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Volunteers Robert and Loraine Schmitt, Marilee Thompson and Bill Phillips (left to right) during the festival. Photo credit Colin Jones, TEP Restoration and Monitoring Director

Twin Rocks hosts 24th Clean Water Festival



A United States Forest Service ranger educates a group of kids on waterfowl.

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

More than 300 fourth grade students from across Tillamook County descended on Twins Rocks Friends Camp on March 18, for the 24th annual Children's Clean Water Festival hosted by Tillamook Estuaries Partnership.

Students spent the day rotating between activities that helped them learn about different aspects of the local water cycle, challenges in keeping it clean, the animals and plants that rely on it and the impacts people have.

"If it touches water or has to do with water, we try to elevate and celebrate it," said Claudine Rehn, Deputy Director of Tillamook Estuaries Partnership (TEP).

The festival kicked off 24 years ago, when Rehn applied for a grant from the Oregon Department of Environmental

Quality that sought to replicate a clean water festival sponsored by the department in Portland in other areas of the state.

Each year, the entire fourth grade classes from the Neah-Kah-Nie, Nestucca and Tillamook School Districts attend the festival, while students from the county's private schools attend every other year with both fourth and fifth graders.

Leading up to the festival, Danielle Maillard, TEP's Community Engagement Coordinator, worked to organize around 100 volunteers to run the seven activities for students. After setting up the activities the day prior to the festival and arriving early on the day of to prepare, the volunteers welcomed the kids at 9 a.m.

Students were split into groups and visited each of the six stations on one of two loops, with chaperones and volunteers

See **CLEAN WATER**, Page A5

TCTD steps up for dialysis patients

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

Since last year's closure of the dialysis clinic in Tillamook, the Tillamook County Transportation District has provided or paid for more than \$200,000 in transportation costs to get patients to Lincoln City, Astoria and Forest Grove for life sustaining care.

Tillamook County Transportation District (TCTD) General Manager Brian Vitulli said that coordinating the 115,000 miles of transportation has been a complex logistical dance for district staff.

"It's like conducting an orchestra, really," Vitulli said, "it's just the amount of coordination and the amount of teamwork that goes on here is incredible."

Even before the February 2024 closure of the U.S. Renal Care dialysis center in Tillamook, TCTD provided rides to their thrice weekly dialysis appointments through four different programs. But when U.S. Renal Care made the decision to shutter the

center, they did not communicate with the district to help establish a plan to get patients to their new centers in Lincoln City, Astoria or Forest Grove.

"That caught us very much by surprise, you know, that the clinic could just pull out of town like that and there not be any kind of plan for how to care for those patients or transport those patients to other centers," Vitulli said.

However, district staff buckled down and tackled the transportation task by

See **DIALYSIS**, Page A5



TCTD driver Jeremy Bellante assists Martin Boge into a district van for his ride to dialysis treatment in Forest Grove on March 17.

PHOTO COURTESY TILLAMOOK COUNTY TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT

Weber focuses on education and transportation in long session

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

Oregon State Senator Suzanne Weber has been spending much of her time during the long session concentrating on issues facing Oregon's schools and transportation network.

Weber said that she and other members of the Joint Committee on Transportation are still working to get a handle on funding shortfalls at the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and that she is a fan of certain aspects of Governor Tina Kotek's education accountability plan but wants more details.

"It's a real aggressive acknowledgement of problems that we have in education and there are some really good things in it," Weber said, "and there are some things that you know, of course, I question, and I think there are some things that haven't been included in it."

As a member of the education committee, Weber has been involved in discussions about Kotek's proposal, which would add new metrics to the state's student success measurements and allow the state to direct spending of portions of districts' funding if they failed to meet success goals repeatedly.

Weber said that she liked that the state was taking a comprehensive look at the system but said that she had questions about testing requirements and how administrators would be involved in accountability efforts and would like to see more details about those issues. "I'm not seeing the details in the broad picture regarding it and that's what I'd like to see," Weber said.

Weber also said that it was important to her that teachers be honored for their contributions and that she was supportive of other bills being advanced to help address the issue of chronic absenteeism.

On the transportation front, Weber

See **WEBER**, Page A2

TLT debate continues

Tourist industry responds to Javadi bill

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

As a bill sponsored by State Representative Cyrus Javadi makes its way through the legislative process, conversation has been stirred about tourists and their impact on highly visited counties, including Tillamook.

