomber squinting from the shore may find them already staring back, well aware of a human presence, wary and watchful.

For the first time in several years, those same rocks are also dotted with specks of purple and orange — sea stars making a comeback after a mysterious wasting disease decimated their populations on the West Coast.

While many people have already shown their support for the group's proposals, some wonder if formal protections will simply shine an unwanted spotlight on areas, putting them on a new kind of map and increasing the number of visitors seeking them out.

It is something the weighs on Treadwell's mind.

“A lot of people I bring that up to say, ‘Look, people are going to come anyway and it's better to get ahead of it and protect places than worry that you're bringing attention to them,’” she said. Also, she added, they're already here.

On an early morning tour the group took of Ecola Point and Chapman Point in September, a low tide revealed wide stretches of tide pools. Despite the early hour, they saw visitors and locals alike pick their way among the rocks. People wandered next to the cliffs of Chapman Point and leaned in to investigate anemones. They tossed balls and sticks to their dogs.

Seniors lose Medicare Advantage option in county

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Astorian

Clatsop County is losing its only Medicare Advantage plan starting next year after Moda Health decided to pull out. But Medicare recipients changing coverage by early December will have access to a newer, hybrid medical savings account.

As of September, more than 9,100 people in the county were covered by traditional Medicare, the federal health insurance program for the elderly covering basic hospital and medical services. Nearly 1,200 people were covered by Moda Health's Medicare Advantage plan, which bundles hospital and medical coverage with other specialty services such as dental, vision and hearing.

Medicare enrollment site The open enrollment

period for Medicare started earlier this month and runs until Dec. 7.

Jonathan Nicholas, a spokesman for Moda, said in an email that the insurer couldn't continue providing a Medicare Advantage plan with reasonable coverage at a reasonable cost.

“We also, I should say, felt bound to consider our responsibility to Moda members throughout the rest of the state,” Nicholas said. “Had we continued to offer plans at a loss in Clatsop County, other members across Oregon would have faced increased premiums to offset those losses.”

Moda's departure comes two years after Family-Care Health pulled its Medicare Advantage plan out of Northwest Oregon, leaving 600 people in the county to find new coverage. The county had seven Medicare Advantage providers as

recently as 2009.

Medicare Advantage plans have been leaving rural areas over the years because of several factors. The scarcity of rural providers make such markets less appealing to insurers providing Medicare Advantage plans that bundle services. Medicare recipients can get care from any provider, but Medicare Advantage plans usually require patients to find providers in the plan's network.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Budget Office has found that Medicare Advantage plans underpay traditional Medicare by 3% and negotiate even lower reimbursement rates with rural hospitals, where it is more difficult for people to stay in network coverage.

Hospital executives in Eastern Oregon, another area with scarce Medicare Advantage options, recently partnered with Moda to cre-

ate Summit Health, a new Medicare Advantage plan spanning 12 counties.

“We created Summit Health following our success with the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization,” Nicholas said. “... Its owners include regional providers who have for decades been focused on meeting the health care needs of their communities. All of us at Moda like to think that Summit Health could indeed be a model to bring more care options to the coast.”

The open enrollment period for Medicare began earlier this month and runs until Dec. 7. The two options left in the county are a traditional Medicare supplemented by a wide array of Medigap policies for specialty services like prescription drugs, and a new Medicare medical savings account being offered by Lasso Healthcare.



Proposed plan by Jeff and Celeste Bodner for Gearhart Elementary School.

Gearhart: Process will not be rushed

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help to determine use, Morey said. “All of these will impact the decision regarding how to best use the former elementary school.”

The process will not be

rushed, Morey said. “It is an exciting time to own such a key piece of property in our wonderful city. We look forward to working cooperatively with the council, staff and the entire community to create something special.”

Broadway: ‘I’m proud of this board’

Continued from Page A1

will detail financing, partnerships and potential uses for the property, board member Celeste Bodner said, with participation from board, staff and the public. They are

scheduled Dec. 7, 14 and 21. “I’m proud of this board and the due diligence in this transaction,” Bodner said. “We want to provide some visibility about what’s been done and what’s ahead in this process.”

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