

In Arch Cape, some residents concerned about forest purchase

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian



Arch Cape is pursuing a timberland purchase to protect drinking water.

FINANCED BY STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS, THE PLAN WILL PROTECT DRINKING WATER AND WILDLIFE HABITAT. THE PROPERTY WILL TIE INTO AN ADDITIONAL 3,500 ACRES THE NORTH COAST LAND CONSERVANCY ACQUIRED FOR ITS RAINFOREST RESERVE PROJECT ABOVE ARCH CAPE AND ADJACENT TO OSWALD WEST STATE PARK.

The Arch Cape Water District Board took a big step in April when it signed off on a \$4.7 million purchase of 1,441 acres of commercial timberland, but a segment of the community is not confident in the district's plan.

The purchase, which has been years in the making, will turn the timberlands around the source of Arch Cape's drinking water into a community forest, making the unincorporated area one of the few coastal communities to have full control of its watershed.

But some residents and landowners are concerned about the water district's plan, including the impact logging and public recreational use could have on the area.

Financed by state and federal grants, the plan will protect drinking water and wildlife habitat. The property will tie into an additional 3,500 acres the North Coast Land Conservancy acquired for its Rainforest Reserve project above Arch Cape and adjacent to Oswald West State Park.

The water district, which oversees 295 water connections, also plans to significantly scale back logging and provide recreational opportunities.

Astoria oversees a similar system at its 3,700-acre Bear Creek watershed, which provides the city's drinking water. However, there is no public access or recreation.

Leading up to the board's decision to purchase the land, Bill Campbell, a homeowner, sent a petition with more than 100 names calling for the formation of a ratepayer advisory work group to come up with an operations management plan that could eliminate the need for logging. He has also set up a blog with critiques about different aspects of the board's plan.

Campbell said the overarching concern is lack of community involvement in the process. He said there are also concerns about logging and plans to open the forest — which sits behind many neighbors' backyards — to

the public for recreational use. He also questions the board's ability to manage the forest and the financial plan.

Campbell claims the water board has not addressed questions from the community. He said the petition, which was sent to the board in March, has also been ignored.

"I am trying to represent the community's interest in getting the community to make a decision," he said. "Sure, I have an opinion on everything. But I'm not weighing in on whether the forest should be purchased or not. Whether there should be recreational use or not. It's really about, let's have full transparency by the board with the correct complete information. And let's get the community to be involved in making the decision. That's what I'm all about."

Campbell has served on Arch Cape's sanitary district board and is on the board of the Castle Rock homeowners association, which represents

a 35-lot subdivision that borders the forest.

"We share a direct border with the proposed forest," Campbell said. "So clearly, people at the 35 lots in this community definitely have concerns, but I think they're concerns that are representative of the full Arch Cape community."

Phil Chick, the water district's manager, said the forest purchase has been an agenda item for the water district's board for years. There have also been numerous workshops, tours and town halls.

A Facebook page and website were set up for the project, which includes surveys, answers to frequently asked questions, project information and timelines.

The water district hired an outreach coordinator in 2018 through a state grant. A finance committee was formed in 2019 to develop a feasibility plan.

The water district held a town hall in March with presentations from various proj-

ect partners and a question and answer period. The district also followed up with a document with written responses to questions raised during the meeting.

"I feel that public engagement was duly done," Chick said. "All of our meetings have been public, and this has been a long, very intentional, deliberate process in not only planning, but public engagement."

"And that process is going to do nothing but continue, even after acquisition is complete, which we're anticipating will happen in the early part of June."

The water district will begin developing a recreation and access plan for the forest beginning this month, a public process that will last several months. The district will work with an advisory group, the land conservancy, Lewis and Clark Timberlands and the National Park Service to complete the plan.

Chick said the goal with the process is to maintain

the character of the land and its traditional local uses and gather community feedback.

The water district also needs to complete a forest management plan, which will be developed by the district's forester and a forest advisory committee.

"Managing a water source is exactly the kind of work that a water utility should be focused on — on protecting its source water and provid-

ing clean, safe water to the people that it serves," Chick said. "Owning the source achieves this in perpetuity."

"Although community forestry isn't especially common right now in this neck of the woods, there are some municipalities that have owned their own watersheds for many years," he added. "And the people that are responsible for making those decisions — the city councils, the staffs — those organizations have little to no forest management experience in house either. They rely on professional consultants to do that, in much the same way that we rely on engineers and different partners to operate our wastewater and our water utility service."

Jewell superintendent hired to lead Newberg Public Schools

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian



Steve Phillips

JEWELL — Steve Phillips, the superintendent of the Jewell School District who is on paid administrative leave pending an investigation, has been selected to fill the same role in Newberg.

At a meeting last Tuesday, the school board at Newberg Public Schools announced Phillips as the school district's next superintendent. The board voted 5 to 2, authorizing the board chair to negotiate a contract with Phillips.

He will take on the role as soon as possible, pending contract negotiations, the school district said.

Phillips was announced as one of three finalists for the position in April. The school board conducted three rounds of interviews with candidates and held a meet-and-greet with students, staff and the community, the school district said.

Raquel Peregrino de Brito, a school board member in Newberg who voted to approve hiring Phillips, cited his past experience as a superintendent in her decision.

"We are looking forward to working with Dr. Phillips

encouraged hiring Phillips, with a few in strong opposition.

Representatives from the Jewell School District could not be reached for comment.

Phillips was placed on administrative leave in Jewell in February and an investigation began shortly after. The rural school district, which serves students kindergarten-through-12th grade, hired an acting superintendent in March to finish the school year.

The school district has declined to disclose the reasons for the administrative leave or the investigation.

Phillips was brought on in Jewell in 2018, eventually being appointed superintendent in 2019.

His tenure in Jewell followed his resignation from his position as deputy superintendent in the Beaverton School District after receiv-

ing blowback for reposting a tweet that expressed anti-immigration sentiments.

He served as superintendent and director of secondary education in the Malheur Education Service District prior to his time in Beaverton.

... with the high expectation that the focus is on the improvement of academics," Peregrino de Brito, who was appointed to the school board in April, told The Astorian.

Peregrino de Brito said that she and another school board member traveled to Jewell to speak with school staff about Phillips and the investigation.

"Not knowing detailed information — it's very difficult without knowing the full extent of what happened to make a judgment," she said, adding that much of what she heard were rumors.

Prior to the Newberg school board's decision on Tuesday, many public comments read by the board

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