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Port of Tillamook Bay Approves Salmonberry Trail Rail Line Use Agreement, Extends Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad Lease

Over several years and through negotiations with dozens of stakeholders to ensure Tillamook County's valuable assets remain protected, last evening, March 20th, the Port of Tillamook Bay Commissioners agreed in a 3-2 vote to sign the agreement to move the Salmonberry Trail project forward. This decision allows engineering studies and planning to continue assessing Rails-WITH-Trails for this massive economic development project. After tabling the Salmonberry Trail Intergovernmental Agency (STIA) lease agreement at its February meeting, the commissioners met in early March to review various elements of the STIA lease, including protections for the Port's current lease-holders. "The Port has clearly stated, from the beginning of this process, its commitment to rails-with-trails along the coast; there is no reason to choose between the two options of just a trail or just rail," said Port General Manager Michele Bradley.

In this decision, the Port board also agreed, based on certain conditions, to provide the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad (OCSR) a 20-year extension of its lease as part of future negotiations, which gives OCSR 20 years of certainty. Language to this effect is in the current STIA lease, designating OCSR as an "existing" leaseholder, which protects OCSR from "changing the goal posts" moving forward. The lease extension would start from the time of a mutually-acceptable OCSR-POTB lease and is conditioned on some new indemnification language. In addition, OCSR must be in compliance with the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers, who are working toward mitigation of an alleged violation following OCSR's March 2014 placement of rip-rap along the rail line without a permit. Once the OCSR/EPA/Corps matter has been concluded, OCSR-POTB lease negotiations can begin, based on the parameters set in the STIA Agreement. Any changes or additional negotiations would be considered an "amended" agreement subsequently, and would open the negotiations up to challenges from STIA.

"We have always been supportive of OCSR as a valuable and unique asset in Tillamook County," said Bradley, "and we look forward to working with them to develop and build a trail alongside the existing rail to provide even more opportunities to experience the views that can only be accessed from the rail line. OCSR has offered to help build the trail; and we hope to see that happen. By working together, a trail with rail can enhance the experiences of both residents and visitors."

The Salmonberry Trail is an 84-mile long proposal for a trail that connects the Valley to the Coast – and is divided into four distinct segments: The Coast, Nehalem River, Salmonberry River and The Valley. The following is taken from the salmonberrytrail.org website and provides a description of the segments within Tillamook County:

The Coast -- The 26 mile section of the trail hugs the coast from the City of Wheeler on the north, to the City of Tillamook on the south. Along the way, this "***rail with trail***" route passes through the cities of Rockaway Beach, Garibaldi, and Bay City, and provides non-motorized travelers with a safe alternative to Highway 101. The trail will also connect numerous state, county, and city parks located along the coast, and provide access to the Tillamook Cheese Factory and other popular tourist stops.

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Nehalem River --This section spans 17 miles, from the confluence of the Salmonberry and Nehalem Rivers to the City of Wheeler, located on the shores of scenic Nehalem Bay. In this section, **the trail will be located adjacent to what will remain an active scenic railroad operation (rail with trail)**. Users will enjoy views of the Nehalem River, including Nehalem Falls, and the lush farmlands of Tillamook County as the trail approaches the coast.

“Throughout the trail planning process and the negotiations, I’ve always made sure that the interests of Tillamook County were being preserved and protected, including the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad,” said Port Commissioner Jack Mulder. “I am committed to building a path forward for both rails and trails to thrive. We are stronger working together.”

The Salmonberry Trail Intergovernmental Agency will meet in Tillamook on Friday April 6th at 10 am in the POTB’s Officer’s Mess Hall. The public is invited and encouraged to attend to find out more about the vision for this project. More information about the Salmonberry Trail is available at www.salmonberrytrail.org.

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