

# HOW BUYING A DAY-USE PASS BENEFITS COUNTY PARKS PROVIDING SAFE AND INVITING SPACES AND GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

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For the bulk of its existence, the Tillamook County Parks Department had operated out of the Tillamook County general fund. In the year 2009, they were removed from the general fund and became a special revenue fund department, meaning they were required to be self-supporting and provide all of the revenue necessary to pay for expenses, maintenance, upkeep, and any infrastructure improvements. Whether the department sinks or swims is entirely up to them. Since that time, their revenue stream has nearly doubled. And the only way it has done so is by charging user fees. Yet with increasing revenue, Tillamook County Parks still has a major financial hurdle to cross to fulfill the many unmet needs that County Parks' assets require.

The County Park's mission is to provide safe and beautiful spaces for locals and visitors to enjoy; to stabilize and protect existing revenue centers (aka campgrounds, day use areas, and boat launches); and to care for and enhance what already exists. County Parks stewards over many assets that make the following activities possible: hiking, boat launching, picnicking, paddle boarding, boating, fishing, walking dogs, playing on playgrounds and many more. Every year, these assets get degraded, especially in their marine environment. To keep these areas of activity safe, County Parks has immediate needs such as improving infrastructure, most of which is as old as an antique car. County Parks wants to provide additional, useful amenities such as wifi in campgrounds but needs for take care of its many restrooms and potholes first.

## Revenue generation types:

1. Day-use fee stations are now at nearly all of their facilities with respect to a limited few. County Parks manages 21 boat launches, many of which have never paid for themselves and the revenue needed to maintain these launches has sometimes come up a quarter million dollars short. This leaves the few "golden goose" areas, such as Barview Jetty Campground, to pick up the tab for other areas.
2. Annual day-use passes (which equals \$0.15 /day if used 365 days a year) and a portion of ODOT RV registration fees go to County Parks.
3. County campgrounds have camping fees - associated with camping maintenance, upkeep, utilities, sanitation and staffing. Webb Park Campground tends to generate the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest revenue of the 6 county campgrounds.
4. Lastly, by saving as much revenue as possible, County Parks can apply for grant matching programs to best leverage their funds. This is primarily how they've accomplished major infrastructure projects.

## Operational Expenses & Unmet Need

- Deferred maintenance happens when there isn't enough funding for projects after meeting operational costs. County Parks deferred maintenance list primarily consists of infrastructure - electrical, water, and roads. Not only do they need updating to meet code compliance but also because they are weathered - Cape Kiwanda restroom, for example, can be patched together only so much more before it will truly meet the end of its life. Asphalt is "black gold and it is VERY expensive," said JoAnn Woelfle, Director, Tillamook County Parks Department. "Depending on the size, an RV area alone could cost three-quarters of a million dollars to pave." When they improve roads, they improve safety and sanitation by reducing dirt, gravel, and dust.
- Primary operational expenses are utilities, fuel, staffing, garbage, chemical toilets, and janitorial supplies.
- A recently completed project was to upgrade the online reservation system, originally established in 2014 and historically held pdfs of maps. Prior to the online reservation system, to make a reservation, people had to get in a line of phone calls, amongst upwards of 500 calls received per day during the busy season, with limited staffing available to answer and return calls. In spring of 2021, the system was upgraded to a current version that is now mobile friendly with integrated maps. Annual passes can now be purchased online, a huge time saver for both visitors and staff.

## Giving Back

In the past fiscal year, 2020-2021, County Parks has contributed \$23,000 worth of donations and partnerships within the community. During last summer's wildfires, campsites were opened for 53 evacuees (196



**Cape Kiwanda Public Restroom, built in 1980, serves approximately 500,000 people per year. It is outdated and due to its existing age and heavy use, along with harsh coastal weather conditions, it has deteriorated to a state that it needs to be replaced.**

night) total) at 17 different sites. Annual pass work-party partnerships engaged 127 people to work in the community, a \$6k plus value. They partnered with Pacific City for 40 different sandwich board signs to direct traffic. Annual pass discounts so far, have provided 820 discounts for a total of \$8,200. Twenty-six disabled veterans have stayed 74 nights. Supportive partnering with different children youth groups; cross-country races and other public events; and the SOLVE group (beach cleaning) through in-kind parking and use of dumpsters all represent ways that Tillamook County Parks gives back to the community.

Tillamook County Parks does not control visitors nor locals, they try to manage and direct users so that they are able to have a safe and enjoyable experience. All funds from County Parks fees are dedicated to this purpose and the opportunity to do more is growing. Tillamook County Parks Department has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest quantity of county park campsites in Oregon. State Parks claims that the honesty factor from those paying for day-use is about 60%. "When we started fees, it was a work-in-progress. It will be a challenge and a balancing act so that patrons understand what the purpose is," JoAnn. "You can only provide the level of service that you can afford."

Although fee stations are new for many County facilities, they have helped County Parks to continue to grow their annual revenue in a positive direction. Which in turn, has helped to bring the many amenities that outdoor enthusiasts love and need, up to-date and hopefully better curated than ever before. Tillamook County is currently engaged with a professional team of architects and engineers, utilizing parking pay station revenues, to master plan and redesign outdated places and spaces such as the popular Cape Kiwanda Public Restroom.

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*We will be sharing south county destination management news each month in the Pacific City Sun. The topics covered and uncovered in this monthly column are written with an objective to illuminate the critical role of destination management for South Tillamook County. Below are key definitions.*

**Sustainable tourism** can be defined by three words: people, place and profit. It is tourism that takes full account for its social and environmental impacts, as well as current and future economic benefits. The goal of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for both local residents and the visitors. For South County locals, this means enjoying a thriving community; jobs for hundreds of people; places to gather and connect with neighbors; and protection of natural resources, all with an emphasis on minimal impact and a call for stewardship.

That's the ideal, of course, but it requires commitment from municipalities, the tourism industry and the community to make responsible decisions that protect people, place and profit. And it takes an understanding from the visitors that sustainable tourism is important to the community.

Sustainable tourism leads to the definition of **destination management**: it is about coordinating actions with the goal of controlling the economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of a specific tourism region, which is carried out by local authorities and tourism stakeholders in partnership, following principles of good governance. It considers all the elements that make up a tourism destination, including local residents, businesses, attractions, amenities, access and messaging.

*Destination management does not mean inviting more visitors - it means effectively managing those who have already arrived.*

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For more updates, please visit the website at <https://tillamookcoast.com/southcounty> and our Facebook page: South County Destination Management.

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