Weighing in on the debate, Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association (ORLA) President and CEO Jason Brandt said that the current split was fair and questioned Tillamook County's use of the unrestricted funds and coastal counties' use of the restricted funds.

Oregon Coast Visitors Association (OCVA) Executive Director Marcus Hinz said that there was not enough data to show that the current split was insufficient to address tourists' impacts on the counties.

Hinz also argued that before trying to change the division, counties should collaborate with OCVA to use restricted funds to address the issues raised by Javadi and others.

"Generally speaking, if you want somebody's money, you should just really sit down at the table and try to work things out first," Hinz said, "and that piece has never really happened."

In response to these arguments, Tillamook County Commissioner Paul

See **TLT**, Page A3



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OPRD hosts Manzanita beach driving public hearing

WILL CHAPPELL
CITIZEN EDITOR

As part of its rulemaking process, the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation hosted a virtual town hall to gather public feedback on a proposed ban on beach driving in the City of Manzanita on March 24.

At the hearing, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) staffer Katie Gauthier and Manzanita Councilor Jerry Spegman discussed the proposed ban and a handful of commenters weighed in.

Currently, the beach in Manzanita is open to vehicle traffic between October 1 and May 30, between the hours of 7 a.m. and 12 a.m. for any vehicle and at any time for boat launching.

Spegman said that this state of affairs had been a concern in the community for at least the five years he has served as a city councilor, but that it was only recently the council became aware they could request a change in the

rule.

The provision allowing driving on the beach was adopted at some point in the early 1990s, according to Spegman, and in the intervening years, circumstances in the town have changed, altering the safety calculus of having cars on the beach.

Spegman said that off-season tourism for various holidays and major weather events has significantly increased since the 1990s and that the full-time population of the city is older and more physically limited than in most cities across the state. Spegman said that the increase in population and demographics of the city created

situations where residents felt unsafe on the beach because of cars, leading to the request for a change.

While the beach-driving allowance serves the purpose of giving mobility challenged individuals access to the beach, Spegman pointed out that OPRD issued permits to allow for similar access and that the town was home to a beach wheelchair from the non-profit David's Chair.

Spegman also highlighted that Manzanita's council had discussed the requested driving ban during at least five meetings and that 40 written public comments had come in in favor of the ban, with only around 15 opposed.

The principal opposition, accounting for 12 of the comments opposed to the change, came from citizens concerned about the impact on dory boats. In response to these concerns, Spegman said that he had reached out to the president of the Pacific City Dorymen's Association and confirmed that there was little or no dory activity happening on the Manzanita beach.

Ultimately, Spegman said that the council had made the request to try to address careless and dangerous vehicle usage, which while only perpetrated by a small group has caused issues.

Gauthier said that public comment on the issue would be accepted until April 7, and that the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission would address the proposal at either their April or June meeting.

Following the presentation, four public commenters weighed in, with a Manzanita police officer speaking in support of the ban saying that there was a small group of people driving irresponsibly on the beach and causing issues. Two other commenters spoke in favor of the proposal, citing its positive environmental impacts, while one, who harvests driftwood on the beach, voiced his opposition.



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Wheeler manager resigns

STAFF REPORT

Wheeler City Manager Wesley Wootten publicly announced his resignation at the city council's meeting on March 18, with an effective date of March 28. Wootten arrived in Wheeler in June 2024 from the Washington D.C. area.

Wootten recommended that the council hire select Finance Director Madison Chestnut to serve as interim city manager during the recruitment of a permanent replacement, and they unanimously accepted the recommendation.

Chestnut plans to begin a master's program in September, so the council instructed her



Wesley Wootten

to create a recruitment schedule that would see a candidate selected by mid-August to allow her at least a week of overlap to familiarize the new hire with the city.

WEBER

From Page A1

said that even after two months in session, the joint transportation committee is still working to get a handle on the issues facing ODOT.

Twice a week, the committee is holding two-hour evening sessions with updates from the agency's director and staff members, and Weber said that the sessions have been eye-opening.

"We walk out of those meetings after listening to the director and the members and you just shake your head," Weber said, "like how in the world did you get to this point without seeing where you were?"

