

LAND CONSERVANCY PURCHASES RAINFOREST RESERVE

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Astorian

The North Coast Land Conservancy has taken ownership of an iconic coastal rainforest above Arch Cape and Oswald West State Park.

The purchase of the 3,500-acre property — previously industrial timberland — comes at a time when a number of North Coast communities are looking at ways to protect their drinking water sources. The Rainforest Reserve includes headwater streams for five watersheds and supplies drinking water to Cannon Beach and Arch Cape. Some plants and animals at home in the towering peaks that visually define the reserve for local communities are found nowhere else on Earth.

When combined with other neighboring protected or soon-to-be protected lands, the reserve creates an uninterrupted 32-square-mile conservation corridor that runs from the Onion and Angora peaks above Cannon Beach and Arch Cape to the near-shore ocean off Short Sand Beach in popular Oswald West State Park.

U.S. Rep Suzanne Bonamici called the purchase a “remarkable accomplishment that will significantly benefit our region in many ways.”

“As we address the climate crisis, strategic, community-driven conservation efforts like this project can help mitigate the most serious risks to plants, fish and wildlife while preserving the ecosystems we cherish for future generations,” the Oregon Democrat said in a statement.

Ecotrust Forest Management bought the 5,000 forested acres known as Onion Peak Holdings from Stimson Lumber Co. in 2016. That same year, the for-profit subsidiary of Ecotrust entered into an agreement with the North Coast Land Conservancy to hold 3,500 acres of the property until the nonprofit could purchase the land.

The Arch Cape Water District is pursuing the remaining 1,500 acres in order to secure full ownership of Arch Cape’s watershed and create a community forest. A purchase could be finalized by next summer.



North Coast Land Conservancy
Katie Voelke, the executive director of the North Coast Land Conservancy, leads a tour at the Rainforest Reserve property before the nonprofit purchased it. The reserve includes important habitat and is home to rare animals and plants.

The land conservancy has pushed for the reserve for more than a decade and it is certainly the most ambitious project they have tackled, said Katie Voelke, the executive director.

Besides the scale of the project, there was the cost. After signing a purchase and sales agreement in 2016, the land conservancy launched a five-year effort and \$10 million fundraising campaign to acquire the acreage.

In 2021, the cost increased unexpectedly to \$11.8 million. An appraisal of the property, required ahead of purchase, came back reflecting a historic high in lumber prices tied to supply-and-demand issues exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

It may be tempting to think of the purchase as an ending, Voelke said. But, she added, “really it’s the beginning of the rest of the story.”

The land conservancy will need to create a final stewardship plan for the reserve that spells out how the property will be managed and what kind of public access and recreation will be

allowed, among other details.

For now, public access at the Rainforest Reserve will not change, though some areas will be closed because they are dangerous or sensitive. People can still walk into the reserve to hike or hunt for deer and elk. Daytime access only. No camping.

Not every property the organization conserves is open to the public, but Voelke is adamant that the reserve needs to be one that is.

“It’s wild, it’s huge, it’s tall,” she said of the reserve. “You’re in the clouds. You’re above the rain. All this incredible coastal wildness and it’s just right there. You can get to it. You can go for a day hike and have one of the most incredibly rich experiences on the coast, and we all need that.”

“We need it for ourselves. For our sanity.”

Up until the purchase documents were signed on Tuesday, Voelke found herself getting nervous when she was out in the reserve.

“Because the more I’m out there,

the more I know how irreplaceable this particular place in the world is and how terrible it would feel to fail at this vision that we have,” she said.

Grants provided about \$4 million for the purchase of the land. The rest of the funding came from numerous donors, including people from all walks of life and political backgrounds: People who hiked around the property as kids or who have hunted there all their lives. It was a place they had been to and seen and cared deeply about.

Years from now, Voelke hopes the conservation of the Rainforest Reserve will seem inevitable — maybe even a little unremarkable, a natural course of events.

“Like, of course this happened,” she said.

Sunrise breaks on steep peaks in the new Rainforest Reserve above Arch Cape and Oswald West State Park.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian



Hood to Coast: ‘It’s become a much better event’

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event. In a typical year, the relay earns almost \$1 million for the Providence Cancer Institute.

“We had another great year,” Floyd said. “I do want to acknowledge we need to get better every year, to make sure we remain welcoming visitors to the community.”

The 198-mile relay from Mount Hood to the Prom brought thousands of people to the coast.

Before the City Council meeting, Hood to Coast CEO Jude Hubber met with city staff. Social media was the No. 1 concern for Montero.

“I paid a lot of attention to what was going on on Facebook,” she said. “And there were some very awful people saying very awful things. And one of my policies is, ‘Don’t tell me something’s happening if you didn’t see it happen.’”

Montero suggested greater marketing efforts from Hood to Coast and



People gather on the beach during Hood to Coast in August.

R.J. Marx

making it easier for the public to register complaints with race officials, possibly via a Quick Response code with a weblink to relay officials, or signage on vans.

“We’ll continue to have open dialogue with everybody here in this room, outside this room to make sure that we continue to be welcome members and contributing members to this community,” Floyd said.

Next year is the last of the five-year Hood to Coast contract with the city. In 2022,

the relay will pay more than \$30,000 to the city. The event is scheduled for Aug. 26 and Aug. 27.

In 2015, City Councilor Randy Frank moderated a workshop where he and local business owners complained about rude behavior by runners, arrogant organizers and vendors who tapped into private power supplies.

“It’s become a much better event,” Frank said. “And not only here, but all the way along the route, whether it’s restrooms or volunteers. ...

It just gets smoother every year, and it was great having it in town.”

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Mandate: ‘The dynamics around COVID are constantly changing’

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The park district policy comes with a stipulation for booster vaccinations as time progresses. Prior notice of at least four weeks will be given to employees.

Since the start of the pandemic, about 10 district employees have tested positive for the virus, six

or seven of those before vaccines were available, Archibald said. Three employees tested positive in 2021 and none since August.

“The dynamics around COVID are constantly changing, but I feel confident that we’re doing our part to keep the community and our patrons safe,” Archibald said.

2022 Medicare ????'s

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