

<http://www.tillamookcountypioneer.net/tillamook-county-to-propose-bayocean-spit-partial-land-swap-with-oregon-parks-in-hopes-of-preventing-development-on-peninsula/>

## **Tillamook County Pioneer**

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### **Tillamook County to propose Bayocean Spit partial land swap with Oregon Parks in hopes of preventing development on peninsula**



The interior of Bayocean Spit. (Flickr creative commons – <http://bit.ly/2bkR6M8>)

TILLAMOOK, Ore. – In hopes of preserving Bayocean Spit as a largely undeveloped natural area, the Tillamook County Board of Commissioners voted yesterday, Wednesday, Aug. 24, to begin discussions with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department regarding assuming partial ownership of the peninsula.

“Commissioner Tim Josi, as the Tillamook County Parks Department liaison, will lead the effort,” said Mark Labhart, chair of the board of commissioners.

The county plans to suggest swapping part of Bayocean – specifically how much land and which portion have yet to be determined – for a section of the state-owned [Neskowin Beach State Recreation Site](#), said Labhart. “We need to access a portion of it for the new [emergency access road in Neskowin](#). Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is willing to do so, but wants something in return of course. We would want the same if it was vice versa.”

While the county owns the majority of the spit, which separates Tillamook Bay from the ocean, it lacks the resources to manage the historically significant property as its popularity among [hikers](#), bicyclists, birders, clammers, equestrians and other users grows, said Labhart. And although the spit is technically considered [a county park](#), the sprawling, 3-miles-plus-long and half-mile-wide, 600-acre finger of land is not managed in the same way other county parks are, according to Del Schleichert, Tillamook County Parks director.

“Much of the use there is park-like,” said Schleichert. “But as far as it being managed as a park, we haven’t had that role.” While the county provides a Dumpster for garbage and pays for regular garbage pick-up, it has lacked the resources to build adequate restroom facilities at Bayocean, he noted, adding, “But it is a county park and it does need to be managed.”

The spit lacks water and sewer infrastructure. The only road, built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to access the Tillamook Bay jetties for maintenance, is accessed by locked gate, with only various government entities and those who own private lots on the property given keys. Following the [demise of the former resort community known as Bay Ocean Park](#), many who owned land on the spit forsook their property, opting not to pay taxes. This left Tillamook County owning the majority of the peninsula, with about 30 individuals owning roughly 50 lots on the spit. Only three of those lots are larger than 10 acres.

During an Aug. 5 workshop concerning the future of Bayocean Spit, Tillamook County Community Development Director Bryan Pohl recapped recent circumstances leading to consideration of turning over at least partial ownership of the property to the state, including a proposed 53-acre [“eco-resort,”](#) county commissioners’ and many community members’ desire to rezone the spit from “recreation management” to “recreational natural” to prevent such activity and subsequent “potential legal action threatened based on a complete [loss of value](#) to one of the [private landowners](#).”

Pohl added that Tillamook County legal counsel “said our insurance may not cover that kind of litigation,” making pushing forward with the rezone “a risky game of chicken.”

During the Aug. 5 workshop, Lisa Phipps, executive director of the [Tillamook Estuaries Partnership](#), told commissioners, “Whether it’s a rezone or an acquisition that helps relieve some of the pressures, TEP would be very supportive of that.”

Others attending the workshop who said they are in favor of inviting the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department to take over ownership of Bayocean included Al LePage, executive director of the [National Coast Trail Association](#), Charles J. Ansorge, a past president of the [Cape Meares Community Association](#), and Cameron La Follette, [Oregon Coast Alliance](#) land use director.

La Follette said that, while many Tillamook County residents consider Bayocean a part of their heritage, the peninsula “holds interest for people far outside of Tillamook County.” Acknowledging the spit’s increasing popularity in recent years, she said, “It’s getting loved to death and that’s a problem.” ORCA has [long opposed development on the spit](#), but does urge construction of a “real parking lot” and vault toilets, she added.

“The county has an extraordinary opportunity here, because it owns such a large piece (of Bayocean),” continued La Follette. “We would propose that it gets a state natural area status.” Land trusts might approach those who own some of the private lots regarding selling, she said.

Portland resident Bill Hannegan, whose family owns two lots “on the crest of a dune overlooking the beach,” said “the spit has always been a special place to our family. My aunt’s house was the last to go over onto the beach.” He noted that his family frequently picks up litter left by some of those using the peninsula. “We take a personal pride in the spit.”

He asked commissioners if they planned to employ [eminent domain](#) to take over ownership of privately owned lots on Bayocean.

“Eminent domain is a very blunt, very effective tool which we have never used, and which I think we will never use,” said Commissioner Tim Josi.

Former Tillamook County Community Development director Vic Affolter, who attended the Aug. 5 workshop, said, “This is a conversation that has been going on for 20 years. ... It’s not practical for the county parks department to manage property where no fees are collected. I don’t think the status quo is tenable.”