Weber said that ODOT projects were consistently running with huge overages and that one of the issues that staffers had identified for this was their bookkeeping software being inadequate, though it has recently been updated. The other issues facing the agency mainly relate to its revenue, Weber said, with

electric and more fuel-efficient vehicles constricting the growth of gas tax revenues.

With more information still coming in, Weber said that the committee had not started to set forth a policy agenda and would wait until the hearings were complete. "We are not gravitating towards anything currently because we're waiting for the whole picture," Weber said.

Another proposal before the transportation committee is the possible institution of a tire tax, which Weber said she had reservations about. Weber worried that the proposed tax would negatively impact low- and fixed-income residents and questioned the plan to use the revenue for public transit projects.

"One issue that has come forward is what everyone has heard of and that's the tire tax. That is very contentious because that tire tax is not going to go towards our roads, it's going to go towards mass transit and bike routes and things like that and trains," Weber said. "All are great ideas, but it doesn't address the existing issues."



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TLT Debate

From Page A1

Fournier said that while he agreed more data was needed, that the impacts of the industry were not able to be sufficiently mitigated under the current arrangement was clear to any resident of the county. “Driving anywhere during the three months is insane. Beaches are full. The impacts are real, the call volumes are going up,” Fournier said. “We are tracking them, but I agree if it doesn’t pass, I think it’s because we haven’t done a good job of showing the problem.”

Fournier also pushed back on the notion, suggested by Brandt and Hinz, that the county should use the funds for purposes outside the language of the statute based on assurances from OCVA and ORLA, saying that would put the county in a position of potential legal jeopardy. “It’s not in the statute, so now we’re doing something because somebody in a private industry sector is saying, “you can do this, we won’t sue you,”” Fournier said. “The government can’t run that way.”

After the Headlight Herald’s recent interview with Javadi regarding his bills attempting to amend the division of transient lodging tax (TLT) dollars from the current allocation requiring 70% be spent on tourism promotion or related facilities, Hinz reached out to respond.

With ORLA serving as the chief group representing the interests of the tourist industry in Salem and leading opposition to Javadi’s attempts at reform, the Headlight Herald also reached out to Brandt for his thoughts.

Javadi originally proposed two bills, but that has now been reduced to a single bill proposing a change in the ways restricted funds can be used to allow for them to go towards public safety and community infrastructure. Javadi argues that tourists’ impacts on public safety cannot be sufficiently addressed by the \$7 million in unrestricted TLT revenue available annually to Tillamook County. The impact of tourists on Tillamook County is reflected in a 1,000-call-per-month increase in volume in the tourist season (4,750 versus 3,750) in June, July, August and September, while half of citations throughout the year go to drivers from outside of the county.

Brandt argued that this was hardly the time to readdress the split as the tourism industry was still struggling after the coronavirus pandemic and needed the funding to help with its continuing recovery. Brandt said that occupancy levels were still lower than in 2019 across Oregon, including on the coast, and that if a change happened, “you can imagine a future where those dollars simply go away.”

Another concern for Brandt is the seasonality of the industry and he said that using the restricted funds to promote shoulder- and off-season visits was key to making sure that the industry could offer year-round jobs.

“There’s a lot of great jobs and careers in our industry if we can sustain demand throughout the year,” Brandt said, “and we want to provide those career ladders for over

200,000 Oregonians that work in our industry so it’s an important mission for us and protecting those tourism-promotion dollars for those times of year when the demand is not as high is a critical priority for us.”

Brandt also argued that the current unrestricted funds represented “more than our fair share” to account for tourists’ impacts on the county and took the county to task for its allocation of the unrestricted funds.

Currently, the 30% of revenue that is unrestricted goes to the public works department to pay for road maintenance in Tillamook County, as approved by voters when voting to institute the TLT in 2014.

Brandt argued that since the income from TLT had tripled in the intervening years, he believed the county should revisit the split and allocate some of the unrestricted TLT revenues to the sheriff’s office.

“I’d be pretty upset if I were the sheriff that there’s never been a community conversation as that resource has exponentially grown since 2014 to have some of it shared with other impacts that tourism has on county economies,” Brandt said.

In response to this criticism, Fournier said that the cost of building roads and bridges had also increased exponentially over the decade since the TLT was approved. Fournier also argued that Brandt was unfamiliar with the conditions in Tillamook County, which is responsible for the most bridges and culverts of any county in the state and faces frequent flooding and landslides.

Fournier said that when voters approved the TLT with its current split, the county had among the roast words in the state, and he did not believe residents would agree with Brandt that the TLT revenues were being used unwisely.

As further proof of this, Fournier pointed to Tillamook County Public Works Director Chris Laity’s work to find outside funding for county projects, which notably resulted in the award of more than \$20 million in federal funding for the Cape Meares Loop Road project, completed in 2023 with a county match of just over \$2 million.

“Our road department’s actually doing really well,” Fournier said, “he’s not flush but he’s using that (TLT) money wisely and for our county it works.”

Brandt also argued that Tillamook County and others on the coast had made poor choices with the restricted revenues generated by the TLT. He said that Tillamook and other counties should use those funds to build facilities like the Seaside Convention Center that could generate revenues and help the industry grow off-season business.

Fournier, who campaigned on a platform of using TLT funds to build facilities to boost county revenues, said that he and the current board were looking at the possibility of a conference center by the fairgrounds as well as other facilities that locals and tourists could enjoy.

“When it comes to us, we are looking at it, especially me, since I’ve come on,” Fournier said, “and I can tell you that this board, we’re interested in using that money to build facilities that visitors and locals will appreciate.”



Jason Brandt



Marcus Hinz



Paul Fournier

Hinz did not share Brandt’s criticism of the use of unrestricted funds but also argued that the restricted funds were not being put to the best possible use, saying that the county should get more creative with the way it spent them.

Hinz and Brandt both argued that the restricted revenues could be used to pay for law enforcement staffing and overtime costs during tourist events, though the language in the current statute makes no mention of law enforcement or public safety. Hinz argued that the funds could also be used for other purposes like mass transit or to support fire departments and that counties should partner with OCVA to explore those possibilities before seeking a statutory change.

“Let’s sit down at the table and completely exhaust all of the possibilities how that 70% can be used to solve the

solutions of cities and counties and all the impacts,” Hinz said. “If we get to that point and there’s like no legal way we can actually help fix these things, well then try to take the money but don’t try to take the money first, that’s not cool, have the conversation with us.”

Fournier said that this was an unreasonable suggestion and that neither ORLA nor OCVA had the power to green light uses of funds not delineated in the statute. Fournier said that if Brandt and Hinz felt that those were appropriate uses of the restricted funds, they should put forward legislation to formalize them.

“They should codify it,” Fournier said. “Otherwise, they’re asking us to break the law this time with their permission, which they totally don’t have the authority to do.”

Brandt said that it felt as

of reporting software for fire districts and departments in Tillamook County, the purchase of an electric trolley for Yachats and programs promoting natural resource protection as examples.

Hinz said that he wanted to help address the impacts caused by tourists on coastal communities but that he did not feel they were as drastic as many locals perceived or that they could not be addressed with the current division.

“We did not cause the revenue shortfalls,” Hinz said, “yes, of course visitors have an impact, and we want to pay for our portion of it, but we don’t want to pay for locals doing their own thing, we don’t want to pay for commerce.”

While Fournier disagreed that the current split was sufficient, he did say that he was not looking for a complete deredstriction of the funds, saying that he saw the value and importance of supporting the industry.

“I don’t want it all to be unrestricted because I don’t trust government either, to a point. Like I don’t think I should be able to spend that on everything because we didn’t do a good job of keeping our budgets balanced,” Fournier said. “I feel like we have to contribute to the visitor industry, we have to keep it strong and vital but that’s why I think 50/50 is a good call.”

Tillamook Beekeepers Association

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Include first and last names of individuals and place of business

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Neah-Kah-Nie seeks operation levy

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

Facing declining and unstable timber revenues, the Neah-Kah-Nie School District will be seeking voter approval for an operation levy that would generate up to \$2 million in annual revenues for the district.

Neah-Kah-Nie Superintendent Tyler Reed began public outreach in support of the levy at the Garibaldi city council meeting on March 17, and said that the district hoped that its history of being good financial stewards would give voters confidence to support the levy that will allow the district to maintain its current programming.

“We don’t need a building or a big project,” Reed

said, “what we need is to keep the lights on and keep educating our kids.”

Reed began his presentation with a primer on the district’s funding, explaining that the district relied on property taxes, timber revenue, and state and federal grants for its funding. Reed explained that the district was not awarded funding from the state school equalization fund because of its high property values and timber revenues.

However, over the last two years, timber revenues have taken a precipitous dip, falling from an average of over \$4 million annually between fiscal years 2021 and 2023 to \$3.9 million in fiscal year 2024 and just \$1.4 million this fiscal year. Reed explained that the

decline was in part due to the locations of timber sales and operators harvesting decisions but owed more to the habitat conservation plan for Western Oregon state forests passed by the Oregon Board of Forestry in March 2024, which placed increased restrictions on timber harvests in state forests.

After describing the district’s funding mechanisms and the threat to them, Reed highlighted some of the programs that the district offers, including free preschool for district families, free breakfast and lunch for all students, an evening bus to take students home after activities and operating two elementary schools for just 325 students.

Reed said that the dis-

trict’s previously strong financial situation thanks to strong property values and timber harvests had enabled them to offer all these programs but that the fall in timber revenue could put them at risk.

To address this shortfall, the district’s board decided that it needed to seek voter approval for an operation levy and has approved the question for the May ballot.

The district is asking voters to approve a levy of 75 cents per thousand dollars of assessed property value, which would yield around \$2 million in annual revenues, according to Reed. For a house with an assessed value of \$250,000, this would mean an extra \$5.50 in monthly property tax payments.

Currently, property owners in the district are paying 50 cents per thousand dollars of assessed value towards a bond that was issued in 2004 to finance construction of the district’s middle school, but that bond is set for repayment in July, when the new levy would go into effect, if approved.

Reed said that the proposed rate was a maximum and that the district would only take the amount needed to support its current programming, with the budget committee reevaluating the levy rate annually in response to timber revenues. Reed said that the soon-to-expire bond was approved at a rate of 94 cents per thousand dollars of assessed value but that

the district had never collected more than 70 cents per thousand and, as previously noted, was currently only collecting 50 cents.

If not approved, Reed said that he estimated 20 and a half staff positions would need to be laid off to balance the budget.

Reed will be appearing at other city council meetings throughout the district over the next month and hosting town halls on April 3, at Nehalem Elementary School, April 7, at Neah-Kah-Nie High School and April 10, at Garibaldi Grade School, all scheduled to start at 5:30 p.m.

More information about the levy, including a tax impact calculator for property owners can be found at nknsd.org/levy.

Rockaway Beach draft Source Water Protection Plan presented

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

After most of a year’s work, contractors from GSI Water Solutions Incorporated presented a draft of a Source Water Protection Plan for Rockaway Beach’s drinking watershed at a town hall on March 18.

Suzanne De Szoeka and Mikaela Clarke, from GSI Water Solutions, discussed the plan’s background and the resulting document, which sets forth strategies to address potential threats to the city’s drinking water supply and secure it into the future.

De Szoeka kicked off the town hall with a brief presentation on the plan, which is aimed at creating the Jetty Creek watershed whence the city’s drinking water is sourced. Oregon’s Department of Environmental Quality performed a source water assessment on the watershed in 2016 and the city applied to the

Oregon Health Authority for a grant in 2023 to build on that work with a source water protection plan.

After being selected for the grant, the city contracted with GSI Water Solutions to complete the plan, with work beginning in the summer of 2024. De Szoeka said that the committee had worked hard to solicit public input for the plan, including through multiple public meetings, an advisory committee and stakeholder work group.

The plan includes sections identifying and prioritizing risks in the watershed to the quality and quantity of water available to the city, strategies to reduce, mitigate or eliminate those risks, implementation plans for those strategies and contingency plans for securing the water source.

Clarke then discussed the risks facing the watershed, which were primarily posed by natural factors or forestry hazards. These

risks include climate change, droughts and low water flows, erodible soils, landslides and earthquakes for natural factors, all of which Clarke said were relatively high risk, and clearcut harvests and pesticide spraying for forestry hazards.

De Szoeka then pivoted into the strategies for protecting the watershed, which were divided into six groups.

Critical area protection strategies include the ongoing efforts by the city to either purchase the watershed or place it into conservation easements, either of which would allow the forest to be managed for water quality and quantity goals versus those of timber harvest.

Data collection and monitoring strategies would include testing of water quality and quantity to give a better understanding of the risks facing the watershed.

Watershed restoration activities would aim to enhance the watershed’s retention capabilities by increasing riparian buffers and removing invasive plants.

Work to control sedimentation and erosion would help to address high turbidity in Jetty Creek.

Integrating water plans with emergency and other city plans would help the city to be better prepared for disasters and the impacts of climate change.

Strategizing to improve communications will help to better engage landowners and other stakeholders in the protection process.

Water conservation measures will help to reduce the demand on the watershed by encouraging citizens to conserve the resource and helping to prevent loss by preventing leaks and completing repairs across the system.

With the strategies for addressing the risks laid out, De Szoeka moved on to the

implementation portion of the plan, which was broken into three phases, the first of which is focused on data collection, establishing partnerships and addressing high-priority risks.

In this phase, De Szoeka said the plan included the city continuing work on planning for acquisition or conservation easements for the watershed and developing a forest stewardship plan in relation to the critical area protection strategies.

For data collection, the plan recommends the city inventory its existing data and perform detailed risk analyses of critical areas in the watershed, partnering with outside organizations for technical assistance, if needed.

Work should begin on restoration of high-priority areas in the watershed, as well as projects for sediment and erosion control, which should be supported by geotechnical studies, as needed.

De Szoeka said that the city should also prioritize working on updating its emergency and master plans to account for the source water protection plan in the first phase and continue its communication and conservation efforts.

The second and third phases of the implementation plan include longer-term goals, with the acquisition of the watershed incorporated in the second phase.

In addition to these elements, the plan also includes a prioritization list for water usage, an action checklist for emergency response and four stages of conservation for situations when water curtailment is necessary.

The plan will cover a 20-year period and will need to be approved by the city council before the Oregon Health Authority and Department of Environmental Quality review and approve it.

Hwy 101 scheduled for one-lane ops in Garibaldi

WILL CHAPPELL
Citizen Editor

Highway 101 through downtown Garibaldi will be restricted to one lane operations during the week of March 31, as crews from K&E Excavation reconstruct sections of the road and repave from 1st Street to 11th

Street.

One of the project leads from K&E told Garibaldi’s city council that the closure comes as work wraps up on sidewalks on the south side of the roadway and that the project is now six to eight weeks ahead of schedule.

The \$10.6-million project began last September and

when completed will see Americans-with-Disability-Act-compliant crossings throughout the city’s downtown corridor. The project is being funded in chief by \$8.5 million in federal funds, with the state of Oregon chipping and City of Garibaldi contributing the remainder.

The project representative told the council that the work would take place in three phases, starting with the section of roadway between 7th and 12th Streets, then moving onto the section between 6th and 3rd Streets and finishing from 3rd to 1st Street. Work on the second section is

expected to take the longest as there will be significant changes to the course of the road, and it will need to be completely reconstructed.

During the work, the road will have flaggers and pilot cars operating around the clock and side streets will be closed intermittently.

While the work is sched-

uled to be completed in one week with crews planning to work from before dawn until after dusk, it may take longer depending on weather conditions and other factors.

The project is scheduled for completion this fall.

DIALYSIS Clinic

From Page A1

relying on the programs that were already making patient transport possible, according to Vitulli. Those programs include the Northwest Rides Nonemergency Medical Transportation Brokerage, the district’s in-house dial-a-ride program, grants received to transport veterans and reimbursement to patient family members.

The brokerage, run by the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization, covers Tillamook, Clatsop and Columbia Counties and relies on a network of volunteer drivers to transport Medicaid- and Oregon-Health-Plan-eligible patients to medical appointments. Vitulli said that the brokerage was covering just over 50% of the rides.

A further 40% of rides are being provided by TCTD’s dial-a-ride program, which has put a strain on that program’s capacity, according to

Vitulli. For the most part, patients’ dialysis treatment schedules have not been coordinated and the long travel times to the clinics have largely meant that drivers stay for the duration of the three-and-a-half to five-hour treatment.

“It’s way outside of our service area and it doesn’t make sense for us to bring that driver back in a lot of cases,” Vitulli said, “so pretty much, you know, the vehicle and that driver is busy for that entire time transporting them there and then transporting them

back.”

District dispatchers have done their best to coordinate other rides for the drivers in areas of the county closer to the dialysis centers, but that has been difficult. Vitulli said that dialysis transport was requiring two to four drivers’ time on an average day, constraining the program’s ability to serve other community members.

“This is the reason we’re at our capacity,” Vitulli said, “because we’re

not able to provide as much dial-a-ride service because we’re providing a life-sustaining service for people who have no other way to get there.”

Vitulli said that the program would be able to expand capacity again once the Tillamook dialysis center reopens. He also noted that the district faces persistent driver shortages and is looking to hire new employees, adding that they paid for training.

Veterans are also trans-

ported by the dial-a-ride program, with the costs for their transport are offset by grants from the federal government.

The final piece of the transportation equation comes from patient family members who are reimbursed by the district for their mileage.

Overall, Vitulli said the district has helped with transport or reimbursement for an average of 11 or 12 patients weekly, ranging up to 16 in some weeks.

CLEAN WATER Festival

From Page A1

guiding them around the camp.

The six activities in 2025’s festival related to water quality, macro invertebrates, marine debris, salmon homes and the water cycle, while the camp’s main activity hall hosted exhibitions from various partner agencies.

At the macro invertebrates’ station, kids examined the gilled creatures before being asked to construct a model from clay. At the marine debris station, kids played a game where some were assigned to pick up ocean waste while others were assigned to play the tide, washing new debris in

as the cleaners cleared the beach.

The salmon homes activity involved small groups of students creating and sharing plans for shepherding salmon to survival, while the water cycle activity saw students taking on the role of a rain drop and rolling dice to determine their path between the clouds, ocean and precipitation on land to demonstrate the varying paths any droplet can take in the cycle.

At the clean water station, kids learned about TEP’s countywide water-quality monitoring program and got a chance to examine water under ultraviolet light.

The exhibit hall featured displays about fish anatomy, native plants, water safety, birds and a touch tank with creatures from the intertidal zone.

Rehn said that the festival’s goal was to raise

awareness of the special place the students live and encourage them to think about ways they could help to promote and preserve it. The festival also strives to be an inclusive event, including bilingual volunteers and sensory rooms and backpacks for students that need them.

Nowadays, the festival is supported by TEP fundraising efforts, but staff from the Department of Environmental Quality still participate, as do staff from Oregon Shores, Oregon State Parks, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Seaside Aquarium, the Salmon Superhighway and Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Many private citizens also contribute their time, and one longtime volunteer said that he kept returning because seeing the excitement and engagement among the students reaffirmed his belief in kids.


COLLEGE WORK PROGRAM

Tillamook PUD is accepting applications for the 2025 College Work Program!


Local high school seniors pursuing higher education after graduation are eligible to apply. The applicant selected would work at Tillamook PUD during summer and school breaks.

Interested in applying or know a student that would be? Applications and additional information can be found at www.tpod.org/about-us/career-opportunities/employment-opportunities/. Applications are due to Tillamook PUD by 5:30p.m. on Monday, May 5, 2025.

APPLY TODAY!



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First Salmonberry Trail segment to open in October

WILL CHAPPELL
CITIZEN EDITOR

After ten years of building community partnerships, planning and fundraising, the first half mile of the Salmonberry Trail will open in Wheeler on October 7.

Salmonberry Trail Foundation (STF) Executive Director Caroline Fitchett said that the segment should be followed by a segment in Washington County in 2027, and another in Rockaway Beach in the near future, and that other projects are coming into focus along the path of the trail as more communities buy into the vision.

“What’s so exciting about it though is that all these community partners see a value in the Salmonberry Trail,” Fitchett said, “and so they’re willing to extend themselves a little bit further than normal to be able to help make it happen as a partner.”

The Wheeler trail will run half a mile through downtown and will eventually extend north to Bott’s Marsh. The path will feature a gravel surface and be located to the north of the train tracks. Work is underway on a memorandum of understanding with



The Reliance Creek Trestle in Washington County will have rails removed and decking and a handrail added before serving as a section of the train. Photo courtesy Salmonberry Trail Foundation

the City of Wheeler and the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad (OCSR) to establish a maintenance plan for the segment of trail and designs are being finalized.

Staff at the foundation are referring to the Wheeler segment as the demonstration trail, as it will not only be the first segment of the 82-mile trail to open but



PHOTOS COURTESY SALMONBERRY TRAIL FOUNDATION.

Volunteers in Buxton planting trees along the trail.

will also be collocated next to the OCSR’s trains, helping to establish best practices for other segments in Tillamook County that will need to share space with the railroad.

Next up for trail segments will be the catalyst loop in Washington County, running 3.2 miles from Manning to L.L. Stub Stewart State Park. Volunteers have already worked to clear invasive plants from the railbed and remove rail in certain sections, while inspectors have evaluated the section’s trusses and found them in good condition.

Fitchett said that the foundation is still working with Washington County on permitting, which they hope to complete by the end of this year, which would allow construction to begin in 2026, and the trail to open at some point in 2027.

Two other sections of trail, both in Tillamook County, are also in the planning stages: the 2.6-mile Rockaway Beach section and one at the Tillamook Creamery.

The Rockaway Beach path, which will run from Washington Street on the south end of the city to Neah-Kah-Nie High School at the north, is currently through 30% of the design phase. The city government now has an application into the Oregon Department of Transportation for a grant to complete design and construct the trail.

The section by the Tillamook Creamery, whose initial planning was supported by a grant from the Tillamook County Creamery Association will run north on Latimer Road but has been bogged down in a wetland delineation review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for several years, and Fitchett said she has no timeline for a decision.

In addition to these in-progress trails, Fitchett said that she is also in discussions with leaders from Bay City about constructing a section of the trail between the city’s pier and the Kilchis Point Reserve south of the city.

Fitchett said that she has also spoken with officials from Garibaldi, who are busy with other projects but expressed interest in future involvement, and Manzanita and Nehalem, who said they would like to see a trail spur extended to connect their communities.

As for the sections of trail outside of cities, more questions and challenges loom. In the so-called river and



Planning work underway in the City of Wheeler for the forthcoming section of trail. Photo courtesy Salmonberry Trail Foundation

canyons sections, between Wheeler and L.L. Stub Stewart State Park through the coastal range, major infrastructure projects to repair bridges and trusses damaged in the 2007 storm that brought commercial operations to a halt will be needed. Fitchett said that these projects would require state or federal funding and drove the estimated per-mile cost for the trail to \$1 million.

Outside of those sections, there are also two notable choke points in Tillamook County, at the curve on Highway 101 right before Barview Jetty and as the railroad tracks run on a berm across Smith Lake just north of Barview Jetty. Fitchett said that building new infrastructure to accommodate the trail in these locations would also cost millions of dollars and said that there might be a solution where pedestrians could walk along the tracks with a gate to prevent access when a train approached.

For now, Fitchett said that the foundation is focusing on completing sections of trail where community partners are available. “There’s so many miles to work on that we are trying to work on the miles that have community partners that want to build it with us,” Fitchett said, “so that we have a partnership on the planning, partnership on the construction and then a partnership on the maintenance and operating of that segment.”

nance and operating of that segment.”

With work ramping up in Tillamook County, there are also increasing opportunities for residents to get involved. Fitchett said that the foundation will be hosting hikes on the trail in conjunction with Tillamook County Wellness this summer as they did last year and are planning to begin offering volunteer opportunities to remove invasive species and clear the tracks, as they have in Washington County.

Fitchett said that citizens interested in supporting the project could also reach out to elected officials to share their enthusiasm, noting that a group of Tillamook County residents had done just that by visiting the capitol last month to speak with legislators.

“One way (to get involved) is certainly around educating elected officials that they want to see the Salmonberry Trail built so the public can use it,” Fitchett said. “So, sending a message to your state legislator or county commissioner just letting them know that you support the Salmonberry Trail and please invest state and local dollars in the trail is helpful to move us forward.”

The foundation is also seeking \$8 million from the Oregon legislature to support its various projects and is in the early stages of planning a fundraising event for the summer.



Screen Today for a Healthy Tomorrow

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among men, but it is also one of the most preventable with regular health screenings. A screening test is used to look for a disease when a person doesn’t have any symptoms. According to the US Preventive Services Task Force, adults should receive their first screening for colorectal cancer soon after turning 45 and then continue screening on regular intervals. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, talk to your doctor sooner. They can help you decide which type of test would be best for you. Health screenings are a covered benefit for most insurance plans, including Oregon Health Plan.

#healthscreening
#colorectalcancer